

Development, Nations, and “The Signs of the Times:” the Historical Context of *Populorum Progressio*

Mari Rapela Heidt

ON EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 1967, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (*On the Development of Peoples*). It was his fourth encyclical in three years and was met with mixed reactions. In some sectors it was lauded as “a document of extraordinary social vision and daring,”¹ “an encyclical that will probably be remembered more than *Mater et Magistra*,”² and “unquestionably a major document, committing the resources of the church to the eradication of poverty and bestowing its blessing on secular initiatives toward the same goal.”³ The same commentator also noted, “It is a moving appeal, not only to Catholics but to all men, to regard the socio-economic development of poor countries both as a moral duty and as an essential condition of world peace.”⁴

Others found it confusing and too different from prior magisterial documents to offer any kind of direction to the faithful. The *Wall Street Journal* very famously called the encyclical “warmed-over Marxism,”⁵ and even seasoned Catholic commentators found themselves at a loss in understanding the new encyclical. Although prior encyclicals also focused on some of the same aspects of economics as *Populorum Progressio*, none addressed the perceived problems in as technical and detailed a manner. *Populorum Progressio* also included no calls to specific faith actions such as evangelization or prayer, except in a very general way, a characteristic it shared with the social encyclicals of John XXIII. Many people felt as René Laurentin did when he wrote in the “Introduction” to *Liberation, Development, and Salvation* that, “I am not an economist and I felt overwhelmed by economics, this basic aspect of the problem.”⁶ There is also the critique offered by Joseph Martino, that the subject of the encyclical is a result

¹ “*Populorum progressio*,” *Christian Century*, April 12, 1967, 460.

² Colin Clark, “The Development of Peoples, Some Implications of the Papal Encyclical,” *The Tablet*, April 15, 1967, 400.

³ Benjamin L. Masse, “The Pope’s Plea for Poor Nations,” *America*, August 5, 1967, 129.

⁴ Masse, “Pope’s Plea,” 129.

⁵ “A Blessing for Secular Error,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 1967, 14A.

⁶ René Laurentin, *Liberation, Development, and Salvation*, trans. C.U. Quinn (New York: Orbis Books, 1972), 3.

of “the intellectual fads of the [19]50s and [19]60s.”⁷ In that era, there was a great deal of concern about development, and the United Nations made development in poor countries the focus of special attention. Of that time, Barbara Ward writes,

When we look back to the 1960s, we can see most of us caught up in the euphoria of economic growth. It seemed clear that, thanks to the Keynesian revolution of demand management, developed societies had virtually solved their problems. We would gallop forward to the society of high consumption, there to enjoy its felicities—whatever they might prove to be. At the same time, behind us would follow the developing world by ‘stages of growth’ and the wealth created in the process would inevitably trickle down until it reached the poorest.⁸

In light of these reactions and the inescapable reality of the social and political contexts in which it is embedded, it is possible to see *Populorum Progressio* as a document responding to a particular time, without real enduring value.

And yet, *Populorum Progressio* not only endures but has become the basis of much of contemporary Catholic social teaching, particularly in the areas of economics and economic development, but also international relations, international aid, and the ethics of globalization. It has been commemorated twice by succeeding popes in laudatory encyclicals which both reaffirm and expand the ideas set forth in *Populorum Progressio: Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by John Paul II in 1987 and *Caritas in Veritate* by Benedict XVI in 2009. Most recently, Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* embraced the spirit and the language of *Populorum Progressio* in its discussion of the obligation to care for creation, quoting from the initial document and from both of the follow-up encyclicals multiple times. The concepts of the encyclical, particularly its central theme of integral human development, have become even more relevant and prominent in the 50 years since its publication, even when not coupled to economics.

In spite of its importance and the ongoing relevance of the themes of the encyclical, the scholarship on *Populorum Progressio* is remarkably thin. After initial attention in the 1960s, publications discussing the encyclical dropped sharply and have not recovered, except for the

⁷ Joseph P. Martino, “*Populorum Progressio*: Moral and Economic Implications,” *This World*, Summer, 1987, 52.

⁸ Barbara Ward, “Looking Back on *Populorum Progressio*,” *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 5: Official Catholic Social Teaching*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 130. For a description of these “stages of growth,” see Walter W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

few articles marking anniversaries and the obligatory mentions upon the publications of the commemorative encyclicals. Few serious discussions of the encyclical exist outside of various compendia of Catholic social teaching, and those which do attempt to dissect and understand the document are often published in languages other than English, with translations generally unavailable. The reasons for this lack of resources are unclear, but it presents an impediment to a deeper understanding of the document, particularly in a North American context. A similar but somewhat larger hole exists in analysis of the work of the principal author of *Populorum Progressio*, the French economist Louis-Joseph Lebret. Again, this lack of resources presents a tall challenge, one that has yet to be bridged.

The goal of this essay is to fill in some of the gaps by looking at the historical context of the document, especially the work of its principal author. To do this, I first look at some of the secular historical context of the 1960s which gave rise to the idea of the encyclical, and then move to a brief examination of the work of Louis-Joseph Lebret. As Lebret's work is married to the more philosophical work of Jacques Maritain in the encyclical, a short review of Maritain's work follows. The essay concludes with some suggestions for future investigations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Populorum Progressio was published in 1967, towards the end of a decade of serious social and ecclesial changes, just prior to the unanticipated upheavals that 1968 and later years would bring to both the world and the church. The document emerged as a part of a long tradition within Catholicism of confronting social and economic problems and proposing solutions that are consonant with the evolving Catholic views of the proper place of economics and economic life within the lives of human beings and societies. It was also, at least in part, a response to the aforementioned social and political realities that emerged in the 1950s and 60s, a time of geopolitical unrest and serious change that enriched some societies while plunging others into poverty and destitution.

