

CARITAPOLIS



A New Global Vision
for Christian Social Thought

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AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

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What would it profit the human race if we were to achieve a higher level of political and economic liberty than ever before, only to live like pigs, enslaved to our desires, without reflection and deliberation? That is, what if the human race were to use its newfound liberties merely to live by the appetites of the lower animals? It is not only our political and economic systems that must be worthy of our human nature, but also our habits of moral living.



For most of the last six or seven generations, human beings have been preoccupied with two questions: one political, one economic.

The political question: which political system is better for poor people and ordinary people, authoritarian power (for Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler, straight-out dictatorship) or democracy? The horrors of the vast communist Gulag Archipelago and the Nazi death camps—Dachau, Auschwitz, and a score of others—convincingly settled this question. In 1900, there were only 10 democracies on the planet; in 1974, there were only 35; and by 2013, there were 120. Through unimaginable suffering, nearly the whole human race has learned the superiority of republican government (with checks and balances against the tyrannical tendencies of majoritarian democracy) over fascism, Nazism, and communism, the three progenitors of the new totalitarianism of the 20th century.

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The economic question: which economic system is better for poor people and ordinary people? Painful experiments from around the world settled this question in favor of a mind-centered system rooted in invention, discovery, and enterprise in new ventures—in other words, capitalism. The accomplishment of one medical miracle after another, the dramatic extension of life spans and dramatic drops in infant mortality, the quadrupling (and more) of the earth's productive capacity, and the advancement of the virtues connected with personal responsibility and personal initiative all have provided very powerful evidence of the superiority of capitalism to socialism. Mikhail Gorbachev once reported that the socialist economy of the Soviet Union had declined to “fourth-world” status. As Pope Leo XIII predicted in the late 19th century, socialism failed. It would prove not only evil, he wrote, but futile. And he proved to be correct.

But the main point is that what has been largely neglected during these many generations is a third and more important question: What is the *moral ecology* under which the dignity and solidarity of all the peoples of the world can best thrive?

What do we mean by “moral ecology”? I define it as “the sum of all those conditions—ideas, narratives, institutions, symbol systems, prevailing opinions and practices, and local dispensers of shame and praise—that teach us the habits necessary for human flourishing, and support us in their practice.”¹

Thus, moral ecology—by analogy with environmental ecology—means those exclusively human ideas and institutions that guide human conduct toward the good and the beautiful and that are the true signs of human flourishing. Humans do not live by bread alone. And doing whatever one desires does not human liberty make. Dogs, cats, tigers, and all the other animals can do that much. What they cannot do is live by reflection and choice.

Human beings are called to higher aspirations. Even in the context of political liberty, the personal possession of wealth—if such wealth does not lead to full human flourishing—is merely empty and quite often self-destructive. Full human flourishing means striving toward beauty, nobility of soul, purity of heart, and great moral deeds. But how can the whole world flourish together in that way?

If there is to be peace and amity on earth, there needs to be a new global vision for which all cultures can strive.

The Need for a New Global Vision: Caritapolis

Caritapolis, the city of *caritas*: that is, in effect, how St. Augustine defined the City of God. That city is infused with, and lives by, the unique love that is the ball of fire in the belly of God, His own inner life, which He has willingly infused into those human beings who freely accept it. By contrast, the City of Man is ruled by the disordered passions and interests of humans who do not choose to be God's friends.

Pope Paul VI and later popes preferred the expression the "civilization of love."² That expression, too, is apt, since even the pagan sage Cicero deemed friendship the cohesive inner bond that suffuses cities with life. Between the deeper, richer Christian view and the secular view, in other words, there is an analogue. There is a secular way of coming near to the idea of Caritapolis.

What exactly does *caritas* mean? Charity, the unconditional love of God and humankind. Whereas English speakers usually try to make do with one word for love, the ancients and later sages distinguished among nine different loves. All are related. Each ascends, as it were, upward. All spring from *caritas*, God's own inner love.

The first, most general name for love, which points to a felt attraction or a pull, is *amor*: *Lamor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle*, "The love that moves the sun and all the stars," as Dante put it.

Then comes *affection*, as when one hugs a child or a spouse in a gesture of being moved by the sight of him or her.

Third is *eros*, the source of romantic love—that drive, sometimes almost like a madness, that tends to override all reflection and deliberation. This is almost entirely distinctive of the experience of the West. Since its demands are so romantic—"happily ever after"—and not down-to-earth, the happiest outcome of romantic love is often death, as in such classic Western tales of romance as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and many others.

