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Joseph Vnuk

Peer Reviewed Articles

**Motifs of Death and Hell in the Teaching
of Jesus. Part 2: An Examination of Gehenna**

Kim Papaioannou

**Wise Participation in the Divine Life:
Lessons from the Life of Daniel**

Tim Meadowcroft

**Church and Politics in the Social Doctrine
of the Catholic Church: An Application to PNG**

Douglas Young

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



CHURCH AND POLITICS IN THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: AN APPLICATION TO PNG

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Abstract

It is now over fifty years since the publication of the groundbreaking encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*. This article reviews the significance for church-state relations of this document and other papal documents that came after it. It applies the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine, especially the concept of Integral Human Development, to contemporary Papua New Guinean society, with special attention to the challenge of corruption. The article concludes with specific suggestions as to how the churches of PNG might work together to defeat corruption and create a more just society.

Keywords

Populorum Progressio, church and state, Integral Human Development, corruption, ecumenism

INTRODUCTION

*“He raises the poor from the dust ... to assign them a seat of honour”
(The Song of Hannah, 1 Sam 2:8).*

The year 2017 marked fifty years since the groundbreaking encyclical letter of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples).¹ This article reflects on how Pope Paul VI approached the issue of the relationship between the Catholic Church and political and economic life, and how this reflection has developed in the last fifty years. The paper then applies these principles to the present context of Papua New Guinea, where the

¹ An encyclical is a papal letter addressed to all of the bishops of the Catholic Church, and sometimes to “all people of good will.”

relationship between the state and the Catholic Church is facing new challenges.

Pope Paul's encyclical (1967) addressed the issue of the relationship between the Catholic Church and political life from the perspective of the emerging social doctrine of the Catholic Church,² with its biblical (e.g., Gen 1:26–31; Matt 19:13–15; 1 Cor 3:16; Rom 5:6–8), doctrinal, and theological foundations in the inherent dignity of the human person and the obligation to pursue the common good, which includes the development of each person and of the whole person.

The Church, which has long experience in human affairs and has no desire to be involved in the political activities of any nation, 'seeks but one goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth; to save, not to judge; to serve, not to be served.' Founded to build the kingdom of heaven on earth rather than to acquire temporal power, the Church openly avows that the two powers—Church and State—are distinct from one another; that each is supreme in its own sphere of competency. But since the Church does dwell among men, she has the duty 'of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.' Sharing the noblest aspirations of men and suffering when she sees these aspirations not satisfied, she wishes to help them attain their full realization. So she offers man her distinctive contribution: a global perspective on man and human realities. The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be au-

² Earlier explorations include: Leo XIII (1891), *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things); Pius XI (1931), *Quadragesimo Anno* (On the Fortieth Year); John XXIII (1961), *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) and (1963) *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth); Vatican Council II (1965) *Gaudium et Spes* (The Joys and Hopes); and subsequently, John Paul II (1981) *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), (1987) *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), (1987) *Centesimus Annus* (On the Hundredth Year), (1994) *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (The Coming of the Third Millennium); Benedict XVI (2005) *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), (2007) *Spe Salvi* (In Hope We Are Saved), (2009) *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth); all well summarized by Rob Esdaille, "2000 years of Catholic Ethics," n.p. [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.catholic-social-teaching.org.uk/principles/history>. While he prefers symbolic action, Pope Francis has added the following to this illustrious history: (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Good News); (2015) *Laudato Si'* (On Care for our Common Home). There are also a large number of other documents from the Vatican departments and bishops' conferences.

thentic, it must be well rounded; *it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man.*³

The encyclical begins with an inquiry into the nature of “progress,” reflecting on the global situation where so many people are suffering from hunger, poverty, disease and ignorance, at least partly as a result of colonial exploitation. The Pope calls on people to act, and not just talk, so that each person and all people can progress towards a development which enables them to be truly human, free, and fulfilled. There is more to progress than economic growth. Action is required to address anomalies in world trade, distribution of resources, inequality, the growing gap between rich and poor, change related conflict, and racism. The Catholic Church, as an “expert in humanity”, has something to say to this situation, especially through gospel-based loving service, even though sometimes its missionaries were also influenced by colonial thinking. A new perspective requires rethinking private property, capitalism, and free enterprise in the light of justice, even including expropriation of landed estates, revolution, or at least radical reform. Family life is the bedrock of human society but parents must plan families responsibly in the light of the “population explosion.” The wealthy nations must act in solidarity, with justice and charity, dialoguing and planning together, and establishing a “world fund” from reduced military expenditure and reduction of waste. Development is the new name for peace, which is more than the absence of war.

