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Populorum Progressio - Moving Beyond Liberal & Conservative Engagements of Integral Human Development – A Pax On Both Your Houses

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Populorum Progressio (1967) is a landmark encyclical in the history of Catholic social teaching. Whereas previous social encyclicals focused on the tension between workers and owners in the industrial developed world, *Populorum Progressio*, focuses our attention, in a north-south direction on the deleterious outcomes of colonialism and neocolonialism on fostering integral human development. Inspired by this encyclical, Catholic groups, institutions, and movements have pursued effective initiatives that address the huge disparity in power between the developed and developing worlds and the political, economic, and social struggles facing those on the margins of society.

At the same time though, the philosophical and theological horizon in which this document is grounded often gets lost within Catholic discourse, both by liberal/secular social justice initiatives which become too detached from the norms evoked by Paul VI and by conversely by conservative critics whose petrification of transcendent norms never leads to the social justice engagement Paul VI accents.

The encyclical has two major sections. The first half presents the Christian vision of development. The second half then asserts that this vision should lead to pursue programs that address aid for the weak, equity in trade relations, universal charity, and the integral link between development and peace.

Especially in the first half of *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI articulates that the pursuit of integral human development is tied to a transcendent destiny disclosed by God. Paragraph #42, in particular, at the climax of the first half of the encyclical synthesizes this philosophical and theological vision:

What must be aimed at is complete humanism. And what is that if not the fully rounded development of the whole man and of all men? A 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. True, man can organize the world apart from God, but “without God man can organize it in the end only to man’s detriment. An isolated humanism is an inhuman humanism.” There is no true humanism but that which is open to the Absolute and is conscious of a vocation which gives

human life its true meaning. Far from being the ultimate measure of all things, man can only realize himself by reaching beyond himself. As Pascal has said so well: "Man infinitely surpasses man." (#42).

Paul VI sees personal and material development tied to spiritual values set forth by God and that the integral pursuit of spiritual and social development entails a journey by which we become more and more human.

Consequently, integral human development for Paul VI is not just about narrowing economic inequality or simply increasing political participation in decision making-networks. Nor is it just about focusing on moral values as a critique of contemporary social practices. No, being attentive to the destiny disclosed through an openness to the Absolute should lead us to alternative set of just human relations that vigilantly seeks to approximate those of the Kingdom of God. As captured specifically by the Caribbean Bishops in "True Freedom and Human Development" (1982):

To sum up, like Christ, the Church is not willing to restrict her mission solely to the religious field and to dissociate herself from man's temporal problems (Mt 25:35). Neither can she restrict her message simply to purely temporal problems. She reaffirms the primacy of the spiritual vocation and insists that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Christ. It is through following out the salvation won by Christ, and all that this means, that true liberation is to be achieved (True Freedom and Human Development #18).

The economic and material dimensions of Paul VI's elucidation of integral human development are drawn from the French Dominican Louis Joseph Lebreton and Cardinal Joseph Cardijn. But in terms of the encompassing theological horizon, Paul VI specifically cites as influences, Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, Henri de Lubac's *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, Jacques Maritain's *True Humanism*, and Maurice Zundel's *L'homme passe l'homme*.

Pascal, de Lubac, and Maritain, each in their own way distinguish between an inauthentic humanism which sees to organize the world apart from God and an authentic humanism informed by transcendent values. Maritain goes the furthest of the three in terms of how this orientation by transcendent values is realized in all its magnitude through a transformation of the political, socio-economic order, as stated in his *True Humanism*: a "new humanism [that is] directed towards a socio-temporal realization of that evangelical concern for humanity which ought not to exist only in the spiritual order, but to become incarnate... (xvi-xvii). Rather than sacrificing for race, class, or nation, Maritain continues this new humanism seeks "a better life for their fellows and for the concrete good of the community of human individuals, so that the humble truth of brotherly love may advance...to the permeation of the social order and the structures of common life (xvii).

In turn, Maurice Zundel, although least known today among the intellectual influences Paul VI cites, in many respects has the most influence on the Paul VI's particular rendering of integral humanism. Zundel was a French Swiss Catholic priest that Paul VI initially met in the late 1920s and was in dialogue with well into the 1970s.

Zundel especially develops the following insight by Pascal in *Penseés* regarding humanity transcending itself: "Learn that man infinitely transcends man, hear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you. Listen to God." Specifically, Zundel argues that by being attentive to our destiny as given by God, we become more and more human. Consequently, human beings are not fixed in their identity but come more and more to realize who they are as they draw closer to God. However, this revelation is not just in some transcendent realm, but becomes incarnate through the dialogue between humans and God, as Zundel's accents in *Tu parole comme une source*:

The Word of God, in fact, is not a celestial telephone; the Word of God is not an absolute that comes from Heaven; it is not a Truth that is necessarily definitive; it is a dialogue, a dialogue, that is to say, a word addressed to someone in this own situation, according to the degree of this intelligence, that allows him to progress in the knowledge and in the love of God. (Translated by Ramón Martínez de Pisón Liébanas).