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Fourth comes *philia*, the kind of love that expresses kinship or some similar closeness, as in *philadelphia*, the love of brothers; or *philosophy*, the love of wisdom; or *philanthropy*, the love of humankind. The root here is Greek, but it also appears in the Latin names for *filius* and *filia* (son and daughter) and the term *filial*.

Much stronger, fifth, is *dilectio*, in which you can see the root *electio*, to choose, as when by reflection and deliberation one selects one other to commit oneself to. One has a special love for one's family, but one does not choose it. *Dilectio* is one love for a lifetime, for your lover or your spouse. It is the love found in the Song of Songs.

Sixth comes the most central of all loves, *amicitia*, friendship, that happy love in which the one to whom you want to commit yourself also chooses commitment to you. This can be as spouses; or as best friends; or as a fellow soldier, one's "brother" for whom one is ready to die. If you have ever felt unrequited love—when you love another who does not have the same love for you—you know how sweet the free gift of friendship from another can be.

Seventh comes Fyodor Dostoevsky's central love, *humble charity*, all those smiles or gestures or small acts of kindness that show that one respects another's personhood and degree of goodness—a humble acting out of "peace on earth" and goodwill and outgoingness. Dostoevsky describes humble charity as throbbing like light along a translucent filament circling the earth, binding humankind together, warming all souls on earth. Inside this filament, he writes, it takes but 15 minutes for a kind deed in one humble place to circle the planet, intensifying as it were the luminosity of humble *caritas* in all places.

Eighth is *agape*, that deepest insight into the inner life of the Creator and Father, shown in the willingness of the Son to endure the insults, lashes, and grinding pain of carrying the cross and three hours nailed to that wood until He could no longer hold himself upright but collapsed downward to die of suffocation. Such self-emptying love is always for others, never for oneself.

And His demonstration of this love shows us that the essence of our existence, and the inner existence of God, is suffering love. Quite directly, the Lord tells us that we must also suffer—take up our cross,

follow Him, die to ourselves. This is how God made the world. To be like God, to be close to God, is to love even in suffering.

Thus, in showing us all this, God shows that He too plays by the same rules. He too submits through his Son to die the death of suffering love, surrounded by insults, held in contempt, scorned. In short, all this is God explaining to us, "My children this is what *caritas* is. You will all live through it. Embrace it. Let Me pass this *caritas* through you, continuing to show it to all humans, and to live now through you. If you will allow Me."

Now, this is where truly Christian social, political, and economic thought begin. In *caritas*, we are given a symbol and a moving narrative of what a civilization of love is, what the Caritapolis of the future is to be like: love for one another until death. It will be one human family of brothers and sisters, willing to give their lives for one another.

The world is very far from that place yet. Yet packed into this story are four important propositions. First, all human creatures form one family, each made in the image of God, each a *unique* image of God. Thus, "Go teach all nations" sends us far beyond boundaries of family, nation, language, race, or religion. It signifies a global, a universal, a catholic community (one that is worldwide, concrete, and visible, as well as in its deepest part invisible).

Second, this community is not yet realized. It is real in its fallenness and failures; it is concrete and can be seen with one's eyes. Yet there is also an inner war going on, in soul after soul in the invisible filament that girdles the earth, an intensely fought battle for the enduring commitment of each person to one another and thus to God. A battle between good and evil or, more exactly, between the living God and the not-god, between friendship with God and turning away from God. This battle in the inalienable freedom of each soul is the ground of the Christian idea of progress. This epic battle is unending. It gives history its shape and its meaning. It distinguishes progress from decline.

Third, God offers friendship, but it must be freely accepted or rejected. If friendship is to burn like a fire, freedom is its oxygen. As the Society of Friends puts it: "If friendship, then liberty." The

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Liberty Bell rings out that God does not want the coerced friendship of slaves. The deepest root of the idea of liberty lies here, in the freedom of free women and free men before God, as both James Madison and Thomas Jefferson grasped.³

Fourth, our Creator and Redeemer is a straight talker, not a deceiver. He does not promise us a rose garden; He promises us the cross. He sees that all the inner beauty of freedom and suffering love flares out only when we see the burnt-out ember, as Gerard Manley Hopkins described, “fall, gall itself, gash gold-vermillion.” Only in dying to their earlier life do all beauty, all bravery, all heroism, all true love “gash gold-vermillion.” That is the way the world was made.

