

Re-living the Memories of Pope Paul VI and his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*

40th anniversary of the encyclical

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There is a story that goes about a priest walking into the ladies meeting at the church saying, "Hello ladies, who are you gossiping about this time?" "Why are you accusing us of gossiping?" asked one lady. "Men also gossip! Even priests gossip" "Oh nonsense", said the priest. "When men get together, we talk serious things like politics. And priests don't gossip about the latest celebrity film star on television". "Maybe not", said another lady, "but you do gossip about sports celebrities, and I have heard priests gossip about who is their favourite pope". Someone called out: "Yes, tell us Father, who is your favourite pope?" And they all waited to hear from him. Was it John XXIII? Or John Paul II? Or the present Pope? Or some Pope from the past.? They were surprised when he said "Pope Paul VI". "Him?" said one lady. "He's the one who wrote *Humanae Vitae*, isn't he. I don't like him. Why would you choose him?" "Well", said the priest, "He wrote famous documents like *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO* and *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*. Those documents moved the whole Church forward into new paths. That is why I like him so much".

The encyclical letter, *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, was signed by Pope Paul VI during the closing stages of the 2nd Vatican Council, on Easter Sunday in March 1967, forty years ago. It seems he deliberately chose to do it on Easter Sunday to emphasise the new idea that it contains, a kind of resurrection of the Church. That is what we are remembering today. The English translation of the title is *THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES*. In what direction should the church move to ensure that nations, and especially Third World nations, should develop and make progress? His answer can be often summed up under the two headings 'Justice & Peace' and 'Human Development'.

Paul had become Pope during the Council, in June 1963, and in the first five years of his pontificate he issued 7 documents officially called encyclical letters, of which *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO* was the fifth. The 7th and last one was *HUMANAE VITAE*, which the whole world heard about, probably because it was about sex, and people love hearing about sex. After *Humanae Vitae* Paul lived another 10 years, but entitled none of his further documents 'encyclical letters', possibly because the uproar that resulted from *Humanae Vitae* was too disturbing for him. Even *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI* and *OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS* which are popularly referred to as 'encyclicals' do not have that title on the Vatican website. I think it is very sad that some people remember Paul only for *Humanae Vitae*, because the encyclical we are looking at today, *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, will, I think, go down in history as a far more important document. This is because it moved the Church forward in new directions.

I am not going to give you a lot of quotes from the document; just a few. You can find other quotes up for yourself on the Internet. And I'm not going into all the detail about topics such as colonialism, social unrest, the use of private property, industrialisation,

the world of work, education, the role of the family, population growth, culture, the gap between rich and poor, free trade, and many other topics that are touched on in this encyclical in separate paragraphs. What I want to give you first is a bit of the church situation at the time which made this encyclical necessary, and then quite a bit of Pope Paul's philosophy and spirituality which underpins the encyclical. Finally I will go into some of the effects that it caused.

The Church Situation

The encyclical was part of a larger plan at that time, to promote justice and peace in this troubled world. Part of that plan was the establishment of a church Justice and Peace Commission, and it was set up in January 1967 just two months before the publication of the encyclical. I will read to you paragraph 5 of the encyclical. He wrote:

*“Recently, we sought to fulfil the wishes of the Council and to demonstrate the Holy See’s concern for the developing nations. To do this, we felt it was necessary to add another pontifical commission to the Church’s central administration. The purpose of this commission is “to awaken in the People of God full awareness of their mission today. In this way they can further the progress of poorer nations and international social justice, as well as help less developed nations to contribute to their own development.” (from the motu proprio establishing the commission).
The name of this commission, Justice and Peace, aptly describes its program and goal. We are sure that all people of good will will want to join our fellow Catholics and fellow Christians in carrying out this program. We earnestly urge all to pool their ideas and their activities for man’s complete development and the development of all mankind.”*

So this anniversary (40 years of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO) is not just the anniversary of the encyclical, it is also the 40th birthday of Justice and Peace. The Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission, and which is our local version of the pontifical commission, and which is hosting this gathering today, needs to be congratulated.

I want to emphasise that this encyclical was not just part of a plan, it expresses Pope Paul's personal philosophy and spirituality. It is a very personal document, and that is why I talk not just about the text of the encyclical, but also about Paul himself. I said at the beginning that this encyclical POPULORUM PROGRESSIO moved the whole Church forward on new paths. What were these new paths?

