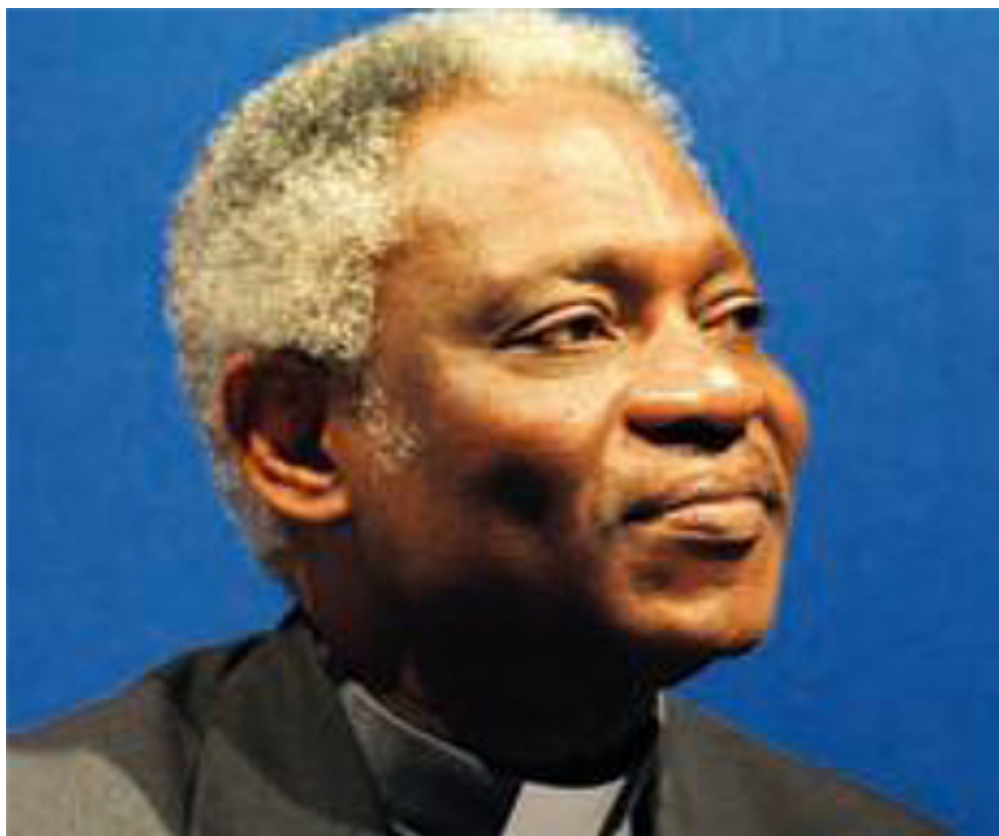


## Turning crisis into action - Keys to the City of God



In his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict presented the global economic crisis as an opportunity to shape a new vision for the future. Here, the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace sets out the steps to realising that vision.

In the period between the 1990s and 2007, we lived in a financial and economic bubble driven by individual greed, on the fallacy that individual quest for gain/profit in the management of our financial and economic affairs is capable of creating a rising tide that lifts all yachts. Unfortunately, most of us have no yachts and some people, especially the marginalised in society, drowned in the tide; nor did people on the whole benefit from the expected trickle-down effect that prosperity is supposed to bring.

The financial crisis that started as a default related to mortgage debt in the United States – the result of the greed of a few – ignited a credit crisis in the global financial system and pushed the world economy into a recession in the last quarter of 2008. We are still dealing with its resulting economic crisis.

The first, final and fundamental question concerns the ultimate goals of humanity. With all his various activity, man should build an earthly city, which is an anticipation of the universal city of God as Pope Benedict wrote in his social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. This outlook should animate the concerns of governments and businesses, non-governmental organisations and individuals alike.

In the end, our goal is to reach “the integral development of man and of all men”, according to Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and now Benedict XVI. The responses to this challenge from a Christian standpoint must go beyond questions of management, however efficient this may be. Since social relations have a spiritual basis and dimension, the true response must be both moral and spiritual. It must pass through a conversion entailing renewed fidelity to the Gospel and an unshakeable determination to do nothing which could undermine the divine calling of humanity and of each and

every man, woman and child created by God.

Hence, the Pope reminds all of their vocation to fraternity, solidarity, gift, etc., recommending that business be directed by a logic of gift and gratuitousness, and that a form of world governance be devised to “govern” globalization. Facing these challenges, our rich patrimony of Catholic Social Teaching invites Christians to the exercise of ministry for the fuller flourishing of all people.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict in a few sentences (paragraph 21) urges five ways (marked here in italics) for building up the city of man with qualities closer to the City of God: The complexity and gravity of the present economic situation rightly cause us concern, but we must adopt a realistic attitude as we take up with confidence and hope the new responsibilities to which we are called by the prospect of a world in need of profound cultural renewal, a world that needs to rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future. The current crisis obliges us to replan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment, to build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones.