Paul VI himself acknowledges the impact of social conditions on his writing, noting at the beginning of *Populorum Progressio* (no. 4) that he was inspired to write the encyclical by his own observations of poverty and the problems brought about by development on trips to Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and India in the early 1960s. He also was strongly influenced by works that detailed the problems of emerging nations, especially the problems of hunger and poverty wrought by inequalities in economic development. Among these works were *Dynamique concrète du développement*, written by the French Dominican Lebret and detailing economic development problems and their effects in several nations, along with Maritain's *Integral*

Humanism and *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* by Oswald von Nell-Breuning.⁹

It is difficult to overstate how much the Cold War dominated and influenced world events in the years leading up to the publication of *Populorum Progressio*, and its echoes can be seen throughout the document (and indeed in previous documents, especially 1963's *Pacem in Terris*). The issues divided much of the world politically into two blocs, with the Soviet Union leading the communist East and the United States at the forefront of the democratic West. The Cold War was not just a war of words, though the rhetoric on both sides was incendiary, nor did the struggle between East and West only manifest itself in ideological debates. Any possibility of "peaceful coexistence" between the superpowers was fragile at best, as evidenced by an on-going race to develop ever more powerful and destructive weapons. The Atomic Test Ban Treaty of 1963 slowed open-air tests of nuclear weapons but did not slow the development or production of these weapons on either side.

In addition to its conflicts with the West, the Soviet Union faced challenges within communism, as evidenced by a struggle with China over who would lead the communist world. The mid-1960s saw the beginnings of another communist bloc, as the Chinese attempted to extend their influence over emerging nations in Asia and Africa. China faced its own problems with the Nationalist Chinese, who held the island of Formosa (now known as the nation of Taiwan) along with a seat in the United Nations. (Mainland China did not gain its own seat in the UN until a compromise was reached in the 1970s.)

In addition to conflicts between the superpowers, wars and unrest dominated large parts of the world in this period. Pakistan and India were at war over the area known as Kashmir, territory that was claimed by both sides. A peace agreement was reached on this issue shortly before the publication of *Populorum Progressio*. Israel had several military conflicts with its neighbors Syria and Jordan, with each side claiming justification because of prior antagonism by the other. Conflicts like these eventually escalated into war in 1967. In Southeast Asia, the United States became embroiled in a civil war in Vietnam, which escalated sharply throughout the composition of the encyclical, reaching a high point in terms of combat deaths the year after its publication. Political unrest was also widespread in Europe as Charles de Gaulle threatened to withdraw France from NATO and from the European Economic Community while long-established political alliances were overturned or tested in other countries, often resulting in new leaders coming to power.

⁹ Giorgio Campanini, "*Le Radici Culturali del Nuovo Umanesimo Proposto dalla 'Populorum Progressio,'*" in *Il Magistero di Paolo VI nell' enciclica Populorum Progressio* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI; Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1989), 43.

As overriding a factor as the Cold War was in shaping world events in the 1960s, it was the continuing effects of decolonization and on-going struggles for independence by colonies that likely had a greater role in shaping *Populorum Progressio*. Throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, many of the countries of Asia and almost the entire continent of Africa became independent of the countries which had claimed and colonized them, most notably France, Britain, and Belgium. Nations as diverse as Vietnam and Indonesia in Asia, Southern Yemen (later the reunified Republic of Yemen) and Lebanon in the Middle East, and most of the African continent emerged from colonial rule. If one includes the total populations of these colonial nations and the populations of the colonizers, the process of decolonization affected more than one billion people, one third of the total world population at the time. Like the Cold War, it is difficult to overstate the effects of this decolonization on the whole of the world population. In many ways, these former colonies still feel the effects of decolonization. The emergence of so many new nations at one time would not occur again until the fall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in the early to mid-1990s.

Conditions in these former colonies were not always good or conducive to prosperity. Along with wars for independence that destroyed lives and used up resources and the struggles of newly-formed nations to learn to govern themselves and to establish economies that could meet the needs of their people without the support of the colonial powers came a great deal of instability within those regions, leading to a general sense of instability throughout the world. On the continent of Africa in particular, there were many conflicts concerning the borders of the new nations and many shifts in those borders before the countries stabilized and became independent states. Wars between various factions for control of the new nations were common, and some civil wars drew the involvement of larger states. The civil war in Congo (later Zaire), for example, drew the involvement of both the United States and France. *Coups d'état* were common, and military regimes were prevalent throughout Africa, often replacing elected governments through violence. In addition, those new governments also had ideological struggles, as the United States, the Soviets, and the Chinese all attempted to influence the political cultures of emerging nations.

Some countries in Africa faced challenges of a different kind, as both Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa, both former British colonies, imposed white minority rule on the black majority, with South Africa going further by imposing a system of racial segregation, called apartheid, on the country. Rhodesia eliminated white minority rule and became the independent state of Zimbabwe in 1980, and South Africa's system of apartheid finally collapsed in 1991, though challenges remain in these countries and throughout states which had

embraced political systems that reflected those of their former colonizers.

