



40TH ANNIVERSARY OF POPE PAUL VI'S ENCYCLICAL ON THE DEVELOPMENT PEOPLES *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*

Speaking Notes of
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Pope Paul VI, Giovanni Battista Montini, was Pope for just over fifteen years, from June 1963 until June 1978. He wrote seven Encyclical Letters in all. This afternoon we commemorate one of these Letters, *Populorum Progressio*, written in March 1967, his only social encyclical. The social encyclicals are those which address, not just theological issues, but underlying social and political questions of the day.

Populorum Progressio was published at a particularly difficult moment. 1967 was the year of the Six Day War; it was at the height of the Vietnam War and the protest movement against the war. 1967 was marked by Cold War tensions, especially about the arms race and the race into space. It was the time of the great de-colonization process, as one by one colonies received their independence but were struggling to address effectively the needs of their peoples in the face of a complex international economic climate for which they were inadequately prepared. It was the challenge of addressing the needs of the poorest nations and their peoples which led the Pope to write his Encyclical.

The first thing that struck me, when I re-read *Populorum Progressio* in these past weeks, was its emotion. It is in the first place an appeal, a cry from the heart, a cry for mobilisation: "The hungry

nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance... and the Church... [they] ask each and every person to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly" (#3).

Pope Paul VI, who was in many ways the most cerebral of recent Pope's, could also surprise with the depth of his ability to identify with the emotion of the moment. It was this emotion which over these past forty years has inspired so many followers of the Gospel to become involved in the development of peoples. Anyone who has experience of the development world will have encountered the work of missionaries, women and men, lay and clerical, who have been inspired by *Populorum Progressio* to dedicate themselves to the service of their poorest brothers and sisters.

Paul VI was a master of Church politics. Most of his working life was spent within the walls of the Vatican. The archives of his work in the Vatican and of his papacy are among the largest ever generated. He was an intellectual and one familiar with modern literature as well as with the political analysis that would have crossed his desk in his many years in the Vatican Secretariat of State.

Populorum Progressio reveals well another side of Montini. It is a highly personalised Encyclical. He mentions his own travels and the impact that they had on his reflection. He writes about his travels as Archbishop of Milan to Africa and Latin America. I was always struck by the commemorative stone in the principle Roman Catholic Church in Soweto in South Africa noting that the Church had been blessed by Cardinal Montini. In *Populorum Progressio* he also makes special reference to the impact that his albeit short journey as Pope to India had made on him personally. He mentions the social conditions of Palestine which he had been able to see on the occasion of his historic pilgrimage to the Holy Places.

Populorum Progressio was a highly personalised Encyclical also because of the particular internal Church context in which it was written. It was the first social encyclical to be written after the Second Vatican Council, an event which had among its aims that of establishing a new way of looking at the relationship between the Church and the World. Paul VI from the very outset recalls that his Encyclical was to take up the message of the Council Document called *Gaudium et Spes*, precisely on the role of the Church in the modern world.

But *Populorum Progressio* is also inspired by the vision of *Lumen Gentium*, a more exclusively theological document, which presented the vision of the Church as a sign of the unity in Jesus Christ of all humankind. A Church which saw its role as fostering unity could not but raise its voice at the disunity and the continuing basic inequalities among humankind. The Encyclical is thus a call to global unity. "The social question draws all people together, in every part of the world", Pope Paul wrote. The social question had become global; the response requires a united mobilisation of the abilities of all. *Populorum Progressio* was not just an analysis of the social situation. It was a reflection which came out of the Church's self understanding.

To understand more fully the ecclesial context in which *Populorum Progressio* was written I would draw attention to three other factors.

With regard to the first, I suppose I should say that I have vested interests. It was the establishment, mentioned in the Encyclical, of the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", where I worked for over fifteen years. Pope Paul saw the Commission as a

further sign of the "Holy See's concern for the developing nations" (#5).

The Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* was the response of Paul VI to the explicit request of the Council Fathers of Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* (#90) to have in the Vatican an "organization of the universal Church whose task it would be to arouse the Catholic community to promote progress of areas which are in want and foster social justice between nations".

It is interesting that at the time there was strong pressure to institute a new office which would have had within its competence both the mission of the laity in the Church and the Church's work for justice and peace. It was Paul VI who stressed that working for justice and peace, whereas primarily the task of lay Christians is not exclusively so. That mission belongs to every member of the Church, bishops and clergy, religious and lay men and women, each according to his or her work or position in the Church.

In characteristic Montini style, Pope Paul opted to establish two separate offices, the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", but united under one President. This was to be the case for over ten years, when both organisms became totally separate.

