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FOCUSING ON THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH
IN THE SERVICE OF RENEWAL. THE SCOPE AND EFFECTS
OF THE ENCYCLICAL *DEUS CARITAS EST**
MORE THAN TEN YEARS AFTER ITS PUBLICATION

A b s t r a c t. This paper is an attempt to outline the scope and effects of Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* more than ten years after its publication in January 2006. It depicts the context of this encyclical within the papal Magisterium since Vatican II and the scope of this document as a call for the Church to readjust Herself according to the hierarchy of truths and to focus on the basic elements of Christian faith in order to renew Herself in Her mission in the service of love. In order to achieve more of the desired effects of both Pope Benedict's and Pope Francis' pastoral Magisterium for the renewal of the Church and also of theology, the theological curriculum needs to integrate Caritas Science as a theological discipline which studies this essential dimension of the Church from both theological and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Key words: Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*; Benedict XVI; post-Vatican-II papal Magisterium; ecclesiology; hierarchy of truths; caritas organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

One does not need to be a prophet to predict that the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, which he declared on February 11, 2013 and which went into effect on February 28, 2013, will go down in history. But what about the Pope's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (DCE) and its effects ten years after its publication?

Pope Benedict's resignation prepared the way for his successor, Pope Francis, whose personality and work have resonated well with the public over the course of his pontificate. In the nearly four years since he took office, the popularity of Pope Francis has eclipsed the pontificate of Pope Benedict. This is exemplified by the manner in which the apostolic writings of Pope Francis have been received by the public. His first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, was completed on June 29, 2013, in collaboration with Pope Benedict, who had already laid the groundwork. Perhaps for this reason, Pope Francis' first encyclical was not as well-received as his subsequent writings such as *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si* and *Amoris Laetitia*, which he wrote on his own. The "Year of Mercy," which began on the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (December 8, 2015) and ended on the Feast of Christ the King (November 20, 2016), has also received positive attention as a heartfelt concern of the Pope. Interestingly, with the exception of some insider circles,¹ it went nearly unnoticed that the 10th anniversary of the signing and publication of Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, fell in this "Year of Mercy." On December 25, 2005, the Feast of the Incarnation, Pope Benedict signed this encyclical and on January 25, 2006, the Feast Day of the Conversion of the Apostle Paul and the end of the week of prayer for the unity of Christians the encyclical was published.

These specific dates were carefully chosen by Pope Benedict XVI as an indication of how his encyclical was to be understood: the encyclical's central message is grounded in the quintessential belief of the Christian faith, namely that God became man in Jesus Christ. Further, like Paul's call to conversion, the encyclical is a call to renew the entire Church and an invita-

¹ This was hidden by the large international conference of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, which took place on February 25-26, 2016. The contributions of the participants have meanwhile been published here: PONTIFICAL COUNCIL *COR UNUM*, *Acts of the International Congress: Love Never Fails, Perspectives 10 Years after the Encyclical Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), also available online, accessed June 21, 2017, http://www.corunumjubilaum.va/content/dam/corunumexpo/pdf-congresso2016/atti_en.pdf.

tion for all to believe. The encyclical makes it clear that it is the central message of Christian faith that can and should bring all believers together in *one* church, in the unity for which Jesus Himself prayed at the Last Supper (Jn 17). Even the mere chronology of the encyclical's publication underscores *the central thesis of this article: The main concern and message of the encyclical DCE is a focus on the essentials of the Christian faith/Christian religion.* The message is aimed first at those within the Catholic Church (*ad intra*), but at the same time, it is also addressed to all people (*ad extra*).²

Many media reports and reputable daily newspapers worldwide as well as in German-speaking regions were pleasantly surprised by the message of the encyclical. Above all, they were pleased by the value that was given to human *eros* and to the essential role it plays in shaping truly meaningful human love.³ As Pope Benedict explains, *eros* is part of the unique reality of love that comes from God.⁴ This message, which was central to the first part of the encyclical, received more direct public attention than the second part of the encyclical.

The second part of the encyclical should not be separated from the first, but read as intrinsically connected with the first part's message of God's love for humanity and our call to respond to this love.⁵ In the second part, Pope Benedict XVI makes it clear that the Gospel of love and the call to love are ecclesiological—love put into action is not only the responsibility of each individual but also that of the Church as a whole.

² Cf. the author's first review of the encyclical: Klaus BAUMANN, "Die Bedeutung der Enzyklika *Deus caritas est* für die Kirche und ihre Caritas," in *Gott ist Caritas. Impulse zur Enzyklika über die christliche Liebe*, ed. Martin Patzek (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 2007), 9-29.