Therefore, beware of merely romantic love, of false promises, of utopias. Keep your eye on the points of suffering at the heart of things. Watch for concrete results, not sweet talk. Caritas is a teacher of realism, not soft-headedness; of fact, not sentiment; of suffering love, not illusory bliss. To think in a utopian way is a sin against the full vision of Caritapolis.

In this spirit of realism, there is a bitter, stunning reality coming down on us today. Very soon now, in our own era, we will have to begin dealing in earnest with the fact that a small but significant portion of Muslims, who interpret Islam in an extremely violent way, are working with all their power to drive all other faiths from their own lands and, some boast, from the face of the earth. The vast majority of Muslims, it appears, are appalled at the violence of this small minority and contemptuous of the group's claim that it alone represents true Islam. Still, as these violent ones grow in international strength, those who do not want to be subdued by them will most likely have to go to war against them. These fierce antagonists appeal not to argument, but to raw power. They appeal not to life, but to death. They appeal not to natural rights, but to total submission.

We must realistically understand what we are soon and now facing. Caritapolis does not lift us into a pretty world of starry-eyed fantasy. It seems to strike every generation with an awakening blow, some horror of its own to subdue.

Obviously, most of the world is not Christian, not even Western, so a term like Caritapolis is not native to the major part of humankind.

More exactly, about one-third of the citizens of earth (just over two billion, and growing more rapidly than any other group) are now Christian, and the other two-thirds live under non-Christian paradigms and narratives. Therefore, even though we think that Caritapolis is the most fruitful paradigm for picturing the direction in which humanity will best thrive, we need to focus on intermediate steps that are less specific and more open to universal acceptance.

Four Milestones in the Direction of Caritapolis

To my mind, there are four intermediate steps toward Caritapolis that are of highest importance. At the moment, these four are not too far from universal esteem, at least among significant peoples in all lands. I call these the virtues on which future world progress hinges—that is, the four cardinal virtues [Latin, *cardo* = hinge] of moral ecology. These four virtues are *cultural humility*, *the regulative idea of truth*, *the dignity of the human person*, and *solidarity*.

Cultural Humility. By cultural humility, I mean a proper sense of one's own fallibility, past sins, limits, and characteristic faults. To see one's own faults and limits, and those of one's culture, is not necessarily to hold that all cultures are equal, or to embrace cultural relativism. It is consistent with holding all cultures to the same, or at least analogous, standards. Any nation, people, or culture lacking this humility before these standards will awaken enormous resentment—and resistance—from other cultures.

The Regulative Idea of Truth. If we do not agree that some things are true and others false, that some actions are just and others unjust, then we doom ourselves to relativism, or even worse, nihilism. By that door, the thugs, those willing to use the most awful violence, enter the nation, set the rules, concentrate all power in their own hands, and rule with ruthlessness. And if we do not agree that the difference between truth and falsehood, and between justice and injustice, is to be decided by evidence (not the desires of the thugs),

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then we have no protections against tyranny and torture.

Proponents of relativism in the West are, therefore, playing with fire, since regimes built solely on relativism, without any possibility of appealing to evidence and fair judgment, dwell under the wild desires of stark, naked power. In the kingdom of relativism, where truth no longer exists and only power matters, the thugs most willing to use brute power move into positions of leadership and drive the finer spirits, who are concerned about such niceties as evidence and argument, first into exile and eventually into prison. Against false imprisonment these cannot shout, "Injustice!" To this claim the thugs reply, "That's just your opinion." And one cannot say, "These charges are false!" There is no longer any such thing as "true" or "false." It is now power alone that speaks.

But why do we speak of truth as a "regulative ideal"? Because we need to emphasize that no one "possesses" the truth. We must each come closer and closer to approximating it, to getting it right and getting it clear, making necessary distinctions. And because we each work under rules that equally regulate all of us, we need rules of evidence and methods of determining those rules. To come closer to establishing these for all of us, we need one another. We need to converse and to argue, to refute false claims—often through the pain of undeniable experience.

That is why, in our era, vast human suffering often points to the truth by a *via negativa*: "This fiery cauldron cannot be the way to go. Try a better way." That is how both Nazi and communist claims were refuted—not by mere words, but by bitter experience. That is how the extreme violence and deliberate cruelty of the minority of Islamists within a more humane Islam are rapidly losing their moral standing as friends of humanity. See how rebellion against them builds.

