

**ANTÓNIO RAMALHO EANES**

**AFRICA: THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST AND THE VALUE OF CULTURE IN  
MEETING THE FUTURE**

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“AFRICA AND GLOBALIZATION: LEARNING FROM THE PAST, ENABLING A BETTER  
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## **Introduction**

Some observers argue that the current globalization is entirely new in history. Others, by contrast, defend that it is not different (in its distinctive essence) from the world order that prevailed under the domination of Great Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I myself believe that the alleged «old globalization» (the English one, from 1840 to 1914) was only a broad and very important process of internationalization of the economy and science – of all sciences – and their technological fruits.

## **Globalization of the «finite world»**

I therefore defend the thesis that the ancient world had its own globalization. I shall call it, using the expression of Paul Valéry (in *Regards sur le monde actuel*), the globalization of the «finite world», as opposed to the present one, which I would name the globalization of the «finite time».

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, "The world did not exist as a unit for mankind"<sup>1</sup>. The world, in the eyes of men, was not a real unit. We may say that the world did not know the world. There were then no universal phenomena, whatsoever.

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<sup>1</sup> RÉMOND, René – *L'Ancien Régime et la révolution. 1750-1815*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974. 1<sup>er</sup> v.: Introduction à l'histoire de notre temps. p.9

In 1750 man's velocity of displacement was still measured by his step, the step of his horse, or the speed of his sailboat. "The world is as if formed by separate humanities"<sup>2</sup>, only partly connected by merchants.

This situation starts to change with the so-called «Discoveries», the maritime epic adventure initiated by the Portuguese people in the fifteenth century with the conquest of Ceuta in Northern Africa, where the trade flows of Eastern spices and African ivory and gold arrived. This was the start of the adventure of a small people; small demographically, small geographically (with 89 thousand square kilometers) and without large resources, living under the threat of Spanish unification.

And this is how Portugal challenged the seas, becoming first in the European ocean adventure, with a remarkable geostrategic intuition and reflection, which lead the Portuguese to «discover» the Atlantic, the Indic and the Pacific.

Under the leadership of Prince navigator Henrique, Portugal goes beyond the Bojador cable in West Africa in 1434; in 1487 the Portuguese people reach the Cape of Good Hope, in the extreme South of Africa; in 1498 they arrive to India; in 1511 they set up in Malacca, and in 1513, from there, they start a business connection with China, receiving the Macao Peninsula from China in 1557.

To Japan – which is known in Europe through Marco Polo, which refers to "a large island, with white people, with good manners and beautiful"<sup>3</sup> – the Portuguese arrive in 1542 or 1543<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> RÉMOND, René – *L'Ancien Regime et la révolution*. 1<sup>st</sup> volume. p.24

<sup>3</sup> JANEIRA, Armando Martins - *O impacte português sobre a civilização japonesa*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1970 (col. Documentário, nr. 8). p.27

As a tribute to the Japanese friends here present, allow me a short digression on the mutually rewarding meeting and discovery of Portuguese and Japanese people<sup>5</sup>. From this fruitful meeting and contact, many Japanese words entered the Portuguese language, and over 30 are still currently used. Likewise, many Portuguese words were introduced into the Japanese vocabulary (religious, geographic, navigation, food and clothing terms mainly)<sup>6</sup>.

In the eighteenth century, when other European nations awakened for an overseas «adventure», the Portuguese and Spanish empires were already declining. It is then England, France, United Provinces and Scandinavian countries' turn. These countries will be joined by Germany and Italy.

Around 1770-1775, English and French navigators discovered the so-called «oceanic archipelagos». A century later, the great explorers Brazza, Livingstone

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<sup>4</sup> In 1543, according to the «Chronicle on the shotgun», "Japanese chronicle on the history of the introduction of the shotgun in Japan, *Teppo-Ki*, written in 1606 by Nampo Bunshi, Buddhist priest of the zen sect of Satsuma, for the lord of Tanegashima." JANEIRA, Armando Martins - *O impacte português sobre a civilização japonesa*. p.28

<sup>5</sup> Gratifying as shown by various writings. As an example, I shall refer:

- "A letter from the «king» of Kagoshima to the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in India, 1562 [that] says: «and just because the Portuguese are good men, we are delighted that they come to our land (...) they will be favored in everything because, after the world began, we have not seen such people as the Portuguese»." JANEIRA, Armando Martins - *O impacte português sobre a civilização japonesa*. p.32
- A note written by Father Cosme de Torres in Yamaguchi on 29 September 1551 [that] refers Japanese people as follows: "They are discrete as one can be: they are guided by reason as much or even more than the Spaniards. They are curious to know more about the many people I have known, and to practice how to save their souls, and serve Him who created them. In all lands discovered there is no man like them: their conversation is so beautiful that it seems that they were all brought up in palaces of great lords: it is impossible to describe how they greet each other: they seldom talk about others and have no envy»." JANEIRA, Armando Martins - *O impacte português sobre a civilização japonesa*. p.40