As rapidly as things were changing in a geo-political sense, they were also changing within Catholicism. Paul VI became pope in the midst of the Second Vatican Council, a council he allowed to continue after the death of his predecessor, John XXIII. By 1967, the work of the Council was finished, and the long work of implementing the changes wrought by the council was really just beginning, an arduous process that could still be considered somewhat unfinished 50 years later. In addition to the council, the pope was under some pressure to issue guidance on the use of artificial birth control, a question which had been under consideration for years and would not be resolved for more than another year.

COMPOSITION AND INFLUENCES

Populorum Progressio was a document long in the making. Work on the encyclical began late in 1963, the first year of Paul's papacy, when he asked Lebreton for a preparatory summary on development that would serve as the basis for a new encyclical.¹⁰ Paul VI had long admired Lebreton's work and had hoped that some aspects of what would become *Populorum Progressio* would have been a part of *Gaudium et Spes*. Although *Gaudium et Spes* discussed development, Paul felt the need for a longer and deeper discussion, one which included some denunciation of the atheistic humanism he saw spreading throughout Europe and with which he had become very concerned as Archbishop of Milan.¹¹

The encyclical went through seven drafts, the first of which was completed in September of 1964. The first several drafts were written in French by Lebreton, with editing and composition suggestions by Paul. After Lebreton's death in 1966, the final drafts of the encyclical were completed by Paul Poupard, a French priest who worked in the Secretariat of State. The final draft of February 16, 1967 was returned marked "*Sta tutto bene*" ("it's all good") by the Pope, and the encyclical was promulgated on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1967.¹² Before giving the traditional papal blessing to the city and the world that day, Paul VI announced his new encyclical, "It seems to us that the proper time has come, after the recent ecumenical council, to add another

¹⁰ François Malley, O.P., *Le Pere Lebreton, L'Économie au Service des Hommes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1968), 99.

¹¹ Laurentin, *Liberation*, 109.

¹² Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 156.

chapter to the teaching on the questions that trouble, torment and divide men in their search for bread, for peace, for freedom, for justice, and for brotherhood."¹³

Beyond his desire to alleviate the suffering of the poor, Paul VI expressed four principal motivations for writing *Populorum Progressio*. First, he wanted to emphasize the theme of development in a stronger way than the Second Vatican Council had, "to approach it in language more direct, more dynamic, and more communicative."¹⁴ While *Gaudium et Spes* dealt with the issue of development, it was a compromise document written by committee, and Paul VI wanted a document that used stronger and more vigorous language than the Council had, one that went beyond the Council's general proposals to issues that were more concrete.

Second, the pope recognized that most of the members of the Council had been from developed, or industrialized, countries and that those countries which were underdeveloped had been under-represented, their voices heard only secondarily. Paul VI wished to stress his concern for the undeveloped and underdeveloped nations of the world and, in a real way, positioned himself as their representative through his document.

A third motivation for Pope Paul VI is mentioned in the text of the encyclical. In no. 4, the pope refers to two trips that he had taken to Latin America in 1960 and to Africa in 1962 which "brought us into direct contact with the acute problems pressing on continents full of life and hope." This paragraph also notes two trips he took after becoming pope, to India and the Holy Land, where he was "able to see and virtually touch the very serious difficulties besetting peoples of long-standing civilizations who are at grips with the problem of development." In *Populorum Progressio*, the pope continues to denounce injustices he witnessed on these trips and, indeed, the inequities in social and cultural progress that he had witnessed since becoming Archbishop of Milan. Finally, Paul's own reflection on the problems of development had led him to make a connection between development and peace, and he wished to express this connection in his encyclical. This led to probably the most famous pronouncement of the encyclical, "development is the new name for peace" (no. 86). René Laurentin, in a work written in response to the Medellín Conference which draws heavily from *Populorum Progressio*, notes that Paul VI had made statements similar to this at least twice before, once in a letter to United Nations Secretary General U Thant in May of 1966, and publicly later that year in a Mass in St. Peter's Square in October.¹⁵

Populorum Progressio is something of a departure from the social

¹³ "Drafted in French," *The Tablet*, April 1, 1967, 359.

¹⁴ Laurentin, *Liberation*, 109.

¹⁵ Laurentin, *Liberation*, 109-112.

encyclical tradition, in that it addresses social problems not just from a practical perspective—what should be done?—but goes beyond scriptural themes and natural law argumentation by drawing on modern philosophical and theological movements. The influences of two French intellectuals on its composition, priest-economist Louis-Joseph Lebreton and two of his works, *Le drame du siècle* and *Dynamique concrète du développement*, and Catholic political philosopher Jacques Maritain and his work *Humanisme intégral, problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté*, bear close scrutiny.

LOUIS-JOSEPH LEBRET

By far the greatest influence on the thinking of Paul VI and the actual composition of *Populorum Progressio* is the work of Louis-Joseph Lebreton (1897-1966), whose two most important works form the basis for *Populorum Progressio*. Lebreton wrote most of the first drafts of the encyclical before his death in 1966, drawing heavily from his own work and even quoting from his prior books verbatim. Lebreton's primary concern was economic development and its effects on the poor, not just on living conditions, but also on what might be termed their "spiritual condition."

