

A Belated but Still Timely Word about the Encyclical “Populorum Progressio”

by

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IT is more than strange that the Catholic Church intends to involve itself intellectually and morally—thus pledging its authority—in the “construction of a better world”¹ although this construction is being carried out apart from God and even against Him. Since when has it been the Church’s duty to interest itself in the prosperity of those who long to destroy it? As the Encyclical “Populorum Progressio” has obviously nothing to do with the Augustinian *Civitas Dei*, to say the least, it must be concluded that the authors and followers of this Encyclical likewise have nothing to do with the real Catholic Church.

We are given a prominent reminder that the Church must “examine the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel,” but this is precisely what she is not doing; on the contrary, she is closing her eyes to the signs of the times and interpreting the Gospel according to the darkness of the world.

Evil, in the world, comes from sin—the sins of the poor as well as of the rich—and not from any such social and economic structures as are normal to man; the Church is there to remind us of this, but she does not do so; like her adversaries, she puts the blame on the external situation, as though that was all, and it is only as an after-thought that she admits, not without some embarrassment, that of course one must not sin... Evil is sin, and sin essentially includes irreligion; but the “Church” does not say so, or if she does she so wraps up this primordial truth in fashionable illusions that no one notices any longer that it is a primordial truth. While verbally objecting to sin, she blesses the fruits of sin and collaborates in their organization.

¹ For those who have not read the Encyclical and whose hopes might be raised by the mention of a “better world,” we only say that the “progress” in question is defined in terms which suggest the manifesto of some political organization terrified of losing the votes of the atheist and agnostic elements in the electorate. In a flood of jargon such as might be expected from journalists, politicians and directors of public companies, but never from the Church, we are urged to acquire “the taste for research and invention, the acceptance of calculated risk, and audacity in enterprise.” We are furthermore invited to make new efforts towards industrialization.” The supreme end in view would seem, to be that every people should become “the artisan of its own destiny!” (Editor).

The “Church” does not see—or pretends not to see—that “civilization,” “our time,” “culture,” and scientific and technical “progress” have come on the one hand from the systematic forgetting of God and on the other hand from love of the world, and that by their very nature they foster and increase this sacrilegious forgetting and this false love; that there is no common measure between this “progress” and those normal and traditional techniques which prevailed everywhere before the outbreak of the scientist, machinist age. Strange to say, we are told to pray for the “progress of the sciences, source of knowledge of God,” whereas elementary truth on the one hand and experience on the other prove, firstly that the absence of these modern sciences is not—and cannot be—the cause of less knowledge of God, and secondly that in fact these hypertrophied, unbalanced and inhuman sciences engender, on the contrary, the worst ignorance and the most pernicious of errors. Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus taught the “little way,” not the “go ahead” of Teilhard de Chardin; she taught the “way of childhood,” not that of “adults.”

One must point out this perfidiousness of the encyclical “*Populorum Progressio*”: “...our predecessors did not fail in the duty of their trust to throw the light of the Gospel on the social questions of their times.” Of their times!² It is precisely this specification which makes it possible to write off all the previous Popes; what is to become of the magisterium of the Church? And without such a magisterium—indispensable for every intrinsically orthodox religion—what is to become of Western Christendom?³

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

For this is the will of God, our sanctification.

Ruysbroeck.

² The masterly encyclicals of Pope Pius X denouncing modernist error are just as applicable to our times as they were to the outset of this century, and the expression of the universal truths which they contain is even more urgently needed today than it was then. But by limiting these truths to “their times,” the present encyclical leaves itself free to disregard them. (Editor)

³ It is true that the magisterium can take the most diverse forms; its support can be a collectivity which is traditionally invested with the indispensable authority, like the Holy Synods in the Orthodox Church; but in the Church of Rome it is certainly represented by the papacy. In all cases the normal functioning of the authority depends on a body of precise conditions which, in the modern world, are becoming more and more precarious. (Author’s Note)