

Be Not Afraid

Bishop John M. LeVoir's Monthly Column for *The Prairie Catholic*

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Two Important Documents

Two important documents were released recently. One document is Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 World Day of Peace message. The Pope's message is entitled: "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace." The other document is entitled: "Dignitas Personae" ("The Dignity of a Person"). It was issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The text was personally approved by Pope Benedict XVI. Let me summarize these two important documents. Both can be found on the Vatican website (www.vatican.va).

The Holy Father begins his World Day of Peace message by quoting Pope John Paul II. "Our world", he wrote, "shows increasing evidence of another grave threat to peace: many individuals and indeed whole peoples are living today in conditions of extreme poverty. The gap between rich and poor has become more marked, even in the most economically developed nations. This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community."

By being attentive to world events, we learn of the extreme poverty that exists in some parts of the world. Even in our own country there is a significant disparity of material wealth between the rich and the poor. A case in point is the plight of immigrants who seldom find a warm welcome in our country. They often live in fear and in the shadows of society.

The dignity of the human person is the basic principle that governs the relationship among peoples. Each person is an image of God. As such, each person has an infinite dignity and value. No one can put a price on the life of a human being. As an image of God, each person has certain rights with regard to the goods of the earth. Each person has a right to the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. Each person has a right to work. These rights cannot be taken away from a person. However, poverty robs a person of these rights.

The Pope's message is primarily about material poverty. Nevertheless, he is aware that there are other forms of poverty as well. He mentions affective, moral and spiritual poverty. This type of poverty is seen in "people whose interior lives are disoriented and who experience various forms of malaise despite their economic prosperity."

Material poverty is often seen as a consequence of demographic change, says the Holy Father. This means that some see the population increase in some parts of the world as the cause of material poverty. However, Benedict points out that recent studies show that "population is proving to be an asset, not a factor that contributes to poverty."

Another cause of material poverty is disease, such as the pandemic diseases of malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS. Here the Holy Father calls for proper health care for people, which, of course, excludes any anti-life measures that some see (falsely) as a solution to health problems. Where there is a spread of AIDS, the Pope states that “educational campaigns are needed, aimed especially at the young; to promote a sexual ethic that fully corresponds to the dignity of the person”

The Pope also speaks of child poverty. About half of those living in poverty are children. Benedict teaches that certain objectives should take priority with regard to children living in poverty, such as “caring for mothers, commitment to education, access to vaccines, medical care and drinking water, safeguarding the environment, and above all, commitment to defense of the family and the stability of relations within it.”

The relationship between disarmament and development is also discussed by the Pope’s message. He notes that excessive amounts of resources spent for military purposes diverts funds necessary for the authentic development of peoples. Therefore, he calls for dialogue to alleviate conflicts, especially military conflicts, which will free up more funds for development.

Finally, the Pope talks about the current food crisis. As he points out, “This crisis is characterized not so much by a shortage of food, as by difficulty in gaining access to it and by different forms of speculation: in other words, by a structural lack of political and economic institutions capable of addressing needs and emergencies.” The more affluent countries produce the manufactured goods that bring in high revenues, while the poorer countries produce agricultural goods which bring in lower revenue. This situation can be rectified by cooperation (solidarity) among governments and peoples.

The Holy Father offers the Church’s assistance to end human poverty by stating: “Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world’s poor through globalization will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights. The Church, which is the ‘sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race’ will continue to offer her contribution so that injustices and misunderstandings may be resolved, leading to a world of greater peace and solidarity.”

The other document issued recently was “The Dignity of a Person.” This document deals with issues of medical ethics at the beginning of human life. These are complex issues, yet it is essential for the Church to teach about them. The issues taught about in this document are: stem-cell research, the morning-after pill, gene therapy, embryo manipulation and “adoption,” freezing of human eggs, and human-animal hybrid cloning.