Pascal, de Lubac, Maritain, and Zundel mutually influence Paul VI to articulate an integral humanism that by being oriented by divine providence, beckons us to transform material conditions that enable each of us to grasp our God-given destinies. In particular, Zundel's articulation of people becoming more human through their encounter with God distinguishes integral humanism from both inflexible dogmatic articulations of transcendence and reducing liberation merely to political, social, or economic emancipation. In this regard, Paul VI resists identifying development solely with either rigid doctrine or social mission.

Indeed, Paul VI's articulation of integral human development, seen against this open-ended transcendental horizon, challenges two opposite tendencies in the contemporary Catholic intellectual world. The first tendency is, when development programs informed by *Populorum Progressio*, get detached from this transcendental orientation, they too easily become another liberal or even democratic socialist program whose underlying secularism falls too easily into a preoccupation with materialism that the encyclical itself actually is challenging and trying to transform.

These social justice initiatives downplay the roles prayer, liturgy, theological reflection, and evangelization play in pursuing integral human development. Economic terminology such as assets are used to render human potentialities and spirituality is just seen as one of many human dimensions rather than seeing spirituality as the font which should inform transforming unjust political, social, and economic structures. The liberal language of making choices in the manner of a consumer supplants the notion of responding to the destinies to which God beckons us. Such secularization of the pursuit of social justice all too easily shrouds the Christian notion of a Eucharistic communion that informs integral human development. Again, as captured by the Caribbean Bishops in *True Freedom and Development*, a "purely materialistic" development "...fosters a competitive and aggressive spirit and distracts our people's minds from humanizing spiritual and eternal values" (#12).

The other tendency is to render Christian evangelization and integral human development as the application of a clear-cut Catholic doctrine in response to the threats posed by relativist modern and postmodern initiatives – a perspective more reminiscent of the preoccupation with certainty of Vatican I rather than with the more hermeneutical reality of Vatican II. In this paradigm, primary emphasis is placed first and foremost on purity of belief and liturgical practices. Only once this normative beachhead is established, can one then try to bring about a harmonious set of just practices in the world.

If the “secular” paradigm deemphasizes the important role of liturgy and evangelization plays in integral human development, this “Christendom” paradigm overemphasizes it to the point that realizing just political, socio-economic practices and structures become a rather secondary concern. Faithful obedience to church authority, the subordination of justice to charity, and distinct roles of clergy and laity in the pursuit of worldly justice become the norms rather than Paul VI’s more fluid, dialogical, open-ended sense of the interaction between the transcendent and the world that fosters the pursuit of “becoming human.” As opposed to pursuing liturgy as a haven in a hostile world, again as the Caribbean Bishops remind us in “Stewardship and the Revitalization of Parish Life in the Caribbean” (2003), through the Eucharistic celebration we “become co-responsible with Christ and with all the people of God for the spread of the Gospel, for the care of creation, and the love of the poor” (#9). Put otherwise, liturgy calls us to become to the Body and Blood of Christ acting in the world.

Indeed, these two paradigms play off each other. When certain applications of Catholic social teaching downplay liturgy, prayer, and a clear reference to the salvation wrought by Jesus, this precisely reinforces the conservative perspective that social justice programs reduce spirituality to the immanent. These same conservatives then circle the wagons and pursue purity of worship within a community of tight believers – quality, not quantity becomes the mantra. Consequently, to those of the more liberal/secular disposition, the pursuit of justice gets lost in the conservatives’ preoccupation with purely transcendent values. Essentially, doctrinal rigidity from “true believers” gives even more justification to those who seem rather comfortable with leaving liturgy and evangelization behind in their focus on transforming oppressive political, socio-economic structures.

By contrast, integral human development, as understood and presented by Paul VI, neither reduces the Christian vocation to either a petrification of the transcendent or conversely just pursuing worldly social justice. In contrast to the conservative outlook, the truth to which we are called, according to Paul VI, is continually becoming disclosed as we become more human in our response to God’s calling which in turn leads us to find God’s providence in the pursuit of just political, socio-economic relations. In contrast to the liberal and secular outlook, evangelization of the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ is essential to bringing about the worldly institutions and processes that enable humans to become more human. Ultimately, integral human development as envisioned by Paul VI is neither liberal nor conservative, but a communitarianism that enables every person’s gifts to flourish through the dynamic

interrelationship between the pursuit of just political, socio-economic relations and being open to the meanings that unfold in our ongoing dialogue with God's beckoning.