

***POPULORUM PROGRESSIO:*
CHALLENGE AND GUIDANCE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY**

by

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Is it possible – indeed, is it desirable – to get very *excited* about a papal document written some four decades ago? A document coming from a world in many ways so very different from today, a pre-internet world and a pre-9/11 world, a world divided into communist and capitalist camps, and a world untouched by the 25-year influence of John Paul II, the Catholic Church's most influential leader in the 20th Century.

That is a question I repeatedly asked myself in preparing the presentation I put forward to you this morning, a reflection on the challenge and guidance offered to Church by Paul VI's 1967 social encyclical, *Populorum Progressio (The Progress of Peoples)*. Because, to be very honest, I personally was genuinely *excited* to revisit *Populorum Progressio (PP)*, to study again its description of a people-centred development, to discover insights I had earlier overlooked, and to evaluate its relevance to my own work in the African country where I've lived for the past 17 years.

I hope that I have not become so excited – enthused, energised, encouraged – by the text of PP that I am distracted from the task given to me through the kind invitation of CIDSE: to discuss what the document can mean today in the efforts of the church to advocate for global justice. Indeed, what is its current relevance to CIDSE, a group of development agencies sponsored by the Catholic Church that claims strong historical links to PP? What I propose to do here – admittedly, in an effort to excite you! – is to look briefly at five aspects of the document and then to draw some conclusions about the challenge and guidance it continues to put before all of us today, especially the challenge to you leaders of CIDSE.

APOSTOLIC AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Before outlining the five aspects of the document that I consider particularly relevant, let me say a word about where I am coming from, apostolically and intellectually, for this certainly influences why PP excites me and it focuses what I want to share with you. *Apostolically*, I come from Zambia, one of the richest counties in Africa, with some of the poorest people in the world. Addressing that unacceptable dichotomy drives my work in what we describe as a “faith based organisation” (FBO), the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), a central player in the church's promotion of faith and justice and a cooperating partner of many of the organisations represented in front of me this morning. Inspired by the social teaching of the church and motivated by the people we try to serve each day, the JCTR engages in research, education and advocacy to advance, quoting our vision statement, “a society where faith promotes justice for all in all spheres of life, especially for the poor.”¹

Intellectually, I am currently influenced in my work by the writings of several prominent development analysts. Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize 1998) in *Development as Freedom*, explains development measurement in terms of “human capabilities.” This focuses not on the primacy of income and wealth but on meaningful human life, creative possibilities and substantive freedom. Joseph Stiglitz (Nobel Prize 2001) in *Globalisation and Its Discontents*, offers a sharp critique of the “market fundamentalism” that guides so many economic programmes that lack that a people-centred orientation. Jeffrey Sachs in *The End of Poverty* speaks of the real possibility of eradicating poverty in our world if we put people first. Kofi Annan in *In Larger Freedom* calls for a moral conversion that would enable the people-centred Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015.²

I mention these authors because I believe that if PP were to be rewritten today, its author would be citing their insights and their recommendations. I can say that because it is a specifically unique and laudable contribution of Paul VI to the tradition of the church's social teaching (CST) that in his encyclical he readily cites a wide range of economic and ethical writers on development, for example, L.-J. Lebret, Colin Clark, O.V. Nell-Bruening, Jacques Maritain, M.-D. Chenu, H. de Lubac, etc. (Sadly, I might add, Paul's good example has not always been followed in CST documents!)

IMPORTANT ASPECTS

I want now to describe the challenge and guidance of PP by noting five important aspects of its message: it is a *futuristic* document, a *contemporary* document, a *dated* document, a *radical* document, and an *optimistic* document.

Futuristic

To say that PP is a futuristic document is to acknowledge that in many ways it was far ahead of its time. Let me mention two strong indications of this. *First*, Paul VI's simple definition of *authentic development* is "for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human" (#20). This definition pre-dated the "human development index" of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).³ This strongly influential index of the UNDP is today the standard measurement of what is really happening to *people*, in contrast to what is happening to the *economy*.