I am going to divide this part into four sections

- This encyclical opened the door for the Church to appreciate much more the philosophy of Humanism. Paul believed in a certain type of Humanism, and in doing so he revived the use of the word ‘Humanism’ in Vatican terminology.
- Secondly, POPULORUM PROGRESSIO got the Church to be interested in human development. Today there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of development agencies, large and small, in the Church, doing all kinds of remarkable work. The fact that these agencies exist is largely due to this encyclical.

- Thirdly, this encyclical introduced a new kind of Spirituality in the Church, commonly called “The Spirituality of Justice”. Pope Paul saw the need for Justice and Peace in the world, but to achieve this people have to develop an appropriate spirituality.
- Finally, a few words about the impact of the encyclical on the Church.

1. A new appreciation of ‘Humanism’ in Church circles.

I am going to deal with this section first because the way that POPULORUM PROGRESSIO is structured, like the way that the Pope approached Justice & Peace, the way he approached Development, and the way he approached world bodies like the United Nations, was guided by his philosophy of True Humanism. The words human and humanism are used 83 times in the encyclical.

Many people assume that the world can be divided in two, the sacred and the secular. My dictionary defines the word humanism as being “devotion to human interests, not divine interests”. A philosophy that accepts this, the separation of the human from the divine, would be called ‘Dualism’. The fact that Paul seemed to be in favour of Humanism come as a surprise to some people, since sections of the Church, especially in Italy, had been critical of Humanism for the previous 500 years, ever since the time of the Renaissance. Was he turning the Church away from God towards the direction of purely human interests? Of course he wasn’t, but we need to clarify what he was getting at. First I will just read paragraph 42 to you.

“The ultimate goal is a full-bodied humanism. And does this not mean the fulfilment of the whole man and of every man?”

“A narrow humanism, closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source, could achieve apparent success, for man can set about organising terrestrial realities without God. But, “closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man. A humanism closed off from other realities becomes inhuman.” (De Lubac – THE DRAMA OF ATHEISTIC HUMANISM).

True humanism points the way towards God and acknowledges the task to which we are called, the task that offers us the real meaning of human life. Man is not the ultimate measure of man. Man becomes truly man only by passing beyond himself. In the words of Pascal: “Man infinitely surpasses man”.

Now as I said, suspicion about Humanism arose in certain church circles at the time of the Renaissance, basically I think because three reasons.

Firstly, it affected theology, because this philosophy (Humanism) had brought into theology ideas expressed in classical Greek literature and philosophy, ideas that were thought to be pagan. Moreover, the theologians propagating humanism were departing from the traditional method of doing theology, rejecting the scholastic method¹, which had been used for several hundred

¹ The Scholastic method of doing theology meant discussing any kind of ‘disputed questions’ in a type of philosophical dialectic. Human needs, human aspirations, human feelings were seldom taken into account. Someone would propose a theological question for discussion, a question on which common agreement was lacking. All the pros and cons would then be raised and by using logical argument including analysis of the meanings of words, a synthesis would be found. The idea was that everyone could then agree and the matter would be settled.

years. By the time of the renaissance however, scholasticism had degenerated. Books were in circulation listing what were called 'sentences', namely short quotations from various authorities, listing the pros and cons of almost any theological dispute and giving the answers, and theology was becoming merely a study of these books. The most widely used one was entitled 'The Sentences of Peter Lombard', written 400 years previously.

The success of Humanism was that it had brought into theology other sources, other writings, not previously quoted in these scholastic books, sources including both extra scripture and the writing of the early church fathers, especially the Greek Fathers. And new theological questions were raised, questions not previously discussed, questions about humanity, and what it means to be human.

Clerics following this new way of doing theology included Martin Luther and the famous scholar of the Renaissance Desiderius Erasmus. This new way of doing theology then became common in the countries of Northern Europe, Germany, Holland and England, and what is called 'Christian Humanism' developed there. Also in Italy and Spain, theologians of the Religious Orders, such as Dominicans and Jesuits, who had been taught to follow the theological method of Thomas Aquinas rather than merely using the 'Sentences of Peter Lombard' were still open to doing serious theology, and were happy with the new developments. However, conservative traditionalists had their suspicions aroused. That is the first reason.

- Secondly, those countries of Northern Europe that I mentioned were also the countries of the Protestant Reformation. So some theologians, especially in Italy and Spain, found another reason for finding Humanism to be a threat to their way of life. Not only was it departing from traditional theology, but it also seemed to lead people away from Rome. We must accept that feelings were running very high at the time.
- Thirdly, moral theologians in particular were upset by the Renaissance in Art. In Italy, and especially in Florence, artists and sculptors, instead of creating religious scenes, suddenly began producing works glorifying the human body. This is where Humanism got its bad name for these moralists.