The relationship between church and state is expressed in terms of “Integral Human Development”, a concept that also found its way into the Constitution of PNG as the very first National Goal.⁴ I believe that this principle, and other principles contained, at least in nascent form, in *Popu-*

³ *Populorum Progressio*, Art. 13–14 [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html. Italics added.

⁴ “1. Integral human development. We declare our first goal to be for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others. WE ACCORDINGLY CALL FOR– (1) everyone to be involved in our endeavours to achieve integral human development of the whole person for every person and to seek fulfilment through his or her contribution to the common good”: Preamble to the *Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea* [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.parliament.gov.pg/images/misc/PNG-CONSTITUTION.pdf>.

lorum Progressio, had a direct influence on the PNG Constitution and our national values by way of then Catholic priest, now President of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, John Momis.

John Momis was a student at Holy Spirit Seminary from 1963–1970. The seminary moved from Kap near Madang to its present location in Bomania in 1968, with Pat Murphy SVD (1927–1978) as Rector and Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Ecumenism. Holy Spirit Seminary was the first tertiary institution in PNG, pre-dating the University of Papua New Guinea which was established in 1965, by two years. Pat Murphy was a true fruit of the reforms of Vatican II, as manifested in his commitment to both ecumenism and the social teaching of the Catholic Church. While serving as a priest, John Momis became Deputy Chairman of the Constitutional Planning Committee which recommended these principles and values for inclusion in the Constitution of Papua New Guinea.⁵ The Constitution, as possibly all law does, still rests on the willingness of human beings to behave ethically.

Thus, the PNG Constitution, enshrining the values of the nation, is in harmony with the values and principles for social life laid out in *Populorum Progressio* and all that followed it. When the church, in this case the Catholic Church, calls the nation to respect the dignity of the human person, “but even more ... that the primary commitment of each person towards others ... must be for the promotion and integral development of the person,”⁶ she is leading the nation towards its true identity. The subsequent documents of Catholic social teaching, especially Pope John Paul II’s (1987) *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), develop

⁵ Constitutional Planning Committee, “PNG Constitutional Planning Committee Report 1974” [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.paclii.org/pg/CPCReport/TAB.htm>. But there is a “fatal flaw” in the Constitution in that a surprising amount of power is vested in the Speaker on the assumption that he or she will always be neutral. But that has not proven to be the case. C. Stewart, “Papua New Guinea’s Constitution: the fatal flaw,” *Outrigger: Blog of the Pacific Institute*, 5 October 2012, n.p. [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://pacificinstitute.anu.edu.au/outrigger/2012/10/05/papua-new-guineas-constitution-fatal-flaw/>.

⁶ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 131 [cited 1 September 2017]. Online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

this foundational principle by expounding related principles: the dignity of the human person, equality, subsidiarity, and participation.

THE CONTEMPORARY PNG SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Pacific Leadership and Governance Precinct operates as a think tank for training of public servants in PNG and possibly throughout the Pacific.⁷ The driving idea behind this project is to ensure not only competence, efficiency, and effectiveness of public servants and leaders, but also promotion of the ethical conduct which must be the basis of these other service skills. The PLGP recognizes all of the negative factors in our social context: corruption, nepotism, discrimination, poor delivery of services; and especially how these have an impact on rural or marginalized people through limited access to quality education and health services.

It is well known and well founded that corruption is at the heart of all these issues. Corruption is commonly defined as the misuse or “abuse of public office for private gain.”⁸ Using this definition, PNG is ranked at 136 out of 176 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2016), with a score of 28/100 where the global average is 43/100.⁹ A country at the world average of 43/100 is already perceived as “indicating endemic corruption in a country's public sector.”¹⁰ The TI website further points out the close links between (what can be described as a “vicious circle” of) corruption, unequal distribution of power, and unequal distribution of wealth. This type of behaviour is heavily criticized in the

⁷ Pacific Leadership + Governance Precinct [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://pacificprecinct.org/>.