³ Cf. e.g. Andreas SMOLTZYK, "Love, Love, Love! Benedikts erste Enzyklika," *Spiegel Online*, January 25, 2006, accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/0,1518,397245,00.html>; Jan ROSS, "Eros und Gott," *Die Zeit*, January 26, 2006; Matthias DROBINSKI, "Religion und Eros. Erste Enzyklika von Benedikt XVI," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 26, 2006. "Papst: Liebe ist nicht bloß Sex," *Die Welt*, January 25, 2006.

⁴ Cf. esp. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, sec. 7-8, Vatican Website, accessed June 21, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html (hereafter DCE).

⁵ While talking about the preparation for publishing the encyclical with members of the Papal Council *Cor Unum* on January 23, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave his own interpretation: "I was particularly interested, however, in the unity of the two themes that are well understood only if seen as a whole." Cf. "Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, Sala Clementina, Monday, January 23, 2006," in *Deus Caritas Est. Acts of the World Conference on Charity Vatican, New Synod Hall, 23.-24. January 2006*, ed. Pontificium Consilium *Cor Unum* (Rome: Ed. Vaticana, 2007), 9.

For this reason, it is absolutely necessary that the charitable action of the Church should find an institutionalized form and become an “organization.”⁶

1. BENEDICT XVI’S FIRST ENCYCLICAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PAPAL MAGISTERIUM

The encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* was published nearly exactly 40 years after the Second Vatican Council, which had provided impulses for the Church in “today’s world.” Pope John XXIII initiated the Council, which began on October 11, 1962. In 1963, Pope Paul VI took leadership of the Council, continuing it in the same spirit as his predecessor. On December 8, 1965, the Council officially ended. Richard Völkl, professor of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg at that time (1964-1986), described the Church as an *ecclesia caritatis*,⁷ based on the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In his words, this Church is a “serving Church, a Church of love.”⁸ However, in terms of historical influence or reception of the Council’s message, this went relatively unnoticed.

The young theology professor Joseph Ratzinger was one of the consulting experts (*periti*) of the Council. In an unprecedented fashion, Ratzinger was there for every step of the reception of the Council’s documents: first as a theologian in Tübingen and Regensburg, then from 1977 as Archbishop of Munich and Cardinal (appointed by Pope Paul VI), and starting in 1981 as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he worked closely with Pope John Paul II until the latter’s death on April 2, 2005.

The historical impact of Pope Paul VI’s pontificate is on the one hand characterized by the successful implementation of many of the recommendations set forth by the Second Vatican Council, such as the liturgical reform. On the other hand, the pontificate of Pope Paul VI is mainly remembered for the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which was published in 1968 and among other things particularly forbid the use of contraceptives by married couples.

⁶ At the same venue on January 23, 2006, Benedict XVI stated: “the totally personal act of *agape* can never remain as something isolated, but must instead become also an essential act of the Church as a community: meaning that it also requires an institutional form which is expressed in the communal working of the Church” (*Ibid.*).

⁷ Richard VÖLKL, “Exkurs: Die ‘Kirche der Liebe (Ecclesia caritatis)’ nach den Dokumenten des Vaticanum II,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 580-6.

⁸ This was the title of his book in German: Richard VÖLKL, *Dienende Kirche, Kirche der Liebe* (Freiburg: Seelsorge-Verlag, 1969).

This led to a particular obsession with the topics related to sexual morality. It blocked possible future discussions about this issue within the field of Catholic moral theology and teaching. The Church's position on contraception was perceived negatively by the public, even by a number of members of the Church. This led to an overgeneralized negative attitude towards the "official Church" and Her teachings in general. A growing divide developed within the Church, with many faithful turning away from these tenets of the "official Church." This divide has been considered by many to be a kind of "horizontal schism" between believers and the leaders of the Church.

The pontificate of Pope John Paul II, which lasted nearly 27 years, was not only the second longest pontificate in the history of the Church (after Pope Pius IX) but also had a considerable political impact mainly on the peaceful turn of events in Europe in 1989 and the fall of the Soviet system. In this way, the Polish Pope left a lasting impression on world history. During his pontificate, there was also an unprecedented rise in violence and terror carried out in the name of religion, specifically by Islamic extremists. The most tangible example of this is what happened on September 11, 2001, when two passenger planes flew into and destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City; currently (2016), the so-called "Islamic State," Al-Qaeda and the Taliban continue to carry out acts of terrorism not only in the Middle East but also in the Western world.