Lebreton was a French Dominican priest who began considering and studying economics and its effects on people during the depressed economy of the 1930s. Lebreton came to the priesthood and to economics somewhat later in life than was usual at the time, not entering study for the priesthood until he was 26. Prior to his ordination, he attended the French Naval Academy and served as an officer in the French navy. He was seriously wounded in the First World War. After the war, Lebreton served as an instructor for a brief time at the Naval school, teaching maneuvering and navigation skills to navigators and helmsmen. During 1921 and 1922, he was assigned a tour of duty that would profoundly affect him and effectively put an end to his naval career: he served as an envoy and director of movement at the port of Beirut, Lebanon. Lebanon was a French protectorate at that point, and Beirut had been named its capital only in 1920. Lebreton's primary duty was to help re-establish Beirut as a functional Middle Eastern port for French ships.

His time in Beirut was Lebreton's first experience of real economic hardship and also his first experience with non-Frenchmen. He worked closely with Lebanese citizens and also established a close relationship with a group of Jesuit priests who worked to help rebuild the city. Lebreton was recalled from Lebanon late in 1922. He was promoted, made a member of the French Legion of Honor,¹⁶ and received

¹⁶ Most French naval officers were made members of the Legion of Honor after the war, see Malley, *Père Lebreton*, 22.

command of a ship, which he accepted. After a few months in command, however, and with his naval career on a fast track, Lebreton left the Navy and entered the Dominican novitiate of Lyon in 1923, at Rijckholt, Holland, where the Lyon Dominicans had established a house after their expulsion from France early in the 20th century. He was ordained there in 1930 at the age of 33.

Over the course of nine years, from shortly after his ordination in 1930 until he was recalled into the Navy during the Second World War, Lebreton developed the basic method he would use later in life when confronting the economic problems within a society. The first step was to observe the conditions already present and to document them. The second step was to try to understand the causes of these problems and to make a judgment about an appropriate solution to the problems. The last step was action, concrete actions which were designed to solve or alleviate the problems he had observed. Prayer was an important part of action, but concrete material actions to alleviate suffering were also important.

In 1939, when Lebreton was recalled to naval service for the Second World War, he served his time as a naval chaplain. In 1941 he settled in a community of Dominicans near Marseilles, where he established a study and research center which he called *Économie et Humanisme*. Originally conceived as a center for the study of Marxism and other economic alternatives, *Économie et Humanisme* evolved into a center for the study of all aspects of the economy and of possible solutions to economic problems that would serve the common good.¹⁷

The stated goals of *Économie et Humanisme* were inquiry and study, discussion among people of various professions, and the determination of the common good. In this period, Lebreton began to write both books and an intermittent periodical published by the center, also called *Économie et Humanisme*. He began to travel widely to study economic conditions in countries beyond France, mostly in French colonies or former French colonies, though he also traveled widely in South America and Francophone areas of Africa and Asia, especially Vietnam. His travels allowed Lebreton to refine and sharpen his economic views, which would later open many more doors for him. He was struck by how much economic development within a country affected the people within that country and how uneven development affected the people unevenly. For example, Lebreton made his first trip to Brazil in 1947, where he taught a short course in political science in São Paulo. He noted the diversity of development within the city, with a vast gulf between the rich in one part of the city and the poor in another part. The same was true throughout the country: the provinces to the south and west were more prosperous and the people in them richer and healthier, while the provinces to the north and east were

¹⁷ Malley, *Pere Lebreton*, 58.

poorer and sicker. Lebreton noted the same phenomenon in other countries and began to focus on development and developmental problems as a deeper course of study. As early as 1952, Lebreton was persuaded that unequal development would be the problem of the century.¹⁸

In 1956, Lebreton passed the day-to-day direction of *Économie et Humanisme* to another so that he could concentrate solely on problems of development and the implications of development. From 1953-56, Lebreton served as an expert at a United Nations conference on development. He later became a member of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization and would go on to serve as an economic advisor to the French government and the governments of several emerging nations. His desire to study development, and especially underdeveloped nations, led to the establishment of another research center, the *Institut de Recherches et de formation pour le développement harmonisé* (l'IRFED) in Paris. L'IRFED had a tri-fold purpose: 1) to study development worldwide and to research ways of ensuring a harmonious, or equally distributed, development, 2) the religious formation of participants and those in countries under study, and 3) worldwide travel to observe the conditions of development. Lebreton became the general director of l'IRFED.

For all the success of *Économie et Humanisme*, it was really l'IRFED which gave Lebreton a place on the world stage. He became an adviser to several governments and became recognized as an expert on development in what was then called the Third World. His work also came to the attention of the Vatican. In addition to his travels and studies, he was appointed to several United Nations commissions as a representative of the Holy See. In 1963, shortly before the former's death, John XXIII appointed Lebreton chief of the Vatican delegation to a UN conference on science, technology, and development. In 1964, Paul VI made him a member of the delegation of the Holy See to a UN conference on commerce and development.¹⁹

Alongside these responsibilities, Lebreton kept a heavy schedule of travel and consultation. From 1962 to 1965, he was involved in constructing development plans in Lebanon, Senegal, Vietnam, Rwanda, and Venezuela, as well as giving lectures all over the world. In 1963, Lebreton was invited to be an informal expert at the Second Vatican Council, and in 1964 he became one of the official experts, or *periti*, at the Council. As one of the experts he contributed to the writing of the document that would become *Gaudium et Spes*. In the course of his involvement in Vatican II, Lebreton had the opportunity to develop a relationship with Paul VI, who was familiar with many of Lebreton's writings.²⁰

¹⁸ Malley, *Pere Lebreton*, 94.

