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SHORT TAKE

Not Bold Enough

WHY DID BENEDICT PULL HIS PUNCHES?

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This summer witnessed the publication of *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI's long-awaited encyclical on economics. While much commentary has focused on the letter's implications for social policy, I want to emphasize the challenge it poses to the assumptions of the so-called dismal science. Against the skinflint orthodoxies of material scarcity and economic competition, Benedict hints at the conceptual foundations of a political economy of love. The finest parts of the encyclical affirm the rapturous plentitude of creation, and remind us that the human person partakes of God's largesse.

The encyclical's title, *Charity in Truth*, is simple but significant. Charity, Benedict argues, is inseparable from an account of the real world, without which it becomes "a pool of good sentiments": pleasant, but shallow and stagnant. If love is a mere sentiment in a hardscrabble world of privation, then it's easily written off as a virtue of the callow, of those saintly few who have never contended with deadlines, payrolls, and cost-cutting measures. But a charity that dwells in truth forms a formidable realism. And the truth, Benedict asserts, is that love leavens the very architecture of creation; that creation is a realm of abundance, and humanity the image and

