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“Avarice ... the most evident form of moral underdevelopment” —Paul VI

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness ...”

Notwithstanding the risk of turning the classic opening from *A Tale of Two Cities* into a cliché, the words of Charles Dickens might aptly describe the decade of the 1960s (or, for that matter, any other decade.)

From a socio-economic standpoint, although the “Sixties” were the “best of times” for the advanced nations, the progress of that decade was not relieving the “worst of times” for the poor and developing nations of the globe.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004) sums up the positive “signs of the time” in that unprecedented era of growing prosperity: “The 1960s bring promising prospects: recovery after the devastation of the war, the beginning of decolonization, and the first timid signs of a thaw in the relations between the American and Soviet blocs.” (CSDC n.94)

At that time, the scope of the question in Catholic social teaching was now becoming “universal and involves all countries.” Thus, by mid-20th century, the platform for social justice began to engage new challenges in the arena of social justice. Issues tied to the international common good were moving Catholic social thought beyond its original 19th century historical context of defending the rights of workers on a national level in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. The conditions in the developing nations of the world, the implications for global economic cooperation and the responsibilities of the developed regions towards the international common good were rapidly emerging as major concerns for justice.

In this second stage of Catholic social teaching, the

international horizon of the social question was reflected in *Mater et Magistra* (“Christianity and Social Progress,” 1961), the first social encyclical of Pope John XXIII, and *Gaudium et Spes* (“The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” 1965).

Despite the general optimism about economic development in the postwar era, the Compendium specifically notes that “[i]nequalities that in the past were experienced within nations are now becoming international and make the dramatic situation of the Third World ever more evident.” (CSDC n. 94)

No doubt, there were solid grounds for persuading political leaders and economists that the period of the “sixties” was “the best of times.” After all, the end of colonialism created a promising outlook for achieving the ideals of worldwide economic and political liberties, especially in the developing nations.

In the Catholic world, the Second Vatican Council had ended in 1965 and the task of implementation of ecclesial renewal within Catholicism was initiated. As a “pastoral constitution,” *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the four major conciliar constitutions, represented “a new kind of teaching.” According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the Pastoral Constitution “presents the face of a Church that ‘cherishes a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history’ [GS n. 1], that travels the main journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world, but which at the same time ‘is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.’” (CSDC n. 96)

In 1967, less than two years after the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI issued his first social encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (“On the Development of Peoples”). The Compendium regards *Populorum Progressio* “a development of the chapter on economic and so-

The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.

cial life in *Gaudium et Spes*, even while it introduces some significant new elements." The encyclical delineated "the outlines of an integral development of man and of a development in solidarity with all humanity." (CSDC n. 98)

In his biography of Pope Paul VI, Peter Hebblethwaite treats this period of Pope Paul VI's papacy in a chapter entitled "Against the Euphoria of the Age." Pope Paul VI applied the then received modern social teaching of the Church to the urgent international social issues of the day, an approach that challenged the dominant economic and political wisdom about development.

By the 1960s, the focus of the social question was already shifting from an East-West to a North-South axis. In that era, "three worlds" had surfaced on the global stage: The First World (Europe and North America), the Second World (the Soviet Union and its eastern bloc satellites along with Communist China), and the Third World (the developing nations of the world). The poverty and destitution within the Third World dramatized the growing gap between the rich nations and the poor nations.

Consequently, the global social question now became concerned with the imbalance in development and underdevelopment found in the relationship between the rich nations and the poor.

Barbara Ward, the noted British economics writer, wrote a retrospective review of *Populorum Progressio* on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its publication. The author of the groundbreaking *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations* (1962) judged that Pope Paul VI had confronted the inadequacy of the conventional one-dimensional notion of development based on economic expansion, a theory that in the long run projected a misplaced optimism. The moral realism of *Populorum Progressio* criticized that "trickle-down" theory of wealth as not providing a just solution for alleviating the dire conditions affecting the world's poorest inhabitants in the Third World.

As the first modern pope who had traveled, Pope Paul VI had experienced first-hand the desperate poverty existing in the poor nations of the world. In particular, he had journeyed to India for the International Eucharistic Congress in December 1964. Again, in October 1965 Pope Paul VI addressed the UN General Assembly as an advocate for justice on behalf of the poor of the world. Barbara Ward wrote: "[*Populorum Progressio*] foresaw the continued massive destitution of millions of people." She contended that Pope Paul VI "had seen the fact of destitution and cried out against it." Accordingly, in that

prophetic judgment, he "cried out to the Christian people of the world to realize what responsibility faced them day by day."