¹⁹ Malley, *Pere Lebreton*, 98.

²⁰ Campanini, "Radici Culturali," 50.

Lebret was a prolific author. He published or collaborated on more than 60 books, articles, and studies in his lifetime, as well as writing for and publishing *Économie et Humanisme*. Paul VI subscribed to this periodical from its inception. His works generally follow two lines. The first are the more spiritually centered works, which focus on theology, prayer, and God's relationship to human beings. *Guide du militant* (1948), *Action, marche vers Dieu* (1949), *Appels du Seigneur* (1957), and *Dimensions de la charité* (1958) are some of these spiritual works, along with several long articles which focus on the examination of conscience.²¹

One of the works that had a significant influence on Paul VI was *Dynamique concrète du développement*. It was written in 1961 and is a study of development patterns in several nations, complete with detailed charts, sophisticated economics graphs, maps, and extensive analysis of the problems brought on by development in each nation.²² In *Dynamique*, Lebret argues strongly that under-developed countries are frequently under-developed because of exploitation by the West.²³ Societies cannot advance unless they are no longer exploited for economic profit by more economically-sound Western countries, but allowed to turn their resources inward, to concentrate on their own advancement. The necessity of the subordination of one group of countries to another group for progress anywhere in the world is a fable.²⁴ What is needed is cooperation among countries so that all may benefit from economic progress. When such cooperation is achieved, development will be harmonious, benefitting all, not just a few. The economy must be directed to the service of human beings—this is the "concrete dynamic of development." Set in large boldface type in the French text to emphasize his point, he wrote, "Civilization's problem

²¹ See Louis-Joseph Lebret, *Guide du militant* (Paris: Efficacité, 1948); *Action, marche vers Dieu* (Paris: Efficacité, 1949); *Appels du Seigneur* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1957); and *Dimensions de la charité* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1958).

²² Louis-Joseph Lebret, *Dynamique concrète du développement* (Paris: Les éditions ouvrières, 1961). Lebret's *Le drame du siècle*, written near the end of his life, is probably the best synopsis of his thinking and heavily influenced Paul VI. *Le drame du siècle* was both a critique of the path of development the world was taking and a call to genuine cooperation among people and among nations to avert the problems brought on by uneven and often unfair development. While *Le drame du siècle* is one of the few of Lebret's works translated into English, translation problems and heavy redaction make it a distortion and a poor representation of his thought. It is available as *The Last Revolution, the Destiny of Over- and Under-Developed Nations*, trans. John Horgan (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

²³ See Lebret, *Dynamique*, 20: "Fréquemment, dans les pays sous-développés, on considère que l'état de sous-développement est la résultat d'une exploitation directe ou déguisée par l'Occident."

²⁴ Lebret, *Dynamique*, 21.

is above all a problem of stabilizing man within a generalized regimen of human economy and of harmonized integral development."²⁵

Lebret had sounded these themes before, but *Dynamique* is a more complete and comprehensive study than Lebret had previously attempted. He details the differences between the under-developed nations and those that are overdeveloped, having more than they need to sustain themselves. These comparisons include the differences in population, birth and death rates, potable water, incidences of widespread disease, and number of hospitals. In almost all cases, he contends, the underdeveloped countries have needs that are unmet and that could be met with the help of some of the overdeveloped countries.²⁶

Near the end of *Dynamique*, Lebret makes two important observations (which are somewhat obscured by his own focus on statistics and charts): people in need are people who will be aggressive to secure those needs,²⁷ and colonialism, while officially falling apart, is far from dead, as economic exploitation is the new colonialism.²⁸ Both of these themes were more fully explored in another of Lebret's works, *Le drame du siècle*.

Le drame du siècle is Lebret's call to action for the nations of the world, and is the singular economic work with the most profound influence on *Populorum Progressio*. Portions of at least 11 paragraphs of the encyclical are taken nearly verbatim from this book. Lebret develops several themes, but at the heart of them is a call for a new civilization, a new cooperation between the nations of the world that will ensure coordinated development which meets the crying needs of those who are currently poorer, sicker, and hungrier than those in developed countries. Here, Lebret gives a harsh critique of capitalism and of nations whose economies rely on unchecked capitalism. Capitalism itself is not a problem for Lebret and can be a good economic system, but a laissez-faire capitalism which allows growth and expansion at any cost to the poor for the purpose of making the rich wealthier is an unfair and inhumane system. Capitalism must be channeled, and development must be planned, in order to have an economy which works for all people. It is in this work that Lebret also points out that people and markets are linked across national lines, recognizing what we today would call the global marketplace.

Le drame begins with a summary in narrative form of the information that Lebret laid out in detail in *Dynamique*. The world is unequally developed, and this leads to great riches on the one hand and

²⁵ Lebret, *Dynamique*, 44: "Le problème de civilisation est avant tout un problème de valorisation des hommes dans un régime généralisé d'économie humaine et de développement intégral harmonisé." These are the only words so emphasized in the French text of *Dynamique*.

²⁶ Lebret, *Dynamique*, 64.

²⁷ Lebret, *Dynamique*, 422.

²⁸ Lebret, *Dynamique*, 430.

great poverty on the other, as those who are richer and more economically able exploit those who are poorer and weaker.²⁹ Not only are riches unequally distributed but so is population, hunger, disease, and early death.