PP sums up the aspirations of women and men, especially those who live now in misery, as "to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more" (#6). For PP, development is much more than economic growth: "In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person" (#14). For PP, development is people-centred or it is not desirable, indeed it is dangerous. From my own experience of living in a country that recently underwent the most *rapid*, most *rigid* and most *radical* structural adjustment programme (SAP) in Africa, I can see what a non-people-centred development approach means in the lives of ordinary women and men marginalised through economic plans which were completely acceptable to influential global agents such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Second, PP anticipates much of the discussion around *solidarity* that would follow in the writings of John Paul II. Paul VI writes: "There is no progress toward the complete development of women and men without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity" (#43). Solidarity moves us beyond the *empirical* reality of economic interdependence to the *ethical* reality of human interconnectedness. Put simply, it means that those in rich countries are woefully underdeveloped as human beings as long as they live in a world where so many of their sisters and brothers struggle to survive in poor countries with unacceptable human conditions. According to Paul VI, *avarice* – the exclusive pursuit of possessions – is for nations and individual persons "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment" (#19). For this reason, Paul could strongly assert: "The world is sick" (#66) – a sickness shown in a lack of sisterhood and brotherhood among individuals and peoples. Today, solidarity has become a common word if not a common reality. We have PP to thank for putting forward this challenge and this guidance to global justice.

Contemporary

PP is a contemporary document in the sense that it addresses issues on the top of the agenda today. Take *globalisation* as an example. Though that much-overused word is not in fact used in the document, its meaning and impact are clearly elaborated. From his tracing of the consequences of colonial ties of the past to the trade connections of today, Paul sees a global reality that cries out for justice.⁴ Thus he can state bluntly: “Today the principal fact that we must all recognise is that the social question has become world-wide” (#3). He prepares the ground for John Paul II’s repeated ethical calls for a “globalisation in solidarity, a globalisation without marginalisation.”⁵

Just how contemporary the message of PP is can also be seen if its sections on *trade* (#s 56-61) are read alongside reports of debates and decisions coming from the Hong Kong meeting last month of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The inherited patterns of injustice in trading relationships, the unreality of “free trade” regimes among nations of excessive inequalities of economic power, the unfairness of agricultural subsidies in rich countries, the need to go beyond mere market considerations if poor countries are to move forward: these and many other points are clearly made in a document that gives backing to the demands of those countries that pushed hard for a true development focus in any trade arrangements. “Freedom of trade is fair,” Paul states bluntly, “only if it subject to the demands of social justice” (#59). Protests outside on the streets of Seattle and Washington DC and inside in the corridors of Cancun and Hong Kong have echoed that blunt statement in so many ways!

A third contemporary note in PP is its emphasis on the centrality of *cultural* considerations in understanding and promoting truly integral development. Paul sees a conflict between the “traditional civilisations” – formed of ancestral institutions and convictions – and the new elements of “industrial civilisation” that would reject all the human richness inherited from the past (#10). He cautions against a developing country’s sacrificing the best of its patrimony of its earlier civilisation (#40) by accepting “deceptive goods which would only bring about a lowering of the human ideal” (#41). He is particularly aware of youth who lose esteem for the traditional values of their homelands. I cannot read this without being called to reflect on the consequences of a new “cultural imperialism” – westernisation, indeed, Americanisation – imposed by the links of global commerce and communications that daily invade Zambia.⁶ Surely in advocating for global justice today, the church cannot ignore these cultural concerns.

Dated

As futuristic and contemporary as may be the message of PP, it still must be characterised as dated. By speaking of this aspect, I mean that its message is devoid of many of the most pressing challenges of today. Were Paul write his encyclical today, especially if he were to rely on the development experts of today such as those I mentioned at the outset of my presentation, he surely would have to address the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, environment, global migration, and information technology, and the “new movements” – e.g., those rallying around the World Social Forum. And his very carefully nuanced discussion of violence (#s 30-31)—something that sparked great controversy! -- would have to take into consideration the new global realities following the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers of New York. Our world of today faces not only the terrorism of organised resistance to Western influences but also the terrorism of organised response to that resistance – one need only reflect on the illegal and disastrous war on Iraq! Paul’s creative expression, “Peace is the new name for development” (#87), would have to be qualified, re-focused, for

today's world of the challenge to peace presented by non-state actors frustrated by poverty that is both material and spiritual.