<sup>6</sup> Cf. JANEIRA, Armando Martins - *O impacte português sobre a civilização japonesa*. p.331-340. As an example the following Japanese words of Portuguese origin can be mentioned: *botan* from *botão* (button), *koppu* from *copo* (glass), *pan* from *pão* (bread) and *tabako* from *tabaco* (tobacco); and the following Portuguese words of Japanese origin: *biombo* from *byobu* (folding screen), *catana* from *katana*, *judo* from *juu dou*, and *origami* from the Japanese *ori* (to fold) and *kami* (paper)

and Stanley discovered the headwaters of the Zambezi and explored the outside basin of the Congo.

The polar expeditions undertaken by the American, British and Norwegian peoples are the epilogue of a mundialization process initiated by the Portuguese and the Spanish. The expeditions to the North Pole (in 1909) and the South Pole (in 1911) allow humanity to know the entire globe. The first historical mundialization, the globalization of the world, the «finite world», was now complete.

I believe it will be interesting to review, even briefly, the consequences – both positive and negative – of this first globalization and to return to the history of colonization led by Europe, because it may help us understand the serious errors then repeatedly made, especially on African peoples: why we did it, where we are and what we can and must do in order for the humanity which the globalization of the «finite world» became one to live in true democracy. This requires, aims and demands, as John Keane said, "a[n active] memory oriented to the future (...) to stimulate the contemporary political democratic <sup>7</sup> imagination"<sup>8</sup> and social responsibility.

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<sup>7</sup> Democracy, which, as we all know, is much more than an original way of government, because "it represents the form and aim of modern society". ALVIRA, Rafael et ali., ed. - *Sociedad civil. La democracia y su destino*. Pamplona: EUNSA, 1999 (col. Filosófica, nº 144). p.XI. The ambition and purpose of democracy should be man as a whole and all men. Only democracy, rationally and ethically carried out throughout the world, will allow fair and shared economic modernization and pacifying social development

<sup>8</sup> MÚGICA, Fernando – La sociedad civil en contexto. In. ALVIRA, Rafael et ali., ed. - *Sociedad civil*. p.5

## **African colonization and post-colonial crisis**

A distinctive feature of the overall African colonization was the political, economic, intellectual, cultural and even religious domination<sup>9</sup>.

At the origin of this perverse condition I believe there were racial prejudices and, naturally, the advanced stage of technical, scientific and cultural development of Europe.

According to this line of thought, the colonization's intention was:

- To bring «civilization» to African populations, improving their natural conditions and raising their standards of living;
- To free them from the primitive beliefs, from vicious social effects, from evil effects on the condition and life of so many Africans, including children (witchcraft, black magic, possession by spirits)<sup>10</sup>;
- To correct injustices, some of them brutally exercised by the colonizers themselves (such as black African slavery)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> We must not however forget other behaviors, much later, often truly heroic, of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits - who the Japanese knew so well - against slavery, particularly in Brazil

<sup>10</sup> "Having undertaken a study and field investigation journey in Kinshasa from 1 to 30 April 2001, we are able to confirm this phenomenon of very small children abandoned on the streets (5 to 15 years old) due to witchcraft. The *economic* crisis that affects most of the population in Kinshasa and the Congo largely explains this inflation of witchcraft which becomes a *pretext* or a *scheme* used by poor parents, incapable of feeding, creating and educating their children." KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique. Esquisse d'une Christologie negro-africaine de la Libération Holistique*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008. p.191

<sup>11</sup> In African societies, as indeed in many other primitive societies, slavery represented a positive step in the performance of tribal war winners because slavery replaced the habit of killing the peoples who had lost the war. This situation, historically lived during the most remote times of the Western civilization, as demonstrated by Code Hammurabi (who was king of Babylon from 1792 to 1750 B.C.): "War prisoners are slaves" (the slave was given the chance of marrying a free woman, their children being free men). FINET, André (introd.) – *Le code de Hammurabi*. Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2004. p.14

In fact, not too few well-known citizens shared that «higher purpose of teaching» and were inspired by it when writing remarkable books, as was the case of Kipling.