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II produced an impressive number of apostolic texts, with varying levels of importance. Many of these documents were written by, or in collaboration with, Cardinal Ratzinger. Pope John Paul II viewed two documents as particularly important fruits of Vatican II: the new *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). Another important document was the *Compendium for Catholic Social Teaching*, which was published by the Pontifical Council "Iustitia et Pax" (Justice and Peace) in 2004, while John Paul II was already very ill. Despite the abundance of important documents published during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II (including encyclicals and other apostolic writings), none of them explicitly discuss the importance of (organized) *caritas* or *diakonia* but rather they usually stress more generally the call to love our neighbor.⁹

⁹ Cf. Heinrich POMPEY, "Die Enzyklika 'Deus Caritas est.' Eine Profilierungschance für die Caritas?," *Die Neue Ordnung* 60(2006): 96-110.

It was left to Pope Benedict XVI to surprise everyone with his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, which paved the way for the rest of his pontificate, dedicated to promoting Jesus' call for His church to *caritas*. The relationship between God's revelation of His life-giving love in the Trinity and the mission of the Church to be an instrument of this love became the *leitmotif* of Benedict's papacy. Yet, what compelled him to do this?

One comment given by Benedict XVI shortly before the publication of DCE, may help explain his motives: "In the same way in which the human proclamation of the Gospel, the word of faith, parallels the divine *Logos*, the *agape* of the Church, her charitable work, must also parallel the divine *Agape*, which is God."¹⁰

This quote expresses the main point, which I would like to expand on in the rest of this text: if we ask ourselves what the *content* of the divine *Logos*, *God's revelation of Himself*, is, then in principle it seems clear that the content of this revelation is *agape* love—that God is love—*Deus Caritas Est*.

The theory of the psychologist Paul Watzlawick leads us to another very relevant aspect in regard to Benedict's teachings. One of Watzlawick's five basic axioms of communication is, "Every communication has a content and relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication."¹¹ It may even be considered the most important axiom of communication. It makes it clear, in other words, that the relationship aspect defines how the content is "actually" meant to be understood.¹² Thus, the manner of the Church's relationship to others, the Church's *agape*, defines how the content of her teachings are ("actually") meant to be understood. Or, in the words of the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (d. 1988), "Love alone is credible."¹³ After so much "content" and so many "words"

¹⁰ Cf. PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM *COR UNUM*, *Acts of the World Conference on Charity*, 9 (with a wrong translation of the Italian original text: "Come al *Logos* divino corrisponde l'annuncio umano, la parola della fede, così all'*Agape* che è Dio, deve corrispondere l'*agape* della Chiesa, la sua attività caritativa," in German: "So wie dem göttlichen *Logos* die menschliche Verkündigung, das Wort des Glaubens, entspricht, so muss der *Agape*, die Gott ist, die *Agape* der Kirche, ihre caritative Tätigkeit entsprechen"). The prior Prefect of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states that orthopraxy is just as important as orthodoxy.

¹¹ Paul WATZLAWICK, Janet H. BEAVIN and Don D. JACKSON, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: Norton, 2011, 1967), 35.

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*

¹³ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Love Alone is Credible* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2004. "[...] for neither the world as a whole nor man in particular can provide the measure for what God wishes to say to man in Christ; God's Word is unconditionally theo-logical, or, better, theo-pragmatic: what God wishes to say to man is a deed on his behalf, a deed that interprets itself before

from the papal Magisterium in the decades before, it seems that Pope Benedict deemed it necessary to give a reminder of what is truly essential, about how all of these documents are meant to be understood.

2. THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The theological and anthropological focus on the “essentials” can be found in the first lines of the encyclical: “‘God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them’ (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the first letter of John describe the core of the Christian faith, the Christian image of God and the Christian view of humanity with unique clarity.”¹⁴

The Christian image of God and image of humanity—theology and anthropology—are intricately intertwined with each other. The entire Christian message about God culminates in this formulation by St. John, “God is love.” General and precise at the same time, this sentence used by Pope Benedict XVI to clarify all religious dialogs and political discussions about Christianity and its fundamental tenet. He continues by writing, “In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant.”¹⁵

With “timely significance,” the Pope alludes to various forms of religious terrorism, such as 9/11. In this way, Benedict XVI perpetuates John Paul II’s message of peace¹⁶ as well as Benedict XV’s call for peace during World War I. There is no religious purpose, neither in Christianity nor in any other religion, to justify wars and terrorism carried out e.g. in the war-torn countries of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Benedict XVI does not want to leave any room for doubt:¹⁷ The *Christian* message, which the Church is called to carry into the world, has no legitimate connection to revenge, hatred or terror.

man and for his sake (and only therefore to him and in him). What we intend to say about this deed in this book is that it is credible only as love—specifically, as God’s own love, the manifestation of which is the glory of God” (from the Preface).