To return for a moment to the issue of gender. From our perspective of today, it is inconceivable that a document on development could be written without any discussion of gender differences in contributions and in benefits. But PP was very much a product of its time – women and development were topics very little connected in the 1960's -- and also a product of its location – women's role has systematically (and sadly!) been marginalised in both thought and structure within our church. To be honest, we still have a long ways to go before a phrase like “promote the good of every man and of the whole man” will be rendered both with more inclusive language – every person and the whole person -- and implemented with more gender-sensitive programmes. That is surely on the agenda for advocacy for global *ecclesial* justice today!

Radical

I can say with all sincerity and honesty, PP is a radical document, indeed, it might be considered the most radical document of the body of the church's social teaching. I say “radical” in the sense of its analysis and in the range of its recommendations. It is important to recall that it was written at the end of the era of colonialism – for example, it appeared less than three years after Zambia achieved its independence from British rule. While speaking of some benefits of colonialism, the document is still honest in acknowledging that “the colonising powers have furthered their own interests, power or glory...” (#7) Paul is aware that to overcome the major problems of the colonial legacy would require some major commitments to change. Otherwise, we face the danger of what he called a “neo-colonialism, in the form of political pressures and economic suzerainty aimed at maintaining or acquiring complete dominance” (#52). We need to hear that warning today when we face the realities of globalisation.

Urgency is a mark of the document's radical character, as Paul issues a clarion call such as:

We want to be clearly understood: the present situation must be faced with courage and the injustices linked with it must be fought against and overcome. Development demands bold transformations, innovations that go deep. Urgent reforms should be undertaken without delay (#32).

Again, in condemning wasteful expenditures, for example, through spending on national or personal ostentation or on the arms race, Paul voices his urgency with the plea “Would that those in authority listened to our plea before it is too late” (#53).

Paul has no sympathy with the neo-liberal solutions to the development crisis that he sees the world experiencing more seriously every day. His radical voice is heard in his reflections on industrialisation when he condemns a system that “considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligation” (#26). He goes further to remind us that “This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing ‘the international imperialism of money’” (#26). He returns to questioning a “fundamental principle of liberalism, as the rule for commercial exchange,” in challenging prices set in free trade markets that produce unfair results (#58). (Think again of the WTO negotiations.)

One of PP's most radical teachings earned the document real trouble in some countries, such as its purported banning by the military dictatorship in Brazil. These were the teachings

regarding private property (#23). Here Paul applied the message about the social responsibilities of owners of land and the duty of the government to promote the common good to establish grounds for the justification of the expropriation of landed estates that “are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardships to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country” and the wider common good (#24). I could not but help recall this teaching when reflecting on the *start* of the process of land reform in Zimbabwe (a process which, admittedly, has gone somewhat astray in terms of overall social justice) and the challenge to future and inevitable land reform in countries such as South Africa, Namibia and, possibly, Zambia.

A concluding remark about PP’s radical character would draw attention to Paul’s insistence that charity alone will not meet the challenges of development but only a thorough-going commitment to justice. By citing Ambrose’s critical remark that gifts to the poor are only restoration of what has been stolen from them (#23), the document clearly opens the way to the profound insights of liberation theology, a theology that would significantly influence subsequent social teaching such as *Justice in the World* from the Bishops’ Synod of 1971.⁷

To be honest, there has been some critique of PP as fostering the “developmentalism” challenged by more radical social analysts in the late 1960s and early 1970s who espoused the “theory of dependency.”⁸ However, I do not believe that such a critique is altogether fair, considering the stronger structural analysis provided by PP, for example, in the critiques of liberalism and in the treatment of international trade, issues I have discussed earlier.

Optimistic

A final important aspect to note about PP is its optimism, its confidence that, for all its problems, the world is on the course of coming closer to the Creator and the Creators’ good plans. In a striking image of progress, the document states: “Humanity is advancing along the path of history like the waves of a rising tide encroaching gradually on the shore” (#17). (I am reminded of the imagery of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.) Paul sees the international cooperation of groups like the United Nations as a response to the vocation “to bring not some people but all peoples to treat each other as sisters and brothers” (#78). For those who would see such a hope as purely *utopian*, he makes a direct challenge: “It may be that these persons are not realistic enough, and that they have not perceived the dynamism of a world which desires to live more fraternally – a world which, in spite of its ignorance, its mistakes and even its sins, its relapse into barbarism and its wanderings far from the road of salvation, is, even unawares, taking slow but sure steps towards its Creator” (#79).