Initially, Pope Paul established the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax" as a study commission. He chose however as its first Secretary an American priest, Mons. Joseph Gremillion, one whose talents was to reach out and to encourage the establishment of justice and peace commissions on a national and even local level. Many of these national commissions were later to play a vital role in their development of their countries, especially at periods of political

transition. I think especially of the national Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions during the transitional years in Chile and Zimbabwe.

The second aspect of the context in which *Populorum Progressio* was written was the inauguration of the *World Day of Peace*, which is celebrated by the Catholic Church each year on 1st January. Once again, the idea of the World Day of Peace was typical of Pope Paul VI. Montini deliberately chose a day, the first day of the calendar year, which was not necessarily a religious feast, but certainly was a natural moment when people of all persuasions were looking both backwards and forwards reflecting on the possibility of a better future. He saw the World Day of Peace as an occasion when the Church could use the message of the Gospel in a dialogical manner to address all people of goodwill, whatever their religious backgrounds. Over the years, the Messages of the Popes for the World Day of Peace have made significant contributions to the Church's teaching on international affairs.

The third event which belongs within the overall context of the genesis of *Populorum Progressio* and which is referred to on a number of occasions in the Encyclical itself was the visit of Pope Paul VI here to the United Nations in New York. After centuries in which Popes never left the Vatican, Pope John XXIII had gone on pilgrimage to Assisi and to Loreto in Italy to pray for the Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI was the first modern Pope to travel worldwide. His journeys were carefully chosen with a strong symbolic dimension. After a first striking visit to Jerusalem and the Holy places, he visited a Church event in each of the continents – India, Australia, Africa, and Latin America - and addressed there also the social challenges. He visited the headquarters of the World Council of Churches and he made a visit to the United Nations which he clearly saw as a sign of the times and a

point of hope for humanity, a focal point in the quest for a new vision of peace and development.

The striking leitmotiv of *Populorum Progressio* was "*development is the new name for peace*". It was a call rooted fundamentally in the biblical notion that peace is more than the absence of war.

The ecclesial context, then, in which *Populorum Progressio* was written, was one of a greater awareness of the Church's mission to be a sign of the unity of humankind and to be present as a leaven in international life through fostering the development of peoples and world peace.

Let us turn now to the world context in which the Encyclical was written. Earlier social encyclicals had focussed particularly on the situation of workers and especially on the theme of peace. *Populorum Progressio* addressed the challenging question about the relations between peoples and nations. The 1960's were marked especially by the end of colonialism. Pope Paul's judgment of colonialism is pragmatic. It is not totally negative, noting what had been done in the area of education, the fight against disease and the building of infrastructures. But his criticisms were also clear and indeed they identify some of the fundamental problems that developing countries still face as a fruit of the colonial legacy. He noted the "precarious imbalance in which economies were left and which paved the way for further troubles". He mentioned especially "the one crop economy which is at the mercy of sudden wide ranging fluctuations in market prices" (cf. #7).

At a time when more and more former colonies attained independence, Pope Paul stressed that "political freedom is not enough" (#6). He saw the need for investment in citizens and the

establishment of “social and economic structures and processes that accord with the dignity and nature of the human person”. In today’s language this would be seen as a call both for the fostering of social and economic rights and also for investment in human and social capital.

Populorum Progressio was written at a moment when ideologies of left and right were at their height. Pope Paul VI responds with a vision for the future that should lead beyond ideologies and power struggles towards the concept of what he calls *authentic development* (#14).

The concept of *authentic development* and is one of the key concepts of *Populorum Progressio*. It is a very simple one: authentic development “must foster the development of each person and of the whole person.” In authentic development economics are not to be separated from human realities, nor development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts is the person—each individual person, each human group, and humanity as a whole (cf. #15).

There is a sense in which the terms “development” and “progress” have always to be framed in the conditional. No model of development can be absolutized. Much of what was deemed progress in past decades is today seen as having had negative, at times disastrous, effects on people and on the environment. When I see in my own city what “developers” have done in building new suburbs without any social infrastructures, I do not see that as real development. Development and progress have to be measured and evaluated.

For *Populorum Progressio* the measuring stick is the human person. Development is person-centred, but it looks at the human

person in his or her integrity and within the communities in which he or she lives and in terms of humanity as a whole. The Encyclical is anthropocentric. Some would see in this a defect, indeed a defect they would say extends to Catholic Social Teaching as a whole. Catholic Social Teaching being anthropocentric, they would say, does not effectively address the question of the environment and ecology.

Certainly the environment is not a theme directly addressed in *Populorum Progressio* as it was, for example in the Encyclical of Pope John Paul *Centesimus Annus*. A vital teaching of *Centesimus Annus* is its criticism of the way in which: “humans think that they can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to their will, as though [nature] did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose which humankind can indeed develop but must not betray.”