¹⁴ DCE, 1.

¹⁵ DCE, 1.

¹⁶ This becomes clearer when look at the messages of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI on the International Day of Peace 2002 and 2006, respectively. Both emphasize that the Christian faith can never be forced upon someone but rather must be freely accepted. Like moral truth, religious truth must always be “free truth.”

¹⁷ “For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others.” See DCE, 1.

Rather, Christianity proclaims unconditional love, offered to each person by God—a love that we are then called to share with others, even with our enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27f.).

The mission of the Church is to share the message of God’s universal love through Jesus Christ, by means of not only words but also, and most importantly, action. One may criticize, and rightly so, that this message was not incorporated into the formulations found in the Christian creed. What if we proclaimed, “We believe in one God, *who is love*, the Father Almighty...” every time we said the Nicene Creed or “I believe in God, *who is love*, the Father Almighty...” every time we said the Apostles’ Creed.¹⁸ Instead of concentrating on the essential image and message of God who is love, systematic theology throughout the ages has frequently been distracted by philosophical quarrels and dogmatic discussions of admittedly real, yet perhaps secondary importance. In the same way that relationship defines the content in communication, it is God’s relationship(s) of love which define(s) how the entire Catechism of the Catholic Church is to be understood.

Benedict XVI reminded us of the importance of this relationship, and Pope Francis has continued to promote this message with his exhortations about God’s love as mercy.¹⁹ It appears that both Popes agree about the “hierarchy of truths” within the Christian faith as expressed by the Second Vatican Council.²⁰ For the Church of today, both Popes strive to bring these truths “back” into their proper and unmistakable order. The first and most important truth is the love of God for his people, as made evident by God’s patience and mercy with His people of Israel and ultimately by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today as in the past, God continues to call people of all nations to accept his love and to respond to it by loving as Jesus Himself loved. In the same way that Jesus admonished the

¹⁸ Cf. Mariano DELGADO, “‘Der Blick auf die durchbohrte Seite Jesu.’ Zur neuen Enzyklika,” *Schweizerische Kirchenzeitung* 174(2006): 86-90.

¹⁹ Cf. FRANCIS, *The Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015, sec. 1, Vatican Website, accessed June 21, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html with its concise opening statement: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him.”; cf. most recently his apostolic letter *Misericordia et Misera* (November 20, 2016).

²⁰ VATICAN II, *Decree On Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio*, November 21, 1964, sec. 11, Vatican Website, accessed June 21, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

Pharisees, the message of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis prompts us to practice “justice, mercy and faithfulness” above all else (Mt 23:23); it is not religious commandments, cultural norms or moral specifications that are the central matters but rather these core values, which are grounded in the belief in a loving God. Following commandments and norms is meant to be a visible expression of our love for God and our neighbors (Mk 12:28-34)—such laws cannot simply stand on their own, or in other words, the content cannot be understood without the relationship. In the last decades, many believers in Western societies understood the importance of this message of God’s love, but disappointedly turned away from the Church, which had driven Herself into a dead end by focusing primarily on secondary issues related to dogma, morality and law. The “new” order of priorities put into place by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis seems to resonate with many believers, who despite their struggles with the “official Church” desire to remain faithful to their personal religious and spiritual experiences of Jesus.

3. ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOCUS

For Benedict XVI, the question of the image of humanity is directly related to the image of God. The well-known philosopher Immanuel Kant asked the question “What is man?” If the central theological point of God’s revelation of Himself is found in Jesus Christ, Love incarnate (1 Jn 4:8,16), then the essence lies in the call of all humanity to salvation through Jesus Christ, from an anthropological standpoint. By creating humans in his own image and likeness, God wove His call to love into the very fabric of every human being; and the biblical call to love God with all our strength and our neighbors as ourselves, in the sense of the synoptic tradition (cf. Mk 12:28-34), was gradually revealed and became concrete in the story of salvation. This call is the first and foremost. The connection between love of God and love of neighbor was adopted by Christianity from the tradition of Israel. This tradition was Christologically transformed and made universal by the contemplation of its “completely” new realization in Jesus, who embodied love of God and love of neighbor during His earthly life, in his suffering and death on the cross, and who called us to “love each other, as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34, 15:12). The revelation of God as “love” cannot be separated from the universal, anthropological orientation of each human to respond in freedom and devotion through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

In other words, the desire of each person to be loved and to love²¹ finds fulfillment here and in the next life through God, who is love.

