

What is Development? Promoting the Good of Every Person and of the Whole Person

Peter Henriot SJ

The year 2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the publication *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples), Pope Paul VI's encyclical, and the twentieth anniversary of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), the encyclical issued by Pope John Paul II.¹ In my view, commemoration of documents written many years ago is worthwhile only if it contributes to understanding of the present and offers hope for the future. Such commemoration should move us to that 'action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world' which is central to the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ.²

My own appreciation of the messages of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and of the rich treasury of social wisdom which we call the church's social teaching, has been profoundly shaped by my living for a year (in the mid-1970s) in Latin America, in Medellin, Colombia, and my life and work in Africa for almost all of the past twenty years. Zambia, where I live, is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources, but one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of people's well-being. That sad paradox – wealth amidst poverty – spurs on my political and economic work in our Jesuit social centre in Lusaka and my priestly and pastoral work in a young and very vibrant church.

Understanding of Development

What I consider to be the biggest challenge in Zambia and in Africa, in Peru and in Latin America, can be expressed very simply in the question: What is our understanding of 'development'? I sincerely believe that *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* are immensely helpful to us who struggle with that question. The clear emphasis of *Populorum Progressio*, later reiterated in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, is that authentic development is: 'for each and for all, the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human' (n. 20).

Paul VI expressed the aspirations of women and men, especially those living in misery, as being: 'to seek to do more, know more and have more in

order to be more' (n. 6). For *Populorum Progressio*, 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.' (n. 14)

In praising *Populorum Progressio* twenty years later, John Paul II highlighted in particular this definition and orientation of development as part of what he called the 'originality of the message' of the encyclical. John Paul pushed further the discussion of 'having and being' by emphasising:

To 'have' objects and goods does not in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to the maturing and enrichment of that subject's 'being', that is to say unless it contributes to the realization of the human vocation as such. (n. 28)

According to the message of Catholic social teaching, then, the question to ask in relation to any development planning, implementation, or evaluation, is: 'What is happening to the *people*?' – not, 'What is happening to the *economy*?'

It is of significance that the understanding of development found in *Populorum Progressio* and in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* was expressed years before the recognition and popularisation of important new definitions of development found in, for example, the *Human Development Index* in the annual reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (beginning in 1990) and the 'human capabilities' measurement devised by Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate, in his monumental study, *Development as Freedom*.³

Both the UNDP's *Index* and Sen's 'capabilities' measurement challenged the fundamental grounds upon which distinctions were made between 'developed', 'developing', and 'underdeveloped' nations. For the orthodox view of development – still strongly influential among international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in ministries of finance and development in many nations – is based primarily on an economic focus on growth in gross domestic product (GDP), the

monetary measurement of the total of goods produced and services rendered. But both the UNDP and Sen have placed an emphasis upon what was happening to the human person, and that, of course, is precisely the focus of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

The question to ask in relation to any development planning, implementation, or evaluation, is: 'What is happening to the people? – not, 'What is happening to the economy?'

Experiences of Latin America

As we look back over the years, I believe that for both Latin America and Africa this challenge to the orthodox view of development has been necessary and vitally important. Two historical challenges, one in Latin America, the other in Africa, merit particular attention.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy inaugurated the ambitious 'Alliance for Progress' programme. Though aimed certainly at addressing problems of poverty on the southern continent of the Americas, the Alliance for Progress was heavily imbued with the heady 'developmentalism' of promoting economic growth.

Under the influence of Walter Rostow's book, *The Stages of Economic Growth*,⁴ development was seen primarily as a planned effort to enable a 'developing' country to 'take off' by increasing economic growth, which – it was hoped – would 'trickle down' to the masses. (I recall the all-too-true observation of one of the Brazilian military dictators in the 1960s who remarked that Brazil had indeed taken off but had left the Brazilians behind! For while the economy had produced high GDP growth rates, the people had been left behind with low social improvement rates.)

The Alliance for Progress and similar development programmes promoted by the United States of America and many European countries were firmly based on this view of development. Hence the strong attack – verbal as well as

political and even military – against any alternative political and economic approaches to development.