This expression of optimism by Paul VI – someone often seen as a melancholic figure – is found not only in PP but also in subsequent writings. For example, he returns to the theme of a *dynamism* in a world somehow moving toward greater justice when he writes in his 1971 *Octogesima Adveniens (Call to Action)* about a “hope that springs also from the fact that the Christian knows that other women and men are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends. For beneath an outward appearance of indifference, in the heart of every person there is the will to live in sisterhood and brotherhood and a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded” (#48). What a contribution to the efforts for integral development in Africa and elsewhere would be more of such optimistic hope!

Surely, Paul was influenced in his very positive view of humanity by the writings of Jacques Maritain, whom he readily cites in PP (#42). His worldview contained an anthropology of human fulfilment which encourages the work for integral development, certainly a necessary element in the church’s advocacy for global justice.⁹

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH'S ADVOCACY

So what can we say today, almost forty years after PP has appeared, when we note it is a document that is futuristic, contemporary, dated, radical and optimistic? What can we say are the implications for our church as an advocate for global social justice? And more specifically, how could it challenge and guide CIDSE, an international effort of our church that takes PP as its foundation document? Let me suggest three implications that I believe we should hear and respond to today when we return to this foundation document.

First, the call for justice must never be muted in the activities of our church and in particular our church-sponsored development agencies. By that I mean the obvious point that structural change for fuller life must remain central to the church's mission if we are to be faithful to the vision of PP. As relates to CIDSE, I find it very significant that in the sections of PP that could be said to provide the basis for the establishment of CIDSE -- #s 45 to #55, under the subtitle, "Aid for the Weak" -- the *invitation to charity* is never far from the *mandate for justice*.¹⁰ For public and private funds, gifts and loans, no matter how generous, are not sufficient to eliminate hunger or reduce poverty, if not linked to the effort for "building a world where all people, no matter what their race, religion or nationality, can live fully human lives, freed from servitude imposed on them by others or by natural forces over which they have not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word..." (#47). (This is certainly *liberation theology* inchoate!)

The structural dimensions are immediately evident in this section's call for higher taxes in rich countries to support development efforts, higher prices for goods imported from poor countries, more concerted, human-centred planning, diversion of funds from arms spending, caution against neo-colonialism, and effective debt restructuring without harmful conditionalities. And the section on aid is immediately followed by the section on "Equity in Trade Relations" -- surely a paramount global justice issue in 1967 and in 2006!

I emphasise this implication for our church since it is a strong challenge and a clear guide for our advocacy for global justice. Certainly for CIDSE it is a key focus. I personally am mindful of and thankful for your agencies' cooperation around the world in the promotion of global justice through research and advocacy efforts and support of local efforts to mobilise for social justice in poor countries like Zambia. I also emphasise it because in my opinion CIDSE's work has been such a helpful complement to the work of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the strong commitments for justice not only of Paul VI but also of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Yes, we do need to speak of *charity*. But in reflecting on the need to move *beyond charity to justice*, I am challenged by the remark attributed to Padre Alberto Hurtado, the recently canonised Jesuit social activist in Chile who died only 15 years before the publication of PP. According to Hurtado, "Marx said that religion was the opium of the people. But I also know that charity can be the opium of the rich."

Second, an obvious implication arises from the analysis I have offered of several key aspects of the teaching of PP. This is the need, *the absolute necessity*, for grounding all the church's work as an advocate for global justice in the church's social teaching. Several years ago, I collaborated with some colleagues in producing a book with the catchy title, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*.¹¹ Would I be totally off the mark to say that for many in our church, indeed, even for many of those associated with church-related development agencies, the social teaching of the church remains *our best kept secret*? How many know more than the titles of documents that present a wealth of values that can contribute so much to integral development efforts?