In Italy, this new form of art coincided with a time of moral decadence at the Vatican, a time building up to the Reformation, and there were a number of what we call 'bad popes', of whom Pope Alexander VI is the most notorious. So the conjunction of public immorality in the highest offices of the Church with the advent of Renaissance Art caused a tremendous reaction among pious clergy and faithful. Humanism was seen to be in opposition to Theism; belief in humanity instead of belief in God.

A big reaction against this more 'secular' humanism came from the Dominicans in Florence, under the leadership of Savonarola. He encouraged people to burn all this new art, to hold actual bonfires on which paintings were burned, and he also called for Pope Alexander VI to be deposed.

Ever since then, certain Christians have been critical of the philosophy of humanism. Their views were re-enforced by further developments in humanistic philosophy in

France at the time of the French Revolution, in Eastern Europe with the rise of the atheistic form of communism, and in Western Europe with the move towards secular societies. So when Paul VI in POPULORUM PROGRESSIO talks of humanism we have to see what he means. I am going to look into

1. What humanism means today, and
2. Who the people were who influenced Paul VI to favour a certain understanding of humanism. I am going to mention in particular the French philosopher Jacques Maritain.

First: What humanism means today. There are an awful number of terms in use. Some of them are:

- Secular Humanism
- Christian Humanism
- Humanistic Buddhism
- Humanistic Judaism
- Integral Humanism
- Posthumanism
- Neo-Humanism
- Incarnational Humanism
- Marxist Humanism
- Renaissance Humanism.

To these we must add African Humanism, usually known as ‘Ubuntu’.

Don’t worry; I am not going to explain all those terms. I want to focus on the term used by Pope Paul VI in POPULARUM PROGRESSIO. He called it ‘true humanism’ or ‘integral humanism’ depending on which English translation you are reading.

He, Paul, inherited this term from the French philosopher Jacques Maritain. What we should notice in POPULORUM PROGRESSIO is that the word ‘humanism’ is preceded by an adjective. He is talking about a particular type of humanism.

An article in TIME magazine in 1967 when POPULORUM PROGRESSIO was published had this to say:

“Traditionally, papal encyclicals cite only writings from the past: scripture, previous encyclicals, the declarations of church scholars and saints. One of the novelties of Pope Paul’s recent Populorum Progressio is that it is studded with references to contemporary works and living thinkers. To students of Paul, it came as no surprise that his ardent defence of a “true humanism” cited as a source the writings of French philosopher Jacques Maritain. “I am a disciple of Maritain,” the Pope once said. “I call him my teacher.”

“During Italy’s Fascist regime, (the Pope, then known as) Msgr. Montini was the unofficial leader of a liberal Catholic faction that used Maritain’s concepts, newly codified in his 1936 work TRUE HUMANISM, to carry on an intellectual movement against totalitarianism. After World War II, when Maritain served as French Ambassador to the Holy See, and Montini was one of the top officials of the Vatican Secretariat of State, the two saw each other on an average of once a week, frequently dined together. And at the close of the Second Vatican Council, the new Pope honoured Maritain by addressing a message to intellectuals and scientists through him, and publicly embracing the philosopher in St. Peter’s Square.”

Maritain, before coming to Italy from France, had been in close and frequent contact during the 1930's with a number of personalist philosophers². From all these contacts and discussion, Maritain wrote his books including the one entitled TRUE HUMANISM. It is from Maritain that Pope Paul derived the term.³

Now I am going to move on to the main theme of the encyclical, which is human development.

2. This encyclical caused the Church to be interested in Human Development

Development was much discussed in the 1960's at the time of Pope Paul VI, especially in the United Nations and related organisations like the World Bank. The years from 1960 to 1980 were called 'The Decades of Development'. Development was seen primarily as an economic issue, to be the business of economists.

This was also the time of the rise of the economic philosophy of neo-liberalism, which promoted ideas such as free trade and belief in market forces. The idea was, if we put it simply, that if money could be ploughed into Third World countries, trade would increase, and everyone would benefit. Even some of the benefits would 'trickle down' to the poor. Development could be measured in terms of the increase in gross national product. I am sure you recognize this, because we still hear it all the time on TV, and we read it all the time in the newspapers.

This was not Pope Paul's idea of development.