Considering the revelation of God as love, the biblical *theologoumenon* regarding the creation of humanity “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27) implies that all humans have the potential to engage in loving relationships—with God, with each other, and with themselves. In addition, we as Christians believe that God continually reaches out to us in a variety of ways (Heb 1:1) to stir our hearts to love: particularly, by means of our conscience, which is the place of both our encounter with God and of our moral decisions, especially with reference to people who are suffering. Giving and receiving love is only possible to the extent to which a person is *free* to do so. Even for those who do not arrive at an explicit belief in Jesus Christ, “faith [is] expressed through love” (Gal 5:6): by giving of themselves to others in love, they demonstrate their answer to God’s dynamic call, perhaps unknowingly, in a “Christian” manner.

The orthopraxy of love takes precedence over the orthodoxy of confessional beliefs. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict pointed out that regardless of how love is defined, there is only *one* love,²² in which all love finds its origin—God’s *agape* for His creation and *vice versa*. It is the context in which Benedict XVI also writes about human *eros*, including human sexuality. As already mentioned, this section of *Deus Caritas Est* received wide-spread recognition in the media because of its positive portrayal and discussion of human sexuality. It was almost as if the negative clichés of the past, which had followed *Humanae Vitae*, were suddenly forgotten and overcome. In my opinion, however, this has not (yet) been achieved, but rather the need to offer this positive Christian vision of human sexuality has only become clearer under the pressure of liberal sexualization.²³ At any

²¹ Cf. MOTHER TERESA, *No Greater Love* (New World Library: Novato, CA, 1997), 29: “We must know that we have been created for greater things, not just to be a number in the world, not just to go for diplomas and degrees, this work and that work. We have been created in order to love and to be loved.”

²² Cf. DCE, 8: “Fundamentally, ‘love’ is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love.” Cf. Klaus BAUMANN, “‘Die Liebe ist möglich...’ (DCE, 39). Zur anthropologischen Dimension der Enzyklika ‘Deus Caritas est,’” in *Liebe bewegt ... und verändert die Welt. Programmansage für eine Kirche, die liebt*, ed. Peter Klasvogt and Heinrich Pompey (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2008), 67-84.

²³ This demonstrates how important it is to make a theological and ethical discernment of the manifold phenomena and realizations of *eros*, *storge*, *philia*, etc. To ignore these discernments,

rate, this was also an important step toward creating a more positive image of sexuality within the Church. Pope Francis has continued along the same lines, as demonstrated by both Synods of Bishops (2014, 2015) and the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016).

4. ECCLESIOLOGICAL FOCUS

In concrete terms, the most important focus of *Deus Caritas Est* is perhaps the image and call of the Church as a whole. Clearly and concisely, Benedict XVI writes, “As a community, the Church must practise love.”²⁴ Moreover, the Church has a “mission in the service of love”²⁵, which encompasses love of God and love of neighbor. With all due respect, this is something quite different from a primary responsibility to uphold the canon laws of the Church.

Faith, in the Christian sense, is both a highly personal matter and the living condition of the Church, which Jesus gathers to Himself through the proclamation of His word and His call to follow the Great Commandment (Mk 12:28-34).

The central role of the commandment of love, as put into practice by the works of mercy, can also be traced back to the Jewish tradition: “According to the early Jewish tradition as found in Avot 1:2, the world rests on the foundation of the Torah, the cult and works of love. After the destruction of the temple and demise of the cult, works of love gained even more importance—this holds true *mutatis mutandis* also for Christianity.”²⁶ Adolf

for example in regard to the need to help, is not legitimate in my opinion. Both from a creation-oriented as well as a philosophical-ethical perspective, all people are in principle able to help (according to the indisputable creation-oriented theological thesis of Rüeegger and Sigrist) or generally aspire to the good (ARISTOTLE, Nicomachean Ethics I, Bekker 1094a1-3). Accepting these very general statements, then this is where the real philosophical and ethical debate begins as it has for Aristotle and the whole ethical tradition, not where it ends. Cf. Klaus BAUMANN, “Die katholische lehramtliche Position zur Sorge um die Armen und Bedrängten aller Art,” in *Helfendes Handeln im Spannungsfeld theologischer Begründungsansätze*, ed. Christoph Sigrist and Heinz Rüeegger (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2014), 111-22.

²⁴ DCE, 20.

²⁵ DCE, 42.