In *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching* (1992), Donal Dorr explains the "heuristic" concept of integral development which Pope Paul VI had articulated in *Populorum Progressio*. The encyclical "challenges Christians to take full account of the non-economic elements — for instance, to recognize the value of different cultures and basic human rights." These so-called "soft" elements (e.g., "respect for culture, for the environment, for human rights, for the sense of community, and for the quality of human rights") cannot be neglected as the cost of pursuing the economic core of development.

It was no surprise, however, that the *Wall Street Journal* had dubbed *Populorum Progressio* as "warmed-over Marxism." By contrast, neither was it surprising that Pope John Paul II vigorously endorsed the permanent value and contemporary relevance of *Populorum Progressio* 20 years after its publication.

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* Pope John Paul II published his second social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("On Social Concern," 1987), a papal teaching that reinvigorated the moral challenge to meet the demands for justice on the international horizon.

Pope John Paul II identified *Populorum Progressio* as "an application of the Council's teaching in social matters to the specific problem of the development and underdevelopment of peoples." (SRS n. 7)

In addition to upholding the ethical aspects of the social question from a global viewpoint, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* recognized two other original elements set forth in *Populorum Progressio*, namely, the principle of solidarity (PP n. 14) and the foundational insight into the concept of integral development. (SRS nn. 9-10)

With regard to the concept of authentic development, Pope John Paul II commented: "... if considered in the perspective of universal interdependence, [the concept] changes noticeably. True development cannot consist in the simple accumulation of wealth and in the greater availability of goods and services, if this is gained at the expense of the development of the masses, and without due consideration for the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the human being." (SRS n. 9)

In conclusion, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed Pope Paul VI's trenchant interpretation of devel-

opment: "Development is the new name for peace." (SRS n. 10; see PP n. 87)

According to Pope John Paul II, *Populorum Progressio* correctly predicted the possibility that under the then current systems of power and wealth, both in the developed and the developing nations, "the wealth of the rich would increase and the poverty of the poor would remain." The forecast of *Populorum Progressio* was validated with the appearance of the "so-called Fourth World" or the pockets of "great or extreme poverty in countries of medium and high income." (SRS n. 16)

In surveying the conditions of the contemporary world in 1987, Pope John Paul II again confirmed "the persistence and often the widening of the gap between the areas of the so-called developed North and the developing South." *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* carefully nuanced that assertion thus: "This geographical terminology is only indicative, since one cannot ignore the fact that the frontiers of wealth and poverty intersect within societies themselves, whether developed or developing. In fact, just as social inequalities down to the level of poverty exist in rich countries, so, in parallel fashion, in the less developed countries one often sees manifestations of selfishness and the flaunting of wealth which is as disconcerting, as it is scandalous." (SRS n. 14)

The words of Pope John Paul II echoed a poignant prophetic oracle of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*: "Both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment." (PP n. 19)

No less engaging is the passage that proclaims Pope Paul VI's vision of hope for widening the circle of neighbors by service of the needy as an

obligation of the wealthy — "It involves building a human community where liberty is not an idle word, where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table (Lk. 16: 19-31)." (PP n.47)

The year 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*. On October 17, The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See at the United Nations sponsored a side event entitled "Development, The New Name for Peace" to observe that anniversary.

On that occasion, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin delivered an address which explored the historical context and the key themes of *Populorum Progressio*. In reference to the encyclical's major theme, "Development, The New Name for Peace," Archbishop Martin emphasized that "[t]he concept of authentic development must be concerned about the development of the person in his or her integrity; that means not just their economic development." This conception of development conforms to an understanding of a "complete humanism" that encompasses spiritual values.

Archbishop Martin contrasts a "complete" or "full-bodied humanism" with a "'narrow humanism', a humanism closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit." (PP n. 42)

In November 2007, the Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice announced the convening of a program to study "the current validity of the historic papal document, with particular emphasis on the moral aspects of development, on new forms of poverty and globalization, on conflicts and disarmament, and on safeguarding and protecting human rights."

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