In the work of a recently established research and education project based in Harare, Zimbabwe (assisted by Misereor), the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST),

we say that there is a *value-added dimension* in the debates and decisions of public policy offered by the social teaching. The social teaching we deal with is not abstract but concrete, not neutral but committed, not polite but prophetic. It does not cite authors but applies principles. In our African context, it relates to issues of sustainable development, democratic governance, empowerment of women, corruption, ecology, poverty eradication and so forth. Surely the value dimensions of these issues should not be “our best kept secret”! Surely the CIDSE agencies represented here should have as priority focus the *internal sensitisation* of all staff about these CST values and the *external promotion* in all your programmes and projects of the application of these values.

Third, a final implication of the message of PP is perhaps a bit complicated and in need of further nuancing than can be offered here this morning. But let me voice it out, as something that bothers many of us, something very worthy of further discussion and response. It touches an issue that I know that CIDSE has struggled with since your inception.¹² This is what I would see, from my practical experience of many years in development work in Washington DC and then many years on the ground in Africa, of the need for closer links between the *pastoral* and the *developmental* works of the church. By this I mean that a kind of sharp division between what some might consider more “sacred” missionary ministries (sacramental preparation, building of churches, for example) and more “secular” development ministries (health care, agricultural training, for example) may today have more text-book validity than practical, day-to-day application. At least I can see that in some instances in Zambia.

It seems to me that the strong emphasis PP 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 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. The goal is “to establish as fact and reality an international morality based on justice and equity” (81). I believe that this relates directly to the much-needed “spirituality of justice” that we talk about these days. But as I’ve said, this issue requires more reflection and response – perhaps a suitable task for the Fortieth Anniversary of PP and of CIDSE as a network.

CONCLUSION

In his encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (The Social Concern of the Church)*, published in 1987 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of PP, John Paul II pays great tribute to his predecessor’s document. He notes that PP is an authentic application of Vatican II while being a message of genuine originality (#s 5-10). And he says that the fundamental motive inspiring the document is its response to the Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)* and its opening lines, lines we have heard so often: “The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties, of the women and men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties, of the followers of Jesus Christ.”¹³

Surely we could find no better foundation for exploring and implementing the theme of this Fifth CIDSE Forum, “The Church Speaking Out on Social Justice Today.” The church’s advocacy for global justice is greatly assisted by the challenge and guidance of *Populorum Progressio*. In the five aspects I’ve analysed, its message can come alive again for us. And in the three implications I’ve outlined, its call can move us to action. The progress of peoples has never been more urgent than today. Not *will we respond*, but *how will we respond?*

Thank you.

END NOTES

¹ For more information on the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, see web page: www.jctr.org.zm .

² See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999; Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalisation and Its Discontents*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003; Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, New York: Penguin Press, 2005; Kofi Annan, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, New York: United Nations, 2005.

³ These reports have been published since 1990. See the latest, *Human Development Report 2005: International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World*, New York: UNDP, 2005.

⁴ For an excellent look at this topic, see the just published *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*, eds. John A Coleman and William F. Ryan, Ottawa: Novalis, Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2005.

⁵ See John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All*, 1998.

⁶ See Peter J. Henriot, "Grassroots Analysis: Emphasis on Culture," in G. De Schrijver, ed., *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds. A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1998, pp. 333 - .

⁷ *Justice in the World* is certainly one of the most important CST documents after the Second Vatican Council. Therefore it is puzzling, indeed profoundly disappointing, that this document could be left out of a recently published book that claims to provide a complete overview of CST. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2004.

⁸ See Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., Commentary on *Populorum Progressio*", in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed., Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004, p.309.

⁹ For a discussion of PP's anthropology, see Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891 – Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002, pp. 129-131.

¹⁰ See also the clear statement in *Justice in the World*: "Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbour. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love" (#34).

¹¹ This book is now in a fourth revised and expanded edition, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*, eds., Edward P. DeBerri and James E. Hug, with Peter J. Henriot and Michael J. Schultheis, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, and Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 2003.

¹² See the discussions in research paper of Andre Linard, "Believing in CIDSE" Restoring the Memories of the Founders, 1999, pp 14-15; and "Working Together in the Service of the Poor: Towards a Theological and Ethical Position," CIDSE working document 1995, revised 2000, p. 22.

¹³ For a concrete application of this message, see Peter Henriot, S.J., "A Church in the Modern World of Africa: The Zambian Experience," forthcoming in the *Hekima Review*, Nairobi.