²⁶ Ulrich LUZ, “Biblische Grundlagen der Diakonie,” in *Diakonisches Compendium*, ed. Günter Ruddat and Gerhard K. Schäfer (Göttingen: V&R, 2005, my translation), 17-35, esp. 18. Original in German: “Nach der frühjüdischen Tradition von Avot 1,2 ruht die Welt auf der Torah, dem Kult und den ‘Liebeswerken’. Nach der Zerstörung des Tempels und dem Wegfall des Kul-

von Harnack (1851-1930) also emphasized the importance of active works of charity: Jesus “made loving service to the sick the focal point of religion and called his disciples to do the same. Christianity, in its early days, fulfilled this call, which was taken very seriously. [...] Very early in history, the Church put institutions into place to care for the sick and poor and effectively continued this work over the courses of many generations. The foundation of this work was the religious community; the work was sanctified in the parish Mass.”²⁷

In other words, this *diakonia* of love is a basic part of the structure of the Church. This neither puts into question whether everyone can and should care for each other in times of great need, nor does it claim that Christians are particularly good or better at this than others. However, it makes *positively* clear that this service to others is an indispensable requirement for the practice of Christian faith.

Well aware of the systemic levels and requirements of the Church as organization, Benedict XVI admonished the entire Church, “Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.”²⁸ He goes on to describe this as a “fundamental ecclesial principle”²⁹ and explicitly states, “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to Her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than She can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.”³⁰

tes sind die Liebeswerke besonders wichtig geworden—und das gilt mutatis mutandis auch für das frühe Christentum.”

²⁷ Adolf VON HARNACK, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* (Leipzig: 4 Aufl., 1924), 147-150. Original in German: “die dienende Liebe an den Kranken in den Mittelpunkt der Religion gestellt und sie allen seinen Jüngern auf die Seele gelegt. Die alte Christenheit hat diese Verpflichtung im Herzen behalten und in der Tat verwirklicht. [...] Die Kirche hat ein festes Institut der Kranken—und Armenpflege in frühester Zeit ausgebildet und viele Generationen hindurch in Wirksamkeit gehalten. Es ruhte auf der breiten Grundlage der Gemeinde; es empfing seine Weihe aus dem Gemeindegottesdienst.”

²⁸ DCE, 20.

²⁹ Cf. DCE, 21.

³⁰ DCE, 22.

Acts of charity—in the sense of the “Great Commandment”—are then not only one of the ways but rather the essential way to realize the sacramental and pastoral mission of the Church as described in the documents of Vatican II. We have now arrived at the core of the sacramental and pastoral ecclesiology of Vatican II: the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* states, “...the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”³¹ In the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the option for the poor is woven into the famous first sentence, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”³²

The Church can thus only be “church” in the full and true sense of the “sign and instrument” when She fulfills her responsibility to carry out acts of charity, not only on an individual level but also in a structured, organized manner. Because the Catholic Church is episcopal in nature, a diocese without organized “Caritas” on the diocesan level cannot be considered to be a local church in the full sense. Without these organizations, the Church cannot truly fulfill Her “mission in the service of love,”³³ faithfully adhering to Her risen Lord. At the end of 2012, Pope Benedict emphasized in the *Motu proprio Intima ecclesiae natura*,³⁴ that such organizations can certainly be organized by the initiative of the faithful. Organized “Caritas” does not have to be created from the “top down”; nevertheless, of course these organizations fall under the responsibility of a bishop, who must ensure their existence and service within his diocese.

By means of this *Motu proprio*, the Pontifical Counsel *Cor Unum* and the Vatican’s Secretary of State intended a better regulation of Caritas organizations in canon law and thus to fill a gap in the Codex of Canon Law, which

³¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, sec. 1, Vatican Website, accessed June 23, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter LG).

³² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, sec. 1, Vatican Website, accessed June 23, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (hereafter GS), italics not in original.

³³ DCE, 42.

³⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Apostolic Letter on the Service of Charity*, November 11, 2012, Vatican Website, accessed June 23, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121111_caritas.html.

they deemed to be painfully missing.³⁵ For the universal Church, it was again stressed (as in DCE) that it is the responsibility of bishops to ensure that reliable and effective structures for organized charity are in place within their respective dioceses.