Lebret sees the exploitation of the economically weak by the strong as the new form of imperialism. Colonial powers have ceased to exist in one sense, but they have become even stronger in another, as their former colonies become exploitable resources. The countries of Western Europe (certainly he means the former colonial empires, including his native France) are to blame, but equally to blame is the United States, which is the principal exploiter of developing nations. "The expression 'free world' masks the reality of a world dependent on North American economic power," he writes.³⁰

Both Americans and Europeans have become exploitive of others by subscribing to the "fatal error of capitalism": the tendency to forget that economies are not just products and money but involve people as well.³¹ Capitalism as practiced in western countries focuses too much on capital and fails to consider the people involved in producing goods or providing raw materials. The people who prosper under capitalism then think that they have prospered of their own accord and forget the many others who have contributed to their prosperity. Another error of capitalism is the tendency to think in the short term and to take the course of action which produces a financial profit quickly. This discourages investment in developing nations, which require long term investment for profitability.

Some of Lebret's harshest words are reserved for what Western nations would term "foreign economic aid" or "foreign development aid." Lebret believes this aid, since it is so insufficient and does not symbolize a true partnership between overdeveloped and underdeveloped nations, is merely a sop to the consciences of those who profit from the current arrangements. This aid is often given with strings attached so that it is not only meant to soothe western consciences but is paternalistic as well.³² This type of aid is not a mark of true cooperation.

For all of Lebret's criticisms of capitalism, he does not find that Marxism as practiced in the Soviet Union or socialism as practiced in other countries is a better alternative. That is also a development system which forgets the person and exploits the developing world. That

²⁹ Lebret, *Le Drame du Siècle, Misère, Sous-développement, Inconscience, Espoir* (Paris: Les éditions ouvrières, 1960), 103-106.

³⁰ Lebret, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 96: "L' expression de 'monde libre' masque la réalité d'un monde tributaire de la puissance économique nord-américaine."

³¹ Lebret, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 103.

³² Lebret, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 115-116.

socialism seems to include all peoples is only an illusion, since all things are meant to serve the state, not the people.³³

Finding both of these systems inappropriate to the creation of a new civilization dedicated to a coordinated and equal distribution of development, Lebreton makes his own proposal for a type of "third way" development, based on Christian principles. He calls for cooperation among the nations. The highly developed West must surrender some of its economic power to developing nations, while at the same time helping those nations to achieve a higher level of development. Two percent or more of the wealthier nations' operating budgets, given as aid to developing countries to use as they saw fit within their own situations, would not be too much and would have little impact on the wealthier nations. Wealthier nations are called to help the less affluent in the name of Christian unity but also in the name of the common economic good. The result will be a better, more peaceful world for all. To do less, however, is testimony to the great sin of our time, the greed of nations.³⁴

To Lebreton, the greatest evil would be to do nothing. "The greatest evil in the world," he wrote, "is not the poverty of the deprived but the indifference of the affluent."³⁵ Nothing less than a new outlook toward development and developing nations is required for peace to prevail and people worldwide to flourish.

JACQUES MARITAIN

Much more well-known, both contemporaneously and currently, is the work of French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). Before his elevation to the papacy, Paul VI had a long relationship with Maritain, beginning shortly before the former's ordination. While still a student, Montini translated Maritain's work *Three Reformers* into Italian in 1925.³⁶

Montini may have met Maritain as early as 1924,³⁷ but the two men came to know each other personally in the 1930s, when Montini was still involved with FUCI, the Italian Catholic university students' group. Montini helped to organize a graduate student group, the *Laureati*, an offshoot of FUCI, in 1936. This group met annually for "study weeks" and studied Maritain, particularly *True Humanism*, which became Maritain's most influential work in Italy. Maritain was chosen for several reasons, chief among them the reality that he was

³³ Lebreton, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 176.

³⁴ Lebreton, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 116.

³⁵ Lebreton, *Le Drame du Siècle*, 180: "Le plus grande mal du monde n'est pas la pauvreté des démunis mais l'inconscience des nantis."

³⁶ Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs, Luther, Descartes, Rousseau, avec six portraits* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1925).

³⁷ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 83.

free to speak when others, such as Luigi Sturzo and Alcide de Gasperi, had been silenced by the Fascists when *Laureati* began meeting. Maritain, Sturzo, and others shared many of the same ideas, but only Maritain was free to give voice to them, even though his previous works and speeches had raised controversy in Italy.³⁸

When Maritain became ambassador to the Vatican in 1945, he and Montini spent a good deal of time discussing the rise of atheistic humanism, which Maritain believed was what had allowed the extermination of so many people in concentration camps.³⁹ After Montini was elected pope and decided to continue the Second Vatican Council, he and Maritain again spent time together, often meeting at Castel Gandolfo. During the Council, Maritain was especially concerned with a declaration on the Jews. This had been something he and Paul VI had discussed in depth following the war and again when Maritain was working on the commission which produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Late in 1963, Paul VI began preparations for an encyclical that would become *Populorum Progressio*, and he is known to have discussed the plan for this encyclical with Maritain, calling it "an important work" on the themes of development and the place of the church in the development of peoples.⁴⁰ (This would be close to the same time he engaged Lebreton for some preparatory papers on economics.) While Montini was a student of Maritain, Maritain was not popular with all Italian society. He had been banned from the University of Milan in 1934 after one of his speeches on religion and culture, and his works caused controversy among Italian intellectuals, who either saw him as a sort of prophet, as Montini did, or as a troublemaker who was best kept quiet.⁴¹ At Vatican II, some, including the still-formidable Alfredo Ottaviani, wanted Maritain's Christian humanism condemned, along with the works of such theologians as Henri de Lubac and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.⁴² It is telling, then, that Paul VI chose to showcase not only de Lubac and other *ressourcement* theologians in *Populorum Progressio* but also quoted from Maritain's *True Humanism* twice. Coupled with the honor Paul VI had given to Maritain at the close of the Second Vatican Council, this was a clear papal signal that Maritain's Christian humanism was not to be condemned but embraced.

³⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 122. Also see Giorgio Campanini, "Montini e Maritain," in *G. B. Montini e la Società Italiana 1919-1939* (Brescia, Italy: Centro di Documentazione, 1985), 88-90.

³⁹ Philippe Chenaux, *Paul VI et Maritain, les rapports du "Montinianisme" et du "Maritainisme,"* (Brescia, Italy: Istituto Paolo VI, 1994), 42.

⁴⁰ Chenaux, *Paul VI et Maritain*, 90.

⁴¹ Campanini, "Montini e Maritain," 88-92.

⁴² Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 287.

Unlike Lebreton, who was directly involved in the composition of *Populorum Progressio* and therefore had his own work incorporated into the text, Maritain was a subtler influence on the composition of the encyclical. Of particular interest to the composition of *Populorum Progressio* is Maritain's *Humanisme intégral, problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté*, first published in 1936. Paul VI had studied this work in depth and its influence on him can be seen in the deeper themes of his encyclical.

L'humanisme intégral, by far the most significant of Maritain's works for *Populorum Progressio*, was published in French in 1936 and translated into English as *True Humanism* in 1938.⁴³ It is a collection of six lectures given by Maritain at the University of Santander in 1934, and compiled together with an introduction. These lectures represent Maritain's view of the human person and human society, including the direction each of these is taking and should take. This is probably the one work of Maritain's which had the most influence on Paul VI, and he began studying it soon after its publication in French. Maritain argues in this work that a genuine or a true humanism cannot be divorced from transcendence, from the sense that there is something supra-human that is beyond human abilities. This humanism is inseparable from civilization and culture, which are expressions of humanism. Any true philosophy of humanism must be "integral," incorporating all the facets of the human being—social, economic, cultural, religious—and grounded in respect for human dignity and "the rights of human personality."⁴⁴

Maritain sees a historical shift since the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Reformation away from a humanism that is theocentric, one which places God at the center of human endeavor, and toward a humanism that is anthropocentric, one that believes that human beings are at the center of all things. "This first kind of humanism," he writes,

recognizes that the centre for man is God; it implies the Christian conception of man as at once a sinner and redeemed, and the Christian conception of grace and freedom, whose principles we have already called to mind. The second kind of humanism believes that man is his own centre, and therefore the centre of all things. It implies a naturalistic conception of man and of freedom.⁴⁵

⁴³ Jacques Maritain, *L'humanisme intégral* (Paris: Aubier, 1936) and *True Humanism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938). There are many English editions of this work. The translation referred to in this essay is the edition referenced in footnote 44 of *Populorum Progressio*.

⁴⁴ Maritain, *True Humanism*, xvii.

⁴⁵ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 19.

This anthropocentric humanism focuses on the temporal, the world which will eventually end in destruction, to the detriment of the spiritual, the incarnational aspect of humanity that will endure. Such a humanism is mistaken, and, more than mistaken, it is inhuman. This is the result of philosophy which has turned to the scientific and away from the spiritual. The extreme results of an anthropocentric humanism can be seen in atheism, especially Soviet atheism, for which Maritain has many condemnations. This "socialist humanism" subverts individuality, taking away the personhood of the human being in service to the good of the collective set of human beings. Of the Soviet version of humanism, Maritain writes,

It is a question for it of changing man so as to oust the transcendent God of whom he is an image, of creating a human being who will be in himself the god, lacking no supra-temporal attribute, of history and his titanic dynamism, a human being who must first of all be de-individualized, whose joy will be in his devotion to all, in being an organ of the revolutionary community, in expectation of the day when he will find on the triumph of the collective man over nature a transfigured personality.⁴⁶

A person is not really a person in this philosophy but rather a part of the state, which orders all things to its own survival. Communism is denounced, but Maritain also offers a strong critique of capitalism as a materialist universe, one in which the human being is not a person but a consumer, a part of the engine that drives the capitalist society. This can be as debasing to the human person as communism, even though many capitalist societies allow freedom for spirituality.

Both communistic and capitalistic philosophies call out for radical changes in the temporal order, a transformation which will allow people to once again understand their spirituality and return to a more theocentric humanism which allows for the growth of the human person but is still focused on God and the Kingdom of God. Maritain writes:

The social and political philosophy implied by integral humanism calls for radical changes in our actual system of culture ... a substantial transformation. And this transformation demands, not only the inauguration of new social structures and a new scheme of social life succeeding that of capitalism, but also (and consubstantially) a rousing of forces of faith, of intelligence and of love in the inner depths of the soul, an advance in the discovery of spiritual realities. Only on these conditions can man truly enter more

⁴⁶ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 54.

profoundly into the deep planes of his nature without mutilating or disfiguring it.⁴⁷

These radical changes amount to a “new Christendom,” a new Christian ordering of society, politics, and economics. As Maritain himself puts it, the new Christendom will be “a temporal system or age of civilization whose animating form will be Christian and which will correspond to the historical climate of the epoch on whose threshold we are.”⁴⁸ The new Christendom would not be confined to one country but, like Christendom of old, would encircle the world.