No one culture possesses the truth. Each struggles to get closer to it. Civilized peoples do this by conversation and reasoned argument. Barbarian civilizations club others into submission. Sometimes justice demands that civilized peoples defend the rules of civilization and stop barbarians from clubbing the weak around them. And in this we must prevail. If we do not, the whole human race slides that much deeper back into barbarism.

The Dignity of the Human Person. More and more cultures (but not all) are recognizing that human beings are worthy of esteem and honor and are of primary importance. Through television and other media, individuals around the world are catching a glimpse of the higher standard of dignity under which other humans are living today. Increasingly they are demanding that a greater dignity be paid them, too, in their home countries. As Thomas Aquinas noted, the human person is the most beautiful creature in all creation, the one that most closely reflects the Creator. That is a major reason why, as Immanuel Kant insisted, human beings are to be treated as ends, not merely means. Today's realities have brought many of the oppressed of the world to a new "awakening" to that truth.

Solidarity. As human beings—and also whole cultures—mature, they see that they are not alone in the world. One cultural world impinges on another as never before, and the whole noosphere, as Teilhard de Chardin put it, the whole inner empire of human consciousness, becomes more interactive and seeks to drive humans upward, aspiring higher. What begins to emerge is a virtue of solidarity, the habit by which more and more individuals come to see that they share a world in common with many who are quite "other." But the aspirations of one part of the world begin to be known (and sometimes imitated) by other parts of the world. The rights and dignity achieved by human beings in some countries strike the hearts of many in other countries, who begin to confront their own political leaders and to insist on these rights for themselves.

In a sense, solidarity is the internal dimension of globalization. It is the change in minds and souls, and maybe even sympathies, induced by humans sharing concrete images of others that they had never before imagined.

Consider for a moment four economic definitions of globalization: a dramatic drop in transportation and communications costs; a single global interchange of ideas and goods connected by the Internet, satellites, cell phones, and television; a geometric increase in foreign direct investment; and international cross-border trade. Beyond these, and even deeper, the interior dimension of globalization is a

change in the way individuals experience themselves and the way they think about others. For example, some enterprising persons now think not only of supplying goods to their local markets, but also of how they can serve a global market. This is a new dimension of self-awareness. Along with this, the highly visible suffering and pain of people awakens sympathy in faraway places, and the glaring tortures and little tyrannies some local leaders practice raise resentment and resistance, rather than passive submission, which was often the response in the past.

These four cardinal virtues—cultural humility, the regulative idea of truth, the dignity of the human person, and solidarity—are compatible with Caritapolis but alone are not sufficient to fulfill all its aspirations. Even so, in secular terms they would, if taken, constitute great steps forward in the direction of human flourishing.

Conclusion

Similarly, we, in thinking of social justice, need to form a clear idea of what we would like the whole world to look like in 25 years, or 50, or 100. From the Creator's point of view, this is His world, and He intended that His Kingdom (the civilization of love) should come on earth as it is in heaven. While until the end of time we always live, as Reinhold Niebuhr taught us, in the realm of the "not yet," it still does help to think through a concrete vision of achievable worldwide steps toward the "city on a hill"—Caritapolis. We cannot promise ourselves success, but at least we see directions in which, however slowly, all cultures can move truly forward.

Notes

This essay is adapted from remarks delivered by Michael Novak at Acton University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 19, 2014. A version of this text is also available at the Witherspoon Institute's *Public Discourse*.

1. Michael Novak, *The Universal Hunger for Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 31.

2. The term was introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1970, in his Regina Coeli address for Pentecost.

3. For example, from James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments* (1785):

[W]e hold it for a fundamental and undeniable truth, "that religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable, because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds cannot follow the dictates of other men: It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society.

And from Thomas Jefferson's *Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* (1786):

Almighty God hath created the mind free; . . . all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and

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meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do.

About the Author

Michael Novak, a philosopher, theologian, and author, is a distinguished visiting professor at Ave Maria University. He served from 1978 to 2010 as the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute, and he received the 1994 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. In 1981–82 he served as US ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and in 1986 he led the US delegation to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Novak has written more than 40 books on the philosophy and theology of culture, focusing especially on the essential elements of a free society. His latest book is *Writing from Left to Right: My Journey from Liberal to Conservative* (Image, 2013).

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