For Caritas organizations, this meant a newfound appreciation for their role within the Church, from both the perspective of the Church hierarchy and theology. Although the importance of these organizations could (and should) have already been apparent from the Gospel, from prior teachings of the early Church as well as from Vatican II,³⁶ it seems that *Deus Caritas Est* was necessary to strengthen this position. Since the publication of the encyclical, it is “officially” no longer possible to view Catholic charity organizations as secondary or unimportant aspects of the life and being of the Church, which could be neglected, as had often been the case. One can no longer claim that everything is well as long as the liturgy is being celebrated and the Gospel is being proclaimed (which was the Protestant position of Martin Luther to define the “church”). Catholic charity organizations no longer have to constantly answer the question (most often asked by bishops and priests) of whether they are “churchy” enough or even necessary—Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that these organizations and their *diakonia* are an intrinsically indispensable aspect of the Church’s mission, equal to *martyria* and *liturgia*. In fact, *Deus Caritas Est* turns the question around and asks the local Churches and dioceses whether they have enough “caritas” in their Church!

By making clear the ecclesiological importance of organized charity within the Church, Benedict XVI expanded upon prior Catholic teachings without taking away from their theological, practical, biblical and historical roots and developments, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries. Organized *Caritas* is thus a positive and necessary aspect of the Christian religious practice, as well as religious freedom.

The Church therefore claims the right to create and run organizations in order to carry out Her “mission in the service of love”³⁷ because this is part of Her religious *obligation*. Supposedly “*pious*” tendencies to let other orga-

³⁵ The German regulations already met the intended new standards, and in some ways, were perhaps even stricter.

³⁶ PAUL VI, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam Actuositatem*, November 18, 1965, sec. 8, Vatican Website, accessed June 23, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.

³⁷ DCE, 42.

nizations take over these responsibilities are ruled out by the exhortation of Vatican II: “For the spirit of charity does not forbid, but on the contrary *commands* that charitable activity be carried out in a careful and orderly manner.”³⁸

Ultimately, everywhere where *Caritas* is organized and carried out as a fundamental ecclesial principle, everywhere where women and men work together in these organizations, services and institutions (also with the bishop) for “the poor or in any way afflicted”³⁹—this is where they jointly fulfill the mission of the Church “in the service of love.”⁴⁰

5. SOCIAL-ETHICAL FOCUS

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI even managed to bring up an important message for the Church (yet not only for the Church) in regard to social ethics: “[...] within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life.”⁴¹

To some, it may first seem that Benedict XVI excludes those outside of the Church. However, it becomes clear that this is a common goal for all of society as he writes later that we are called to “a true humanism, which acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity.”⁴² In particular, the Catholic Church must work for “the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenseless.”⁴³

Benedict XVI describes how this can be implemented in greater detail in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), and Pope Francis also expands upon this in his most recent encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015).

³⁸ GS, 88. Cf. PAUL VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, sec. 8. This is not to say that Catholic believers cannot establish services, organizations and institutions that have *no* formal affiliation with the Church. It is quite possible and also encouraged that believers are active in such organizations, even religiously neutral ones, as a result of personal (religious) convictions or even as part of their work. However, in secular organizations, believers must consider whether the organization’s values align with their own moral beliefs.

³⁹ GS, 1.

⁴⁰ DCE, 42.

⁴¹ DCE, 20.

⁴² DCE, 30b.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

6. CARITAS IN PRIESTLY FORMATION AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The caritas-theological focus of Vatican II, which was brought to light again by Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*, points to a structural deficit in the formation and training of theology students and priests. In the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* on ecclesiastical universities and faculties,⁴⁴ there is barely any mention of a “Caritas Theology.” Yet, Caritas studies (“Caritas Science”) have been established as a theological discipline of its own with an interdisciplinary nature and awareness for the variety of needs and services required to fulfill the Church’s call for service in love.⁴⁵ Without an official change in the teaching requirements laid out for Catholic universities and seminaries, it is unlikely that Caritas Theology will become a standard element of theologians’ and priests’ education and training. The Holy See (including its competent congregations) subsidiarily along with the individual Conferences of Bishops, holds the main responsibility for implementing such a change. The acting director of *Cor Unum*, Monsignor Giampietro Dal Toso, acknowledged this at the conclusion of the *Conference on 10 Years of Deus Caritas Est* in February 2016. This was documented in the conference records, and all bishops present at the conference were encouraged to seriously consider the importance of this matter.⁴⁶

7. OUTLOOK: THE ESSENCE—TODAY AND TOMORROW?

In the Gospel of Matthew, there are two passages that state what the most important part of the “law” is. The first passage is Mt 22:36f., which provides us with the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbors as ourselves, and in Mt 23:23, Jesus tells the Pharisees that “justice, mercy and faithfulness” are the essential matters of the law.

⁴⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Constitution Sapientia Christiana*, April 29, 1979, Vatican Website, accessed June 23, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutionsdocuments/hf_jp-ii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana.html.