The uniqueness of the human person is to be found in the ability to make rational decisions about the use of the world’s resources, in a responsible or irresponsible way. Catholic social teaching underlines the fact that humans must respect the “prior God-given purpose” which belongs to other elements in creation. In its vision of the relationship between people and creation *Populorum Progressio* always stresses that the whole of creation is ordered in the first place towards its creator and the rationality of humans is directed not to using nature in a thoughtless way but to a recognition of God’s plan and thus to the “prior God-given purpose” of nature.

The concept of authentic development also touches on the very nature of the human person and to the response we need to make to his or her needs. It is not possible to talk about human development without talking about spiritual development and the person’s relationship with God. The Church would not be true to its mission if

in the area of development it did not draw attention to this aspect of the identity of the human person.

Authentic development must be concerned about the development of the person in his or her integrity; that means not just their economic development. Catholic Social Teaching is an organic whole; it must be looked at in its integrity and it is dangerous to go cherry picking around one or other its dimensions. It would be wrong to separate social teaching from the Church's teaching on the human person, male and female; it would be wrong to limit social teaching to the merely social, political or economic. The fostering of the family is essential if we aim at a type of development that is truly rooted in the deepest reality of what it is to be a human person.

This integral vision of the person situated in a human and physical environment is linked with another fundamental concept of *Populorum Progressio*: the concept of *humanism*. The Pope speaks of a new humanism, a true humanism and a full-bodied humanism. I looked up the Italian which is presumably the original language of the Encyclical to see what "full-bodied" might mean and I found "umanesimo plenario", which does not help particularly. Full-bodied humanism is defined in relationship to what is called "narrow humanism", a humanism which the Encyclical defines as closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God. For Paul VI, a humanism closed off from God ends up being directed against humankind.

If we are concerned with the human person in his or her totality, then our activity in favour of humanity cannot somehow leave God aside. This is not a question of proselytism, which would be totally out of place. It is an attitude which is well described by Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*: "Often the deepest cause of suffering

is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love" (#32). In serving others, the Catholic will also be aware that he or she is witnessing to the love of God which responds to the deepest needs of human being.

Pope Benedict goes on: "We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern" (#31, a). This is authentic development of persons in their integrity.

This does not mean that Pope Paul does not take up some of the specific themes which development work should address. He notes especially the difficulties that the poorest countries have to encounter in terms of economy and trade. In particular he looks at the model of capitalism which was emerging at the time.

The title of one paragraph in the English language text of *Populorum Progressio* talks of "unbridled liberalism" (#26), while interestingly the other languages simply say: "liberal capitalism". The English translation does show some other peculiarities which reflect the writing style of the time: we would today hardly refer to intellectuals as "thoughtful men" and many of us would not think of journalists as "gentlemen of the press". I am not too sure who are the "artisans of destiny".

Let us come back to liberal capitalism. What the Pope refers to is a liberalism which "presents profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right,

having neither limits nor concomitant social obligations". One can only imagine how the exponents of liberal capitalism reacted to such expressions. Suffice it to say that these expressions belong to the specific literary genre of *Populorum Progressio*, a passionate appeal and a cry from the heart. A more detailed exposition of the Social Teaching of the Church on capitalism can be found in *Centesimus Annus*. Here again the thrust of Pope Paul's thought is that no economic model can be absolutized. Capitalism and a market economy have undoubted value, but they too must be written in the conditional.

Whereas the presentation of capitalism in *Centesimus Annus* is more detailed and nuanced, it places the same emphasis as *Populorum Progressio* and indeed *Gaudium et Spes* do on the question of the social responsibility which belongs to all private property. This is a teaching which goes back in an explicit form to the Fathers of the Church. *Populorum Progressio* quotes Saint Ambrose: "The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich". This derives from a principle of Catholic Social Teaching called by the complex term: the "universal destination of the goods of creation". It simply means that when God created the good things of the earth he created them fundamentally for the benefit of all. This principle which has been applied to themes like land reform, must today find its place in reflection on those common goods of our global world: the environment, water and above all to knowledge and intellectual property.

Much attention was devoted by *Populorum Progressio* to the question of inequities in the global trading system and to the fact that the less developed nations found themselves in a situation where they have nothing to sell except raw materials and agricultural produce. Pope Paul stresses forcefully that "free trade, by itself, is no longer adequate for regulating international agreements".

The world has changed since 1967 and the plight of the least developed countries has not improved much in the area of trade, although there is a new awareness of the importance that fair participation in world trade could bring immense benefit to poorer countries. On the other hand, some of the larger developing countries, at least in comparison with their neighbours, have become trading giants and major players on the world scene.