May I remind you of the old joke – how many economists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is none, because if the light bulb really needed changing market forces would have caused it to happen!

Paul definitely wanted change, not to change the light bulb, but to change the world; to get rid of the poverty and the violence that was prevalent in so many countries. And he felt it could not be left just to economists. With his philosophy of true humanism, he wanted human development. This could include economic development, but it is something very much bigger.

When talking about humanism, Pope Paul had found it necessary to add an adjective, so it became 'true' humanism or 'integral' humanism. He did exactly the same thing with the word development, adding the adjective 'authentic'. POPULORUM PROGRESSIO is about 'Authentic Development'.

² Personalist philosophy places persons and personal relationships at the centre of its theory, and in this way differs from both liberal capitalism and materialistic communism. The personalist philosophers with whom Maritain had contact included Emmanuel Mounier, Nicholas Berdyaev, Jacques Ellul and Jean Danielou (who later became Cardinal Danielou). Some of them used to meet monthly in Maritain's house for philosophical discussions. (Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement* p. 102). This group was in turn influenced by other philosophers such as Leon Bloy, Charles Peguy, Paul Claudel and Georges Bernanos (p.101). Regarding these last four, it has been written: "*If there is today a new Christian humanism, we owe it to them*". (Mounier, *Be Not Afraid*, introduction by Leslie Paul, quoted in Zwick p.101).

³ (If you are interested in taking this point further, there are two English translations in academic libraries of Maritain's book on Humanism. The first translation, by Adamson, published in 1938, is entitled *True Humanism*. The second, by Evans, published in 1968, is entitled *Integral Humanism*. Pope Paul of course would have studied it in the original French.)

There was already some opposition in certain church circles to the kind of development that was beginning to take place. In South America, questions were being raised by priests who would soon be called proponents of Liberation Theology about the motives for North American investment in the economic development of South American countries. I want to read to you a quote from an article written by the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum. He said:

“At first, the Christian churches were ill at ease with the new idea of development. They had heard the protests of Christian and non-Christian groups in the poorer parts of the world, denouncing the aggressive modernization of their regions. I will mention but two of their objections.

“One is from Latin American liberation theology. The theologians of this school, in dialogue with political economists, recognized that the industrialization of the South by Northern capital created patterns of dependency that prevented the countries of the South from creating their own future in accordance with their own culture. If industrialization was supported by northern capital, they argued, it would be guided by the North; it would produce goods for export to sell at high prices on the world market, not goods needed by the local population; it would use sophisticated technologies, not those appropriate to the skills of the people; it would exploit the simple workers, paying them in accordance with the law of supply and demand.

“More than that, these Christians opposed the globalization of Western culture, with its competitive spirit, ideals of personal autonomy, unrelenting work ethic, and impatience with celebration and contemplation. Liberation theologians replaced the notion of “development” with the concept of “liberation” (Gutierrez 1973). They advocated the creation of a regional low-scale economy, based to a large extent on local resources, relying mainly on local skills, and serving, for the most part, the needs of the local population”. (From the book THE LAB, THE TEMPLE AND THE MARKET, ed. by Sharon Harper, published by IDRC in Canada, 2000).

Gregory Baum then goes on to speak of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO and Pope Paul. He claimed that Paul was well aware of the debate regarding development that was going on in South America and elsewhere. Moreover Paul felt that it was right and necessary that wealthy nations contribute financially to the development of poorer nations. So Paul wanted to issue a document that would take account of the objections of liberation theologians but at the same time keep the development aid running.

It is no wonder then that Paul turned to someone who already had made a study of human development. This was a French Dominican priest, Louis-Joseph Lebret, the founder of the Institute of Economy and Humanism. Paul appointed Lebret to be his economic advisor, and gave him a huge hand when preparing the text of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO. I will read to you paragraph 14 of the encyclical:

“The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man. As an eminent specialist on this question has rightly said: “We cannot allow economics to be separated from human realities, nor development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts for us is man – each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole.” (Lebret: Dynamique concrete du developpement, Paris, Edition Ouvrieres, 1961).

The eminent specialist that the Pope was referring to in that paragraph was Lebret.

I think that a bit about Lebret will help us to understand the encyclical. During the depression years of the late 1920's, Lebret was based in a fishing village in the north-west of France, and discovered that the big fishing companies had succeeded in forcing the small fishermen out of business. With their financial resources, big companies had developed modern fishing methods and had gained control of the fishing grounds. Lebret spent hours talking to wives and children of fishermen, visiting them in their homes, to find out the effects of this development on ordinary people. He then extended his investigation to cover the entire coastline of Europe, from the Baltic to the Mediterranean.