⁴⁵ Cf. Klaus BAUMANN, “Caritaswissenschaft: Ihre Ursprünge und Aktualität,” *Neue Caritas Jahrbuch* (2016): 139-145 (on 90 years of the Institute of Caritas Science founded at Freiburg in 1925).

⁴⁶ Cf. PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM COR UNUM, *Acts of the International Congress “Love Never Fails” – Perspectives 10 Years after the Encyclical Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2016), 161f, also available online, accessed November 10, 2016, http://www.corunumjubilaem.va/content/dam/corunumexpo/pdf-congresso2016/atti_en.pdf.

The thesis, which I set out at the beginning of this paper, was that the main message of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* is a new focus on the essence of Christianity. I have made my argument by touching upon theological, anthropological, ecclesiological and social-ethical viewpoints. “Caritas” was not only the main topic of Benedict XVI’s first encyclical but also became the *leitmotif* of his entire pontificate,⁴⁷ as evident in his books on the life of Jesus as well as his encyclicals on *caritas*, *spes* and *fides*—love, hope and faith—the last of which (*Lumen Fidei*) was written together with Pope Francis. It seems clear to me, however, that Pope Benedict XVI was not able to bring about a lasting change—or at least *not yet*. Benedict XVI wanted a Church that was not only concerned with Herself but, more importantly, with her mission in the world “in the service of love.” His attempt to put this idea into action met with considerable resistance, which—as he grew weaker—became more and more difficult to work against.

As Pope Francis took office, he continued practically working against this resistance with new energy, in complete harmony with Benedict XVI’s *leitmotif*. Not only through his words but also in his actions, Pope Francis has created awareness for the needs of men and women in suffering: for refugees (visit to Lampedusa in 2013, or to Lesbos, Greece in April 2016), for married couples and families (Synod of Bishops 2014 and 2015), for the imprisoned (Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday, 2015), for all (of us) who are in need of God’s mercy and of works of mercy. In the meantime, it has also been announced that the next Synod of Bishops will discuss the situation of youth. The challenges created by these situations are particularly tangible in our European society and the Church, and addressing them in a concrete way is unavoidable:

Problems regarding marriage and family, and solidarity within our society are complex. In the end, our society must find ways to help children, teens and adults to develop the ability to love and be loved. How can we as a society learn to love God and our neighbors as ourselves, particularly when we live in a free, secular state that by itself is not able to “provide a guarantee” for these conditions?⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cf. Klaus BAUMANN, “Mit dem Papst von 100 auf 110—Caritas als roter Faden im Lehramt Benedikts XVI,” *News. Caritas-Mitteilungen für die Erzdiözese Freiburg* 2 (2013): 9-11 (also available online).

⁴⁸ Cf. Ernst-Wolfgang BÖCKENFÖRDE, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), 60: «Der freiheitliche, säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann.» Böckenförde particularly refers here to religious commitments and moral values. The Church takes responsibility for such issues, especially in regard to protecting marriage and family and the well-being of children.

Creating conditions for love and solidarity are particularly crucial in the current situation involving hundreds of thousands of refugees that have made their way or are in the process of making their way to Europe, hoping to survive the treacherous journey. What is our Christian responsibility in all of this? How seriously will Christians, along with non-Christians, take the dignity of human life—will we stop at the dignity of those citizens with a European passport? I am convinced that the challenges of our current times cannot be ignored by baptized believers. In fact, it seems that fulfilling the call to “service in love” may be key to bringing new life into what has become a somewhat lifeless Church in Europe. Quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar once again: “Love alone is credible.” It is the active expression of love and service to others that has the potential not only to keep people in the Church but to hopefully attract people in the spirit of the New Evangelization, which builds on two pillars: *caritas* and *confessio*.⁴⁹ Through our actions and ways to relate to each other, especially to the poor and those in any way afflicted, we, as the Church, are called to practice and to proclaim the essence of our faith: *Deus Caritas Est*. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis continue to trust in the workings of the Spirit within the Church—a Spirit that will continue to unfold the meaning of the words and actions of both of these popes. This is a hopeful perspective with which to look into the future, and undoubtedly, DCE will not be soon forgotten.

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⁴⁹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, Synod Hall Monday, October 2012, Vatican Website, accessed November 22, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121008_meditazione-sinodo.html; quoted by Pope Francis in his audience for the Representative Council of *Caritas Internationalis*, November 17, 2016; FRANCIS, *Address to the Representative Council of “Caritas Internationalis,”* Clementine Hall, November 17, 2016, Vatican Website, accessed November 22, 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161117_caritas-internationalis.html, last viewed 22.11.16.

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