While the framework for a multilateral rules-based trading system, which gives preferential treatment to poor countries and assists in building their capacity to produce and to trade, is emerging, the deficiencies of the current system remain obvious.

The deficiencies are linked with the overall question of the power balance between economies and States in the world. This was addressed in another of the innovative concepts of *Populorum Progressio* was that of an *effective world authority*. The Pope called for “institutions that will promote, coordinate and direct [international collaboration among nations] until a new juridical order is firmly established and fully ratified” (#78).

The Pope does not enter more deeply into what this “effective world authority”. Pope John XXIII had spoken about a similar idea in order to resolve conflicts and prevent recourse to armed conflict. Pope Paul obviously saw that the establishment of a new juridical order above that based on national sovereignty would be a long process.

I have often said that our current family of nations is a dysfunctional family. We are still very far from having a truly effective world authority for the governance of global goods. The existing structures are often inadequate, politically weighted in one direction or the other, and at times they work against each other.

That is not in any way to disparage the work done by international organizations, whether within or outside the United Nations family. Were Pope Paul here with us today he would certainly be saying thanks to all those who have given themselves in the service of humanity within the UN system. He would surely also certainly be making remarks on the slow progress of UN reform. We need a well-functioning UN. Today's possibilities for inter-connectivity among peoples offer new and innovative ways of cooperation, also within the UN system.

On the other hand the concept of an effective world authority is being challenged by disregard for international norms where powerful nations – I deliberately chose the plural - place their trust in force. We must also note that the door for force is opened when humanitarian or diplomatic opportunities are not followed with vigour. The international political climate which inhibits the United Nations to address a number of the world's major humanitarian crisis is a source of frustration to so many.

In talking about responsibility for development and of international cooperation, the Encyclical stresses consistently the role of public authorities. This recalls today's debate about both good governance and the important role of politics.

In one paragraph of *Deus Caritas Est* which provoked much surprise, Pope Benedict notes "that the just ordering of society and the State is a primary responsibility of politics" and adds later that "the Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible". Some have seen this as somehow the recipe for the retreat of the Church from commenting on the public arena. I look on this as a remarkably strong emphasis on the importance of politics and on the real purpose of politics. Politics

is an essential dimension of the construction of society. We need around the world a new revival of politics. Around the world we need a new generation of politicians inspired by ideals, but also capable of taking the risks involved in transmitting those ideals into the “possible”, though the optimum use of resources and talents to foster the good of all.

Populorum Progressio addresses the coming together of peoples also in another important context: The term “dialogue between cultures” is explicitly used by the Encyclical (#72), anticipating Huntington and many others by decades. The aim of such dialogue should be to work towards “one universal civilization that spans the globe”. *Populorum Progressio* insists that development and respect for culture go together. Getting into detail, Pope Paul warns experts and foreign investors involved in development projects that “they are guests in a foreign land” and that they cannot impose just any form of development and technology but must recognise the historical conditions, the rich culture and the peculiar genius of each people.

Populorum Progressio addresses many other topics. It has salient things to say about migration and population movement. It talks about peace and disarmament and the waste of valuable resources caused by the recourse to arms and high military expenditure.

Certainly today it would be impossible to speak of international development without mention of HIV/AIDS, a tragedy which in 1967 could not have been foreseen, although Pope Paul noted the possible devastating effects of not addressing urgent health care infrastructures. Again, the 1967 Encyclical did not look explicitly at the specific development challenges faced by women.

After forty years it is clear that the inadequacies of any document will emerge with greater clarity. The forty years since the publication of *Populorum Progressio* have in no way reduced the urgency that was in the appeal of Pope Paul VI. That urgency still remains undiminished and it requires then as now a response from all.

In conclusion may I come back once again to the basic spirituality which inspires *Populorum Progressio* and indeed any Christian commitment to development. In *Deus Caritas Est* Pope Benedict highlights the need, in the face of activism and growing secularisation, for both a spirituality for social activism and for prayer. It is interesting to see throughout history that in addition to being very practical and courageous women and men the great Christian pioneers of social concern were in most cases also mystics. They were people the depths of whose understanding of the needs of others was rooted in an inner sensitivity which they drew from their prayer life.

It can easily slip our attention that Pope Paul chose to sign *Populorum Progressio*, his Encyclical on the Development of Peoples, on Easter Sunday, the Feast of the Resurrection, to stress just how his message was one of hope, of a hope which can only spring from a belief and an understanding of the message of Jesus, the one who gave himself so that all could have life and have it to the full.