Lebret was not against economic development, but he saw that it had to be accompanied by other forms of development, to the benefit of those who were losing their livelihoods. He gave the model of a spiral staircase, which goes round and round. Before one step is directly and vertically above another step, there are a whole number of steps going round in a circle, not directly above each other, and covering "*all spheres of life – economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual*". (Goulet, *A New Discipline: Development Ethics*, Working Paper no.231, Kellogg Institute, Notre Dame, p.9). These other development steps have to be there, if human beings are not to suffer. From this idea, Lebret established his Institute for Economy and Humanism. It drew together experts in many fields, not just theologians and economists, but also sociologists, psychologists, educators and so on.

Lebret extended his studies to include what was happening in Brazil, in Vietnam, and in West Africa in the country of Senegal. The famous Brazilian Archbishop Dom Helder Camara took Lebret with him to the 2nd Vatican Council to be one of his advisers, a 'peritus' and it was after this that he cooperated with the Pope in the writing of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO.

What is said in the encyclical is very different from the World Bank's concept of development. At this stage in world history, the World Bank had existed already for twenty years, and was seen by many to be the arbiter of development all over the world. What Paul VI had in mind was something different from what the World Bank was doing, although he supported it. It was not just any kind of development that he was proposing, but a particular type of development, 'human development'. In the encyclical, the word 'development' occurs 50 times, and the word 'human' 71 times.

It is the type of development that is described in the encyclical that has motivated so many church development agencies.

Earlier this year I attended the World Forum of Theology and Liberation which preceded the World Social Forum in Nairobi. There I attended a seminar run by the English Catholic funding agency entitled The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, CAFOD. CAFOD, by the way, has helped financially many projects in South Africa. What I learnt at this seminar in Nairobi was that CAFOD bases its work throughout the underdeveloped world totally on the encyclical that we are talking about today. I had not previously realised that. Presumably all the other big Catholic funding agencies would say something similar.

Father Peter Henriot, a Jesuit who lives in Zambia and is a prominent worker for Justice and Peace in Africa gave a talk on POPULORUM PROGRESSIO to an assembly of European Catholic funding agencies last year in the Netherlands. At the

end of his talk he spoke about the implications of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO for the Church today, and I would like now to share with you one of these implications. He spoke of the distinction that some funding agencies often made between two kinds of development work namely “*the more ‘sacred’ missionary ministries (sacramental preparation, building of churches for example), and more ‘secular’ development ministries (health care, agricultural training, for example).*” He then went on to say:

*“It seems to me that the strong emphasis that POPULORUM PROGRESSIO puts on a Gospel-based foundation for development work makes the distinction a bit strained and should be our challenge and our guide. One example: there is a call (in paragraph 81 of the encyclical) for lay people to strive resolutely to permeate the ‘mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live’ with the spirit of the Gospel. I believe (says Henriot) that this relates directly to the much needed **spirituality of justice** that we talk about these days.*

So I now want to say a few words about this phrase ‘A spirituality of Justice’.

3. The encyclical started a new kind of Spirituality in the Church, a Spirituality of Justice.

Several commentators have pointed out that this encyclical started a new kind of spirituality in the Church, a spirituality of Justice. Now this may seem odd, because you will not find the word ‘spirituality’ in the document. It doesn’t come up even once. Nevertheless, it is imbued with a very obvious spiritual dimension.

When it discusses the signs of the times we live in, it calls on us to interpret these signs in the light of the Gospel (§13). Paul was concerned about the commonly accepted division between spirituality on the one hand, and action to change the world on the other. When he spoke of prayer, he said:

“The prayer of all ought to rise with fervour to the Almighty. Having become aware of such great misfortunes, the human race will apply itself with intelligence and steadfastness to abolish them. This prayer should be matched by the resolute commitment of all individuals – according to the measure of their strength and possibilities – to the struggle against underdevelopment”. (§75)

And in his conclusion, he said:

“To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all people, and therefore the common good of humanity”. (§76)

This is a task, the Pope declared, especially for the laity. He said:

“It belongs to the laity, without passively waiting for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live. Changes are necessary, basic reforms are indispensable: the laity should strive resolutely to permeate them with the spirit of the Gospel”. (§81)

This phrase – “*the spirit of the Gospel*”, or its equivalent “*the light of the Gospel*” – comes up a number of times in the encyclical. He mentions previous Popes by name “*who did not fail in their duty of shedding the light of the Gospel on the social questions of their times*” (§2).