Shadowed by the conscience of their military, cultural, intellectual and economic superiority, dominated by Eurocentric prejudices, committed to meeting different material interests<sup>12</sup>, Europe was unable to realize that all peoples – and, of course, African peoples as well – have a historical tradition, a cultural personality, which must be respected, even with the aim to change, transform and modernize it, avoiding psychosocial traumas.

At the Berlin Conference, held from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885 – which decided the partition of Africa among the strongest military and capitalist powers of Europe, under a sheer logic of power and interests –, African ethnic-territorial reality and their historical hostilities were not even minimally considered. Indeed, this fact is relevant to explain and understand many of the civil wars that have ravaged the African continent, such as the one between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, a genocide which takes place under international passivity, particularly that of the United Nations.

Thus, by failing to understand this set of imperative reasons, even moral, the Berlin Conference made African peoples enter a culturally disfiguring adventure,

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<sup>12</sup> To demonstrate it, the following arguments can be mentioned:

- The number of African slaves transported to the USA, Canada (especially by the British) and Brazil
- The abolition of slavery by Britain in 1807 with the "Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" considered the economic interest because "the rapid development of the U.S. economy with slave work was a serious threat to the English metropolis". MAURÍCIO, Domingos – Escravatura. In *Enciclopédia Luso-brasileira de Cultura*. Lisboa: Verbo, 1968. Vol. 7. p.952

which preferred "imprisonment to freedom, oppression to expansion, mistake to truth, partiality to totality"<sup>13</sup>.

This overall picture explains, I believe, the main reasons why Africa failed to meet the present and the future, in terms of economic modernization and social development.

We have all witnessed the "tragic and dramatic worsening of the post-colonial crisis through civil wars happening allover Sub-Saharan Africa"<sup>14</sup>. Bloody dictatorships have repeatedly and dramatically been installed in the African continent<sup>15</sup>, destroying the present and turning the future of millions of Africans into a problem.

And, even more serious, this has significantly contributed to a "strong chronic instability"<sup>16</sup>, "bloody rebellions and ethnic hatreds carved in historic old rivalries"<sup>17</sup>, but also the destruction of the traditional ties of African solidarity"<sup>18</sup>.

In fact, these governments have proved incapable of changing, as promised, the situation of the African continent, which can be defined as follows:

- With 13.4% of the humanity, Africa only reaches 1% of the planet's GDP;
- It is only present in 2% of international trade;

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. ANTUNES, Manuel – *Obra completa*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2005. Tome 2: *Paideia: educação e sociedade*. p.202

<sup>14</sup> KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.128

<sup>15</sup> Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Mobutu in Zaire, Bokassa in the Central African Republic, Biya in Cameroon, Eyadema in Togo, Kérékou in Benin, Compaoré in Burkina Faso. Cf. KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.128

<sup>16</sup> KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.190

<sup>17</sup> KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.190

<sup>18</sup> KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.191



- It receives no more than 1% from foreign direct investment;
- Despite a relatively strong growth of African economy in 2003, a third of sub-Saharan African countries reported a decline in income per capita, while the number of people in a situation of extreme poverty in the region (with less than a dollar per day) increased to approximately 60 million since 1990.

Moreover, the democratic path that many African governments chose, after the late '80s, under the pressure and supervision of the International Monetary Fund, the European Economic Community (at the Third Convention in Lomé in 1985-1990) and inclusively France (during the Franco-African Summit in La Baule in 1990), is far from having contributed to any success. Serious problems arose with the anarchic proliferation of ethnic-based political parties, which were fueled by the frustration and correlative social protest, stimulated by the harmful effects of underdevelopment and expanded by the opportunities offered by some liberalization of the media.

The suffocating weight of foreign debt and the austerity policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund have helped destabilize the regimes that have chosen a democratic path because the reduction of the financial resources of these States has frustrated the expectations of customers which support innumerable States<sup>19</sup>. "Under these conditions, very few African States seem able to reconcile order and freedom"<sup>20</sup>, which is essential for societies to be civil. These situations of protest and social conflict have a negative impact on capital

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. BERSTEIN, Serge; MILZA, Pierre (dir.) – *Histoire du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. De 1973 à nos jours: vers la mondialisation et le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Vol. 3. Paris: Hatier, 2005. p. 407

<sup>20</sup> BERSTEIN, Serge; MILZA, Pierre (dir.) – *Histoire du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Vol. 3. p. 407

holders that might consider investing in Africa. And, obviously, without foreign investment it is not possible to maintain macroeconomic stability and accelerate structural reforms, namely in health, education and public services (public transport network, energy, water, telecommunications, etc.).