⁸ Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network of the World Bank, “Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank” (September 1997): 8 (1–69) [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/corruptn/corruptn.pdf>. See also United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Documents, publications and tools” [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/publications.html>.

⁹ Transparency International Papua New Guinea Inc., “Annual Report 2015,” 6 (1–48) [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.transparencypng.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/TIPNG-AR-2015-small.pdf>. See also Transparency International, “Papua New Guinea” [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <https://www.transparency.org/country/PNG>.

¹⁰ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2016” [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016.

Scriptures (see, e.g., Prov 28:15, 29:2; Eph 5:11), and Pope Francis describes corruption as a cancer.¹¹

The second National Goal of the PNG Constitution speaks of “equality and participation.”¹² *Populorum Progressio* deals with equality more in terms of post-colonial international relations (Art. 52, 54, 58, 60) and with “participation” only once¹³ where it is taken for granted as a value. Both these dimensions (equality and participation) have been much further developed since 1967, based largely on the radical equality implicit in the incarnation and spelled out by Paul (e.g., Gal 3:28). The most obvious act of participation in a democratic society is the vote, exercised in freedom and with due respect for the equal voting rights of others. However, citizens may participate in many other ways through the activities of civil society. In PNG, at this time, they are supposed to also be able to participate in the deliberations of District Development Authorities which set priorities for expenditure in a district.¹⁴ The right of a person to contribute to the fabric of society according to their gifts is crucial for the full development of the person and of the society. Equality also means that each person’s vote is of equal value and that no one should be subject to unjust discrimination, either by way of favouritism (nepotism, bias) or prejudice (bigotry, intolerance). The advent of the Emmanuel is, therefore, the one and “ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class.”¹⁵ The *Cate-*

¹¹ Catholic News Agency, “In a book foreword, Pope Francis calls corruption ‘a cancer’” n.p. [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-pope-francis-corruption-is-a-cancer-to-society-98381/>.

¹² Preamble to the *Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea* [cited 31 August 2017]. Online: <http://www.parliament.gov.pg/images/misc/PNG-CONSTITUTION.pdf>.

¹³ “The injustice of certain situations cries out for God’s attention. Lacking the bare necessities of life, whole nations are under the thumb of others; they cannot act on their own initiative; they cannot exercise personal responsibility; they cannot work toward a higher degree of cultural refinement or a greater participation in social and public life” (*Populorum Progressio*, Art. 30).

¹⁴ <http://www.parliament.gov.pg/uploads/acts/14A-40.pdf>. Note that meetings of the Board are open to the public (VI.21.1)

¹⁵ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 144 [cited 1 September 2017]. Online:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

chism of the Catholic Church, citing the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (29.2), also asserts that the equality of men and women “rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.”¹⁶ This dignity is based on their being created in the image of the one God and their being redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ. This fundamental equality is also the basis for their participation in “the same divine beatitude”¹⁷ and in decisions that affect their lives (see texts using the image of the body to describe the church: Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27). Subsidiarity (the individual, the family, and the community precede the State), though not directly mentioned in *Populorum Progressio*, is closely linked with the principle of participation, in that decisions should be made at the lowest “level” possible (Mark 6:30–56 is often cited as an illustration of this). Although as much social activity and decision-making as possible should be decentralized to (or claimed by) the village or clan level, it is also true to say that structures and relationships such as the *wantok* system that work well at the village or clan level cannot be successfully transposed to a higher or “national” level.¹⁸

THE IDEAL

The ideal presented by Catholic social teaching is Integral Human Development. This is the recognition of the innate dignity of the human person and the pursuit of the common good.¹⁹ There are natural law arguments for both these principles (as human rights).²⁰ We are primarily guided by sa-

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1935 [cited 1 September 2017]. Online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P6P.HTM.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1394 [cited 1 September 2017]. Online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P6P.HTM.

¹⁸ A. Murray, *Thinking about Political Things: An Aristotelian Approach to Pacific Life* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), 26.

¹⁹ Other related principles are solidarity (as in the Golden Rule: Matt 7:12; John 3:16), the universal destination of all created goods (based on the 7th commandment, Thou shalt not steal: Exod 20:15; Deut 5:19; Matt 19:18; see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2401–2406), and the preferential option for the poor (as in the whole Bible, but note 1 Sam 2:8 above and Matt 25; see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2448–2449).