We need to reflect on whether there is still some of the 'take off' theory guiding the economic plans of developing countries. Do we not need to hear again and again the human-centred definition of what true development is all about? And can a renewed interest in the lessons of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* help in the current reality?

Experiences of Africa

In Africa, the post-colonial period may have meant the semblance of a passage of political power from European countries to the newly-independent African states. But this did not mean a ready passage of economic power. Thus, in *Populorum Progressio* Paul VI was able to identify 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' (n. 52).

Zambia, like so many African states, opted after independence for a command economy with heavy state ownership and control of the economy. Socialism was the dominant ideology. But Zambia was hit hard in the 1970s by massive trade deficits caused by a collapse in the price of its main export, copper, and an increase in the price of its main import, oil.

Moreover, the country suffered economically as a consequence of its decision not to cooperate with the apartheid regime of South Africa, with rail lines cut and infrastructure bombed.

Zambia borrowed heavily to sustain a more consumer-oriented economy and it fell deeply into debt, particularly to the multi-lateral institutions of the IMF and World Bank and the bi-lateral lenders of Europe, North America and Japan. Its path was similar to the 'debt trap' of many other poor countries: *borrow in order to service debt, and service debt at the expense of serving people.*

Faced with a stagnant economy for reasons not wholly of its own making, Zambia in the 1990s was obliged to enter into the most rapid, most rigid and most radical Structural Adjustment Programme on the continent of Africa. Massive liberalisation, privatisation and free market reforms adjusted the economy and maladjusted the

people. Large-scale retrenchment in employment, imposition of education and health fees, opening of borders to outsiders with unfair competitive advantage were all features of the Adjustment Programme.

While it is true that the economy began turning around, the majority of people did not experience the promised benefits. Life expectancy fell to its current extremely low level of 37.5 years. And HIV/AIDS, itself a development-related disease, now *infects* almost 17 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 49 but *affects* 100 per cent of the population.

Since 2000, Zambia has received cancellation of its massive debt stock of 7.2 billion US dollars as a consequence of adhering to the stringent conditions of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). But Jubilee-Zambia, the campaign hosted in Zambia by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, continues to emphasise that we must avoid falling again into debt and must chase off the so-called 'vulture funds' that would pick our scarce savings. Many other poor countries in Africa and Latin America face the same dangers. I believe the Zambian experience highlights the urgent necessity of emphasising Catholic social teaching's understanding of development in the face of economic and political structures at national and international levels which reinforce a very different view of what development means.



Zambian crops threatened by GMOs?
© Photo courtesy of Trócaire

Other Challenges

Among many other challenges facing our rapidly globalising world, two in particular have profound links to the human-oriented approach of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei*

Socialis. The first is trade.

Countries in Latin America struggle with the implications of the proposal to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which has been promoted especially by the United States, and we in Africa struggle with the implications of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), currently under negotiation between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries.⁵ Both Latin America and Africa are affected by the negotiations, agreements and dispute-settlement decisions of the World Trade Organization. In all cases, the focus of concern is the same. Pope Paul VI put it simply and clearly in *Populorum Progressio*: 'Freedom of trade is fair, only if it is subject to the demands of social justice' (n. 59). This makes clear that the development component of trade arrangements, with particular concern for the poor, must be the deciding factor in signing on to the trade agreements being pushed by the rich countries of the North.

The second is the danger to the livelihoods of our peasant farmers posed by the potential introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into our agricultural sector. To-date, we in Zambia have been able to resist GMOs. How much longer we can do that in the face of immense pressure for the so-called 'Green Revolution for Africa' (backed by foundations and seed companies in the USA) is a very serious question. Many groups in Latin America are pointing up the danger of the US push for the introduction of GMOs into their countries. Again, I ask the fundamental question: 'What human development impact will this technological fix have for the people, especially the poor?'

Social and Pastoral and Personal

In my view, three clear challenges emerge from reflection on *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Social Challenge

First, there is the social challenge of translating the wonderful insights of the Catholic social teaching of these two documents into practical political policies. By that I mean that the people-centred definition of development they offer must provide the foundation for critiques raised, approvals offered, and alternatives proposed when faced with national and international development plans.