To all this, too problematic already, we can add other negative situations:

- Explosive demographic situation, characterized by a low number of working-age adults, and persistence of a high birth rate.
- Excessive child death due to malnutrition.
- AIDS (particularly violent in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Zaire), which aggravates the economic, financial and social situation (26 million Africans are infected, which accounts for the location in the African continent of 7% of the victims of the HIV pandemic).

International organizations (such as International Monetary Fund, World Bank, United Nations, and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) as well as numerous NGOs have been sensitive to this situation, setting a program aimed at halving extreme poverty up to 2015, under the name «Millennium Development Goals», which, in my opinion, seem too ambitious. In fact, public aid to development is still inadequate, despite the additional effort decided in 2002, which only covered up for the accumulated insufficient aid since 1990. Simultaneously, in 2001 the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) launched, together with the G8, a development aid program, linking its concession to liberal and democratic reforms. The balance of results achieved in 2005 is not too positive although institutional aid has

contributed to reducing the burden of African foreign debt, which, after 1995, still stood in 205 billion dollars.

In this situation, it is difficult for Africa to resort to external debt, especially after the second world financial crisis. And foreign capital is essential to help Africa get out of the swamp where it fell and still finds itself.

### **Globalization of the «finite time»**

The so-called «New Economy», with its liberal management of modern information and communication techniques, has become the carrier of a promise for stable and sustainable economic growth. From internationalization (the intensification of relations between national economies) neo-capitalism jumps to globalization, which turns the planet into a single global market.

But globalization has an overturn, which, according to experts, is due to the fact that none of the existing international organizations holds sufficient authority to regulate and prevent dysfunctions, restore them and impose operation rules to global economy players, rules that are accepted and controllably respected by all.

In this situation, it becomes clear that the major challenge for policy in the twenty-first century is to build, together, a new global regulatory model, with new international institutions or with the existing ones adequately reformed. It has thus become necessary and urgent to restore ethical, political, legal and institutional control over world capitalism.

## **Globalization and Africa: promises and consequences**

In Africa globalization was also naturally received with hope. Flows of capital in developing countries would grow promisingly: they were multiplied by six, in six years (from 1990 to 1996). People thought that all – all men and all countries – would benefit from globalization, which was supposed to help developing countries "create better economic environments"<sup>21</sup>, jump to the information age, accelerate the development and enhance global harmony.

However, African scholars see globalization with skepticism and even great concern. Churches working in Africa, including the Catholic one, have also been worried. The Holy See published a note on finance and development, immediately before the United Nations Conference in Doha, which states: "We need to pay particular attention to Africa, where the development map shows strong inequalities. In Africa, the situation is different from country to country; there is a trend towards polarization between situations of success in obtaining resources and making them fruitful, and situations of total marginalization."<sup>22</sup>

Globalization has therefore become a phenomenon with disastrous consequences for governments and the peoples of Africa, such as:

1. The integration of African economies into the capitalist economy has made «colonialism» provide a legal tool for the dependence of African economy from western economies.

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<sup>21</sup> AKINDELE, S. T. et ali. – "Globalisation, its implications and consequences for Africa" (2002). In. [http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v2.1/01\\_akindele\\_etal.html](http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v2.1/01_akindele_etal.html)

<sup>22</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace - *Note of the Holy See on finance and development on the eve of the United Nations General Assembly Conference in Doha* (18 November 2008). Reprinted with permission. pp.19-20

2. Privatization has intensified the integration of African countries in production and finance global systems, encouraging the flow of capital investment and attracting the ownership by foreign capital of former public-held companies.
3. Africa became the dump place of a series of products (at literature, cinema or music levels) that have little to do with African people, obliterating African culture and leading to a Eurocentric vision of reality.
4. Globalization subverts the autonomy and self-determination of African peoples. The burden of external debt of the developing countries in 1994 had already reached 2 trillion dollars, according to the World Bank. Naturally, mass poverty caused citizens to be deprived of a meaningful existence.
5. The lack of governmental incentives to local production, the subversion of local production by high imports, the exchange rate devaluation and the depletion of foreign reserves are some of the effects of marginalization and underdevelopment caused by development agents.
6. Due to globalization, it has not been easy for governments to ensure social protection, one of their core functions and the one that has helped many developed nations maintain social cohesion and domestic political support.
7. Furthermore, globalization also damaged the natural environment of Africa. We can mention the Niger Delta and the Ogoni people in particular, affected by oil exploration in the region, which has ravaged

marine life and environment, has affected the supply of drinking water and caused a number of diseases<sup>23</sup>.