The crisis thus becomes an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future. In this spirit, with confidence rather than resignation, it is appropriate to address the difficulties of the present time. (*Caritas in Veritate*, paragraph 21)

These ways are in effect five profound competences each worthy of exploration.

“We must adopt a realistic attitude”: The first step is to face the difficulties of the present time not with ready-made answers or simplistic, over-simplifying ideologies, but with a realistic attitude and with discernment. This is the Church’s duty to scrutinise the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.

In order to confront the problems of our world, we must learn to see them clearly and recognise what constitutes injustice at every level. “Seeing” demands more than a glance based on presumptions of ideology or prejudice or even political affiliation. Rather, using the available scientific tools, we must conduct a rigorous analysis of social conditions, their causes and interconnections, their effects especially on the poor and marginalised, and the contemporary experiences of the People of God who struggle.

Besides an empirical analysis, we make use of biblical insight, the tradition of our Church’s social teaching, theological reflection to “judge” the situation described. And out of this effort – which sometimes entails solitary research but which often is a collaborative task – emerges a way forward and proposals of what to do and how to “act”.

“To rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future”: This can only begin with oneself, so this competence can rightly be called conversion, metanoia. To know and accept oneself is the beginning of wisdom. And this attitude must be accompanied by a willingness to change, to work on oneself.

The “outer ecology” of the structures of our family, our community and our society – what we call justice and peace or their absence – reflects the “inner ecology” of each individual, community and organisation. Those who refuse to change will contribute to the establishment or maintenance of unjust

and conflictive societies. Those who promote peaceful transformation of the world in a convincing way have usually worked to transform oppressive and violent tendencies within themselves, and thus have become credible advocates for those who are suffering the violent consequences of unjust structures. “To set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment”: With confidence rather than resignation, let us take up the new responsibilities which go with a new vocation and mission. Vision, as the third competence necessary for building a more just and peaceful society, requires clarity about our human calling.

The industrial and scientific revolution irreversibly changed Western humanity’s picture of the world and man’s place in it. The earth got reduced to a collection of material objects, structured like a machine and treated as such, rather than recognising the intrinsic worth of every human creature and a sense of the common good. But “the more we strive to secure a common good, corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the polis,” in society.

“To build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones”: The Pope would have us open to profound cultural renewal, with confidence and hope. Counter-culturally, Christians firmly believe that a more just and peaceful world is possible.

Economic resources do exist that could help wipe the tears from the eyes of those who suffer injustice, who lack the basics of a dignified life and who are in danger from any deterioration in the climate. And the poor do benefit from champions in solidarity who believe that injustice can be reduced, that harmonious relationships can be fostered, that our planetary ecology can be made sustainable, that a world of greater communion is possible. “The crisis thus becomes an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future”: Gathering the wisdom of the previous four, the fifth competence would have us commit to new rules, new forms of engagement with coherence and consistency.

This competence for building a society of greater peace and justice requires cooperation, collaboration, networking and solidarity – all that binds people together in the multiple efforts required. It means that groups, organisations, institutions and movements of different persuasions – whether Catholic, Christian, inter-religious or non-confessional – need to respect one another’s identities and differences, and not see one another as threatening or competing with one another. We must cooperate, coordinate and make our efforts converge towards the very same goals: greater justice, greater security, greater transparency, greater peace.

In his 2011 message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict said: “Today too, in an increasingly globalised world, Christians are called, not only through their responsible involvement in civic, economic and political life but also through the witness of their charity and faith, to offer a valuable contribution to the laborious and stimulating pursuit of justice, integral human development and the right ordering of human affairs.”

This baptismal experience of life of the ecclesial community does not close in on itself, but interacts at every level with the world. It is in living in Jesus, the Supreme Truth and Good, that the faithful

discover anew an appropriate order of goods and an authentic scale of values to live by and witness to, to minister and serve in. Let us pray that God, who has truly begun the ministry of human flourishing within and among us, may bring it to great fruitfulness.

*Cardinal Peter Turkson is president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. This article is an edited version of the 2011 Bishop Dunn Memorial Lecture he presented in Durham on 10 March, hosted by the Centre for Catholic Studies of Durham University and Cafod. The full text of the lecture can be read on [www.thetablet.co.uk](http://www.thetablet.co.uk)*

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