The principle upon which this document rests is the same as the principle employed in the message of the Holy Father for the “World Day of Peace,” namely, the inherent dignity and value of each human person, who is created in the image of God.

This principle is clearly stated in the conclusion to this 32-page document. “In virtue of the Church’s doctrinal and pastoral mission, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has felt

obliged to reiterate both the dignity and the fundamental and inalienable rights of every human being, including those in the initial stages of their existence, and to state explicitly the need for protection and respect which this dignity requires of everyone. The fulfillment of this duty implies courageous opposition to all those practices which result in grave and unjust discrimination against unborn human beings, who have the dignity of a person, created like others in the image of God. Behind every 'no' in the difficult task of discerning between good and evil, there shines a great 'yes' to the recognition of the dignity and inalienable value of every single and unique human being called into existence."

Dos Documentos importantes

por Obispo John M. LeVoir

Recientemente dos documentos importantes fueron publicados. El primer documento es el mensaje de su Santidad Benedicto XVI para la celebración de la Jornada Mundial de la Paz. El título de su mensaje: "Combatir la Pobreza, Construir la Paz." El otro documento se titula: 'Dignitas Personae' ("La dignidad de la Persona").

El Santo Padre inicia su mensaje a la Jornada Mundial de la Paz al citar el mensaje del Papa Juan Pablo II. "Nuestro Mundo," y dice, otra seria amenaza para la paz: muchas personas, es más, poblaciones enteras viven hoy en condiciones de extrema pobreza. La desigualdad entre ricos y pobres se ha hecho más evidente, incluso en las naciones más desarrolladas económicamente. Se trata de un problema que se plantea a la conciencia de la humanidad, puesto que las condiciones en que se encuentra un gran número de personas son tales que ofenden su dignidad innata y comprometen, por consiguiente, el auténtico y armónico progreso de la comunidad mundial."

Al estar atentos a los acontecimientos del mundo, aprendemos de la pobreza extrema que existe en algunas partes del mundo. Incluso en nuestro propio país hay una diferencia significativa de la riqueza material entre los ricos y los pobres. Un ejemplo es la condición difícil de los inmigrantes que raramente encuentran una cálida bienvenida en nuestro país. A menudo ellos viven en miedo y en las sombras de la sociedad.

La dignidad de la persona es el principio básico que gobierna la relación entre las personas. Toda persona es una creación a imagen de Dios. Como tal, toda persona tiene una dignidad y un valor infinito. Nadie puede poner un precio a la vida de un ser humano. Como imagen de Dios, cada persona tiene ciertos derechos con respecto al bien común de la tierra. Toda persona tiene el derecho a las necesidades básicas de la vida: alimento, ropa y refugio. Toda persona tiene el derecho a trabajar. Esos derechos no se pueden privar a la persona. Sin embargo, la pobreza roba a la persona de esos derechos.

El Santo Padre ofrece asistencia a la Iglesia a terminar la pobreza indicando: "La marginación de los pobres del planeta sólo puede encontrar instrumentos válidos de emancipación en la globalización si todo hombre se siente personalmente herido por las injusticias que hay en el mundo y por las violaciones de los derechos humanos vinculadas a ellas. La Iglesia, que es «signo e instrumento de la íntima unión con Dios y de la unidad de todo el género humano,

continuará ofreciendo su aportación para que se superen las injusticias e incomprensiones, y se llegue a construir un mundo más pacífico y solidario."

El otro documento que recientemente fue publicado "La Dignidad de la Persona." Este documento se ocupa de éticas médicas a inicios de la vida humana. Éstos son ediciones complejas y es esencial que la Iglesia enseñe sobre ellos. Las ediciones que enseñan este documento son: investigación de las células madres, las píldoras, terapia genética, adopción entre otros.

El principio sobre el cual este documento se basa es similar al principio empleado en el mensaje del Santo Padre para el "Día Mundial de la Paz," es decir, la dignidad y el valor inherente de cada persona humana, es creado a imagen de Dios.