### **The future of Africa**

How, then, can Africa free itself from such heavy, anguishing and cursed situation?

For many people, mainly religious men and scholars, such as Engelbert Mveng<sup>24</sup>, "the reconstruction of Africa must first start with regaining the spirituality empirically rooted in African cultural values"<sup>25</sup>.

When Africa is able to meet those ancient cultural values again, modernized by education and sublimated by religion, it is reasonable to expect that corruption – that has «invaded» Africa primarily due to the perverse association between economy and politics – will strongly be reduced and economy will be directed by law, which will be defined by politics, and politics itself will be led by ethics. Then, and only then, will African societies be civil and civilized.

But, how can a dynamics of confident sustainable growth of African economies be operationalized, a dynamics strong enough to eradicate the evident injustices that devastate the continent at this time of irreversible globalization?

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<sup>23</sup> In this region, as elsewhere, the traditional economy based on agriculture, fishing and hunting was replaced by an economy based on petrodollars, without basic infrastructures being improved while governments closed their eyes to a series of violations of human rights

<sup>24</sup> Engelbert Mveng was murdered at home near Yaoundé (Cameroon). He was a Jesuit priest and left a considerable work as historian, theologian, poet and sculptor

<sup>25</sup> KUNGUA, Benoît Awazi Mbambi – *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. p.133

Widely recognized is the need for a set of articulated policies able to ensure peace and security, achieve and maintain macroeconomic stability, ensure international trade and the liberalization of exchange rate regimes, attract foreign capital flows given low national capital and establish the necessary economic and social infrastructures.

In order to achieve these goals it is necessary, among other measures, to:

- Develop competent and serious governance;
- Modernize public administration with technical competence and legislative safety;
- Ensure security, namely of investment, through appropriate legislation to ensure transparency, predictability and reliability in public decisions and policy;
- Promote the competent independence of courts, enabling them a modern organization, supported by technically competent staff;
- Establish independent central banks in the States to ensure price stability and transparency in monetary policy;
- Promote an effective connection between the government and civil society through a democratic organization of political power; democratic both in its origin and way of functioning, respecting cultural realities;
- Promote educational ability and merit, with free access to higher education in national or foreign universities, under the compromise to

provide services to the State for a given number of years after graduation;

- Promote agriculture and cattle raising education by establishing «land banks» to provide land for young farmers, who should also be supported financially and technically by domestic and foreign experts;
- Commit to the training of a specialized workforce (especially in towns), in arts and crafts schools, whenever possible in religious congregations with large experience in such activities;
- Promote a flexible system for providing health services to the entire population, using the facilities and expertise of the armed forces, NGOs and volunteers, including foreigners;
- Reform international institutions, namely African, giving them the means and power to effectively respond to inter-African conflicts.

This is obviously a cyclopean work, but necessary and possible, as demonstrated to a large extent by the example of Cape Verde, with effective, competent and democratic governance, worthy of confidence, even in the utilization of international financial aid; a work which, at least theoretically, would not be as cyclopean would we be to able to succeed in achieving the dreams and utopias imagined by some of the great philosophers of the eighteenth century, as Emmerich de Vattel and Kant, regarding the construction of a universal State.



The obvious inability of the United Nations, the emergence of conflicts that destroy the States and bring back humanity to its «state of nature» (as in Somalia) would be enough to justify the change. Another justification may also be found not only in the current world financial and economic crisis and the need for a virtuous answer, but even in the imperative need to respond to an ever-lasting globalization, to climate change, biodiversity, rationally interested management of water and underwater resources, energy challenges<sup>26</sup>, terrorism, inter-religious dialogue, etc.

In his new encyclical *Caritas in Veritatis*<sup>27</sup>, Pope Benedict XVI stated that in the name of man – of his happiness – we must end with global society's excesses, so little virtuous and so dominated by power and interests. And he adds that "we should not be victims but leading actors"<sup>28</sup>. Naming the failure of the United Nations, he defends a new political and economic order, especially a "real authority"<sup>29</sup>, recognized by all, with effective power, able to consistently help economies in crisis, promote full disarmament, ensure food security and peace, protect the environment, and render the relations between financial capital, economy and work virtuous; a planetary lawful State – utopic for a long time still – that could well answer the two virtuous globalizations that have made humanity one, contiguous, of unitarian interaction.

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<sup>26</sup> Which the horizon outlines with increasing accuracy considering the nearing depletion of fossil fuels

<sup>27</sup> Charity in truth

<sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. In [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_po.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_po.html)

<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. In [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_po.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_po.html)