He praises missionaries, who “*have built not only churches, but also hostels and hospitals, schools and universities*” (§12)

I would like to comment on this, in the light of my own experience of the Church in South Africa today, in the light of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO. I am distressed that in the average parish that I have encountered, and I have worked all over the country, you may find 500 – 1000 people at Mass on Sunday, you may find 20 – 50 people singing in the choir, you may find 10 – 30 people in a parish council, but when it comes to what Pope Paul VI spoke of, consciously bringing the spirit of the Gospel into the world outside of the Church, you may only find a handful of dedicated people. This is actually scandalous.

My own analysis of why this is, is that the missionaries coming to South Africa over the last century and a half, had a job of building up the local church. They did this very well. However, as foreigners they could not see themselves entering into local disputes about justice and injustice. While they certainly observed the signs of the times, such as the materialistic values caused by the discovery of gold and diamonds in our country, while they certainly deplored the migrant labour system and the breakdown of family life, while most of them could not be accused of propagating racism, etc., they did not feel confident to challenge what was going on. So we have inherited a church with a culture of staying in the background when it comes to such matters.

We are no longer in a missionary church. This encyclical challenges us. It points out:

“We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us to enlarge the human family. The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty.” (§17)

All this is I think, what is meant by a Spirituality of Justice.

4. The impact of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO on the Church.

To end off, I wish to say a few more words about the impact of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO on the Church.

I have already pointed out four things

- A new appreciation of the philosophy of humanism
- The fact that it was pointing the Church in new directions

- The growth of agencies in the Church to fund human development
- The development of a new type of spirituality, a spirituality of Justice.

Now I want to add one more important impact, namely the growth of a new type of Theology.

This happened initially in Central and South America.

The year after POPULORUM PROGRESSIO was signed by Pope Paul VI, the bishops of South America held a plenary conference in Columbia, originally to review the progress that was being made in the implementation of the resolutions of the 2nd Vatican Council. It was held in a small town which has since become famous – the town of Medellin. What happened at this conference was that the Bishops, and soon the whole Church in South American countries, including lay people and even the poor, entered into a process which was described as “doing theology”.

I don't think this had ever happened before. Theology had always been in the hands of clergy and professional theologians, people with academic degrees. Now, however, everyone could join in and credit for this has been given to POPULORUM PROGRESSIO. This was seen to be part of ‘human development’. One of the emphases in the encyclical had been on the development in all directions of poor and marginalized people, and now thousands of them joined in discussing the Gospel, and how it related to their daily lives. They did this in small groups in slums and shanty towns and rural settlements all over South America, looking both at scripture, and how their reality of poverty and voicelessness could be clearly seen to be contrary to the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. Indeed Jesus drew crowds of thousands, people very much like themselves.

These little groups, meeting regularly, became known as ‘Christian Communities of the Base’, where the word ‘base’ meant ‘the bottom of society’, those people of no-account. They began calling themselves ‘The Church of the Poor’, a phrase that already been used in the Bishops’ meeting at Medellin. And the kind of theology they were doing became known as ‘Liberation Theology’.

This revival of the Church at grassroots level soon spread to the rest of the world, and it was no longer the prerogative of the poor. Other people, less marginalized, including the middle class, also wished to relate the reality of their lives to the Gospel. So instead of calling themselves Christian Communities of the Base’, they coined the phrase ‘Basic Christian Communities’, or, as in South Africa, ‘Small Christian Communities’. And instead of the words ‘Liberation Theology’, which of course referred to the liberation of the poor and oppressed, a new phrase crept in: ‘Contextual Theology’. And because these other Catholics were not necessarily ‘the poor’, after about 10 years the phrase ‘Church of the poor’, developed into a new phrase: ‘Church with an **option for** the poor’. The Church doesn't only consist of poor people, but all Catholics, whether rich or poor or somewhere in between, should take an option to be on the side of the poor in development matters.

Conclusion

At the start of this talk I told you a story of a priest who had Paul VI as his favourite Pope. Perhaps you can now see why he is also my favourite Pope. This 40th anniversary of POPULORUM PROGRESSIO has been celebrated all over the world. Hopefully these commemorations will lead to further growth of Justice and Peace

Commissions, and that the push towards more humanity in both Church and world will continue.

Thank you.