²⁰ P. Lee and R.P. George, “The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity,” *Ratio Juris: An International Journal of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* 21 (2008): 173–93; J. Goyette, “On the Transcendence of the Political Common Good: Aquinas Versus the New Natural Law Theory,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Spring, 2013): 133–

cred Scripture which affirms that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, and that the obligation to love one's neighbour is non-negotiable except in its practical working out, which is the proper domain of politics. How we are to love our neighbour through decision-making about the allocation of resources, budgets, education, health and social programs is the stuff of politics. One hopes and expects that these decisions are made for the benefit of all in the context of the common good rather than for the benefit of a ruling elite.

At a recent round table discussion involving most of the Public Service Commissioners of the Pacific, the topic discussed was "values based leadership". One commissioner asked what values are and can they vary? The response was that there are universal values, but their implementation and the priorities given to them may vary according to the cultural context. Several cited their nature as a Christian country (e.g., Cook Islands, Vanuatu) driven by Christian values. But no one was very specific about what those Christian values might be beyond "honesty". One made the point that Christian values create good leaders, as distinct from appointed leaders discovering values after the fact. The values identified as guides for the PNG Public Service are integrity, accountability, wisdom, respect, and honesty.

THE CONVERSION: FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

How do we get from where we are to where we want to be, that is, from a political life characterized by corruption to one based on the dignity of the human person and the common good?

1. We must work and witness together to present the ideal vision of the innate dignity of the human person and the consequent human rights (to life, self-determination, natural justice, etc.) so as to provide an environment of responsibility, accountability and mutual respect in which corruption cannot flourish. Currently the churches are not effectively united or organized in their efforts to improve good governance.²¹ I note

155. Online: <https://thomasaquinas.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/goyette-transcendence-political-common-good.pdf>

²¹ V. Hauck, A. Mandie-Filer, and J. Bolger, *Ringing the Church Bell: The Role of Churches in Governance and Public Performance in Papua New Guinea* (Discussion Paper No. 57E; Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management, January

that very recently the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification, already endorsed by the Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches, has been endorsed by the Reformed Churches with the proviso that “the Statement of Association should emphasize the connection between justification and justice as a Reformed contribution to future ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of justification”.²² As we grow in our common understandings, we must also grow in our common work for justice. Pope Francis also calls for cooperation among churches, religions, and people of good will to overcome the cancer of corruption. We already have a good foundation in an agreed statement or policy on development and on gender.²³

2. We must also witness to good governance in our churches and institutions. Our own positive witness is far more effective than complaining about corruption at the national level when we are fully aware of weaknesses in our own institutions.²⁴ Here too we have a good foundation in our cooperation in Church Partnership Program (CPP) on governance and leadership training.
3. Thus, within our churches and in our teaching and preaching about leadership and good governance, we should stress the servant leadership model as seen in the Scriptures but also, not surprisingly, in good management.²⁵ We have to move from the Big Man model to Servant leadership in the service of the common good. Someone who wants to serve will be a good leader, but someone who wants to lead will not be a good servant. The church as the body of Christ does not want political

2005) [cited 1 September 2017]. Online: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan023626.pdf>.

²² World Communion of Reformed Churches, “JDDJ Association” n.p. [cited 1 September 2017]. Online: <http://werc.ch/jddj>.

²³ PNG Church Partnership Program, “Theology of Development Statement: “PNG Church Partnership Program Theology of Development Statement,” *Catalyst* 46.1 (2016): 56–59.

²⁴ See, e.g., P.A. Tanda, “An Analytical Evaluation of the Effects of the Wantok System in the South Sea Evangelical Church of PNG,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 27.1 (2011): 6–39.

²⁵ See R.K. Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader* (rev. ed.; Indianapolis: Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991).

power but wants to serve, and so can exert a strong moral power on political leadership, in the style of Jesus himself.

4. Christians should engage in political life by running for elected office in ethical ways, by participating in consultative processes such as the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council where possible, and by serving on government boards and panels. It is far better to be in the room where the decisions are being made than to be on the outside looking in.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the causes and roots of our current social, economic, and political situation in PNG, a fundamental issue that requires the healing power of the gospel is corruption in every situation or level of society. The Word of God has much to say and our theological reflection on the Word since the time of the apostles gives us the resources with which to bring truth to power. This is best done if, with due respect to and acknowledgement of our diversity, we can speak and witness with a common voice.