This new Christendom encompassed several points. First, it was to be pluralistic, incorporating economic and religious diversity in recognition of the autonomy and freedom of the human person. Although the human person is rightly oriented to God as the center of all things, faith cannot be forced but must be approached in freedom. This pluralism and freedom contributes to the common good by allowing all the opportunity to know their theocentric humanity in their own way. Most importantly, it is not to be an authoritarian state in any way.⁴⁹

Although grounded in Christian principles, the new Christendom would be secular, led by lay people, not the institutional church. This is not an anti-religious state but one which is grounded in the dignity of the human person and constructs a temporal order which is indicative of that dignity. The common good in the temporal order would be an end in itself, though only an intermediate end and subordinate to the spiritual ends of humankind. A Christian secular state which recognizes the essential humanity of all members of society can construct a just social system in which all may participate, not just those who hold authority. This is in sharp contrast to the current regimes of communism, which concentrates authority in a few who may then subjugate the many, and capitalism, which does not recognize each person’s humanity within the profit/loss system. After the end of capitalism and the establishment of this Christian secular state, the common good would involve the common ownership of some parts of society, including the common ownership—and profit from—the means of production.⁵⁰

Maritain envisions the new Christendom as a “concrete historical ideal,” a vision to be worked for through concrete actions in the temporal sphere.⁵¹ Human beings need to choose between a system which dehumanizes them and makes them subject to science and rationalism and a system which recognizes their essential humanity and allows for

⁴⁷ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 82.

⁴⁸ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 126.

⁴⁹ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 156-204.

⁵⁰ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 205-222.

⁵¹ Maritain, *True Humanism*, 121.

the re-emergence of the theocentric humanism which is the proper way of seeing the world. Such a transformation will require work, hard work, in political, social, and economic spheres. But this "concrete historical ideal" of the new Christendom is worth the work, because it is the ideal to which all people are called, for the realization of the fulfillment of humanity. He writes,

Indeed there is nothing which rouses more scandal and, in a sense, is more revolutionary...than the belief in a form of political action which is intrinsically Christian in its principles, in its spirit, in its methods, and the claim to advance the world to a form of political action which is vitally Christian. But the man conscious of these things knows that the first way of serving the common good is to remain faithful to the values of truth, of justice, of love which are its principal element.⁵²

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE STUDY OF *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*

The marriage of Lebreton's thinking on economics and development and their connection to human flourishing and Maritain's integral humanism is one of the truly original and significant contributions of *Populorum Progressio*. While much had been written, both within and outside the Church, on economics and the responsibilities of various actors, it is *Populorum Progressio* which ties economic development and the complete development of the human person together as intrinsically related and inseparable. The concepts introduced by *Populorum Progressio* were relevant in their own context in 1967 and have become even more relevant in the 50 years since, as economic globalization has forced the issues of exploitation, economic colonization, and inequality ever more to the surface. As issues like these become more important in a globalized economy, *Populorum Progressio* can continue to offer a moral direction for the future of development, both economic and human. To hear this voice, however, requires an ongoing engagement with the document so that its insights can be better connected to the wider tradition of economic and social teachings. Just as *Rerum Novarum* and other encyclicals from the tradition are applied to new or ongoing situations, so must *Populorum Progressio* be one of the first places to turn for guidance on globalization, poverty, and inequality.

The way forward for scholarship on *Populorum Progressio* is defined as much by what is missing as by what has already been written on the document. A lack of resources restricts scholarship on every level. Of particular concern is the lack of resources available on the work of Lebreton. A fuller understanding of Paul VI's document de-

⁵² Maritain, *True Humanism*, 260.

mands a deeper understanding of Lebreton's life and work, his publications, and his connections to worker movements and other Catholic movements in France and throughout the world. While Maritain's work and connection to *Populorum Progressio* is well known, Lebreton has not become nearly as widely analyzed. Though not unknown outside of his native France, much of his work remains unavailable to scholars in North America. Most university libraries do not shelve copies of his most influential works, likely because they are out of print and have never been translated to English. Until recently, he did not even merit an English-language Wikipedia page. Although there is some scholarship on Lebreton and his work, much of it is older than *Populorum Progressio* itself and only available on a limited basis through European libraries. Cost and availability certainly have been contributing factors restricting needed scholarship in this regard.

The lack of resources also offers a somewhat unique opportunity for scholars to pursue projects on *Populorum Progressio* in conjunction with colleagues around the world. The document itself stresses the need for "mutual collaboration and a heightened sense of solidarity," which is likely to be fruitful not just in relationships between nations but also in relationships between scholars. The problems of accessing materials and translating them to a useable format can be overcome with the aid of colleagues in other nations where such materials exist. More importantly, collaborative work opens possibilities for mutual understanding that is in the spirit of the document itself. Reaching across the bounds of language, nation, and institution can lead not only to better understanding on all sides but to a true solidarity among scholars. Just as there are wealthy nations and those that have less, there are well-off institutions and those that have far fewer resources. If it is imperative for wealthy nations and under-developed ones to work together for the better development of all, can we not say the same for all scholars? Such collaboration can only lead to the same end imagined by Paul VI, an interdependence based on mutual solidarity that contributes greatly to the good of all. **M**