At the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Lusaka we adopt a ‘value-oriented’ engagement with public policy, on issues such as poverty eradication, employment generation, debt contraction, trade agreements, environmental guidelines, HIV/AIDS. We undertake socio-economic analysis of these issues, then submit this to a critical evaluation arising out of the perspectives of Catholic social teaching and then recommend appropriate policy steps. This is, in effect, an application of the methodology: ‘see, judge, act’, or the ‘pastoral circle’.

Pastoral Challenge

Second, the pastoral challenge is to continue to build a church where *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – along with so many other important documents – perform what I refer to as the five tasks of Catholic social teaching:

- Ground:* underpin our social engagement with a solid foundation that instills confidence;
- Inspire:* fire us up to move forward even in the face of uncertainties and difficulties;
- Clarify:* offer a framework of fresh insights and wide vision;
- Guide:* provide directions and pointers toward practical actions;
- Sustain:* keep us moving even amidst setbacks and obstacles.

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II draws attention to this pastoral challenge by emphasising that: ‘... the Church has something to say today, just as twenty years ago, and also in the future, about the nature, conditions, requirements and aims of authentic development, and also about the obstacles which stand in its way’ (n. 41). This is seen as fulfilling the mission of integral evangelisation. And Catholic social teaching is central to that evangelisation.

During the deliberations of the African Synod in 1994, a bishop from West Africa focused the assembly on the simple but profound task facing the church: ‘Church of Africa’, he cried, ‘what must we do to be relevant and credible?’ The church must indeed be both relevant to the true needs of the people and credible in the response it makes. I genuinely believe that a pastoral approach that incorporates the central messages of Catholic social teaching will indeed be relevant since it will relate well to the ‘joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties’ of people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1).⁶ And if it is a

church that shares the Catholic social teaching by the way it lives – that preaches the Good News of Catholic social teaching by its clear witness – then it will indeed be credible.

Personal Challenge

Third, there is the personal challenge offered by both *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* to appreciate at a profound level the link between love and the commitment to the social justice which is essential for integral human development. I emphasise this point because I believe it is key to understanding the more radical character of Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love).⁷ In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II is very clear in stating that: ‘... the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest’ (n. 46). But that love must have consequences in how we structure society, that is, in the work of justice.

In *Populorum Progressio* the meaning of that love is focused on justice when Paul VI cautions that public and private funds, gifts and loans, even if very generous, are not sufficient to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty. These efforts must be linked to action towards ‘... 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 ...’ (n. 47).

I believe that a careful reading of *Deus Caritas Est* shows that Benedict XVI is in line with this thinking of Paul VI and John Paul II. The invitation to charity is never far from the mandate for justice. For this reason I look forward to what is reported to be an up-coming social encyclical of Pope Benedict, in which I am confident he will continue to develop his critique of the structures of globalisation that deny the fullness of love.

In the personal life of each of us, then, we are challenged to put love into action – the action for the justice of integral human development.

Conclusion

Forty years of *Populorum Progressio* and twenty years of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – these time-spans are longer than the life expectancy of many, many people in my country of Zambia. With

stronger political commitment to the teachings on integral human development of these two great documents, I believe that we can move more hopefully, with the fullness of human life, into the next forty years.

That is our challenge. It is our hope and our prayer. Let it also be our action!

This is an edited version of the address given by Peter Henriot SJ at a seminar on *Populorum Progressio*, Peru, September 2007.

Notes

1. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples), Encyclical Letter issued 26 March 1967; Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), Encyclical Letter issued 30 December 1987.
2. *Justice in the World*, Document of the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, November 1971, Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press.
3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
4. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.
5. The objectives of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are stated by the European Union to be 'to establish new WTO - compatible trade agreements' between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries. Under, first, the Lomé Convention and then the Cotonou Agreement, the European Union concluded trade agreements with these countries, granting them specific trade concessions and official development assistance. See Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Economic Partnership Agreements*, Brussels, 23 October 2007, COM (2007) 635 final.
6. *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), 7 December 1965, in Austin Flannery OP (General Editor), *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (new revised edition), Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996.
7. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), Encyclical Letter, 25 December 2005, London: Catholic Truth Society.

Peter Henriot SJ, is Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, Lusaka, Zambia