Thank you to the organizers for giving me the privilege of speaking at this ‘Just Faith’ Conference. I find it very heart-warming to see that the conference has been jointly organized by three key Scottish agencies: Missio, SCIAF, and ‘Justice and Peace Scotland’.

I begin this talk by sharing a little of my own experience. In 1973 I went to work as a missionary in Africa. Having worked for some years in West Africa, I later spent shorter periods working in Eastern and Southern Africa. It was in Africa that I began to experience at first-hand what the Vatican Council called ‘the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of people, especially of those who are poor or afflicted’ (GS 1). During those years, and over the years since then, the encyclical Populorum Progressio has been a foundational element in my life and work.

BACKGROUND

A brief word about the background to this document. Two great social encyclicals were issued by Pope John XXIII: Mater et Magistra in 1961, the year before the Second Vatican Council began, and Pacem in Terris in 1963, issued during the Council. Together they called for a theology and spirituality which put a new stress on justice, human welfare and progress. Vatican II moved even more radically in this direction. It liberated us from a dualistic and escapist spirituality and put far more focus on the continuity between this world and the next. Pope Paul VI brought this to a new level by four major interventions. The first was his 1965 speech to the UN where he called strongly for respect for human rights. The second came just fifty years ago in 1967 with his great encyclical Populorum Progressio – ‘On the Development of Peoples.’ This encyclical did for the international community what Pope Leo XIII did for Western industrial society in 1891 through Rerum Novarum, the first of the great social encyclicals. Whereas the emphasis on Pope Leo was on justice between individuals or classes within industrialized countries, the focus of Pope Paul was rather on relationship between nations at a global level. The third major intervention by Paul VI on justice issues came in 1971 in a document called Octogesima Adveniens which filled out what he had said in his encyclical by insisting that the new international economic order which he had called for had to be brought about by political action. The fourth important intervention by Paul VI was his 1975 document Evangelization in the Modern World in which he presented a unified vision of liberation which integrated work for justice with the more overtly spiritual dimensions of our Christian faith.

NEW AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT

The teaching of Paul VI, above all in his great encyclical Populorum Progressio, provided both an incentive and a solid theological basis for very significant and closely related practical advances which took place in the Catholic Church within a few years of the publication of the encyclical. A major development in the institutional Church as a result of the Populorum Progressio encyclical was a new awareness of the importance by national bishops’ conferences in Western countries of justice and peace commissions and agencies such as ‘Justice and Peace Scotland.’ At the same time it greatly enriched the understanding of evangelization promoted by Missio. And it gave a great boost to the work
of SCIAF which had been established by the Scottish bishops two years before the encyclical. Overall the encyclical inspired the Catholics of Scotland and their leaders to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the promotion of justice and authentic human development both at home and in the poorer parts of the world. I can speak from my own experience of the importance of this commitment, as I shall indicate a little later in this talk.

LIBERATION

A second major follow-up to Populorum Progressio was the Conference of the Latin American bishops at Medellín in 1968 where these church leaders effectively adopted a key principle of liberation theology by making a formal commitment to take the side of the poor in their non-violent struggle for justice. This official support by the Church leaders of grassroots movements for justice was enormously important in the Latin American countries most of which were grossly unjust.

The new direction taken by the Latin American official leaders and the grassroots movements played a key role in encouraging the development in other parts of the world of local or national grassroots movements which were inspired and animated by liberation theology. The aim of these movements and organizations was to empower poor and marginalized groups so that they could become what Paul VI called ‘artisans of their own destiny’ (PP 65; cf. PP 34).

One of the best-known and most effective of these movements was the one which came to be called ‘Training for Transformation.’ It was designed and facilitated by two women, Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. It was established in Kenya in 1973 under the auspices of the Mill Hill missionary bishop Colin Davis. Its many volunteers and small number of staff were mainly lay people with some religious sisters and brothers and a few priests. And it was my contact with this movement in 1975 in the desert area of northern Kenya which changed the whole direction of my life, and explains how it comes about that I’ve been invited to give this talk.

The theological basis of the ‘Training for Transformation’ programme was Paul VI’s encyclical Populorum Progressio plus key aspects of liberation theology. The on-the-ground practical methodology which it adopted was a creative combination of the insights of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire and all kinds of human relations and group planning training. It linked three key elements: (1) personal empowerment of poor people, (2) participatory leadership and joint planning, and (3) discovering and challenging the root causes of poverty and oppression.

It was in Turkana, a desert area in the north of Kenya, that I first came in contact with Anne Hope and the ‘Training for Transformation’ programme. That was just 41 years ago when I was 41 years of age. I was invited to take part in a week-long training workshop which they were facilitating there in the desert. That was one of the most memorable experiences of my life because it was there that I underwent a kind of conversion experience which has changed my whole approach to life. Fundamentally, I moved from being a lecturer to being a facilitator. I might say that I moved from being in ‘transmit mode’ to being in ‘listen mode.’ This experience transformed my thinking, my feeling, and the activities in which I have engaged all during this second half of my life. And the encyclical Populorum Progressio was a key foundation for that conversion.

In the late 1970s and all through the 1980s I played a role in establishing and fostering in various African countries the ‘Training for Transformation’ programme which had brought about my conversion. I found enormous fulfilment first of all in going through
a training programme as a facilitator of the programme and then in going on to facilitate workshops in ten African countries as well as back in Ireland. When we were establishing the programme in West Africa I turned for moral and financial support to a consortium of four development agencies, one of the most supportive of which was SCIAF.¹ With their support we ran the training workshops in marginalized urban and rural parts of Nigeria, and then extended the programme to Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. In the 1980s and 1990s I was involved in the programme in Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. The encyclical *Populorum Progressio* provided the theological underpinning for this work.

A CHALLENGE TO ECONOMIC LIBERALISM

Having shared this personal experience I want now to go on to spell out some aspects of *Populorum Progressio* which convince me that it has made a major contribution to Catholic Social Teaching. As I have already pointed out, a crucial aspect of the encyclical was that Paul VI put the emphasis on *international* social justice rather than just on justice at the *national* level—and in fact mainly within Western society. However, there are at three other key features of the encyclical.

(1) First of all, it poses a strong challenge to the economic liberalism of the time (PP 26 and 58) and calls for ‘a bold transformation’ of the current structures (PP 32). Pope Paul was calling for what a few years later came to be called ‘A New International Order’—a system in which genuine economic solidarity between rich and poor nations would be implemented through planning on a global scale (e.g. PP 50-2, 60-1). He emphasized the need for ‘a new juridical order’ at the international level—reaffirming his strong support for the United Nations (PP 78).

A weakness in the encyclical is that, in making his call for radical change in the international economic structures of society, Paul VI was operating on the basis of a consensus and willing collaboration model of change. He was appealing with the poor and on their behalf (PP 65); but he did not suggest how change may be brought about if the appeal of the poor is not listened to by the rich and the powerful. I think it is important to note both the radical challenge of the encyclical and its weakness on the specific issue of who are to be the main agents of change. Together they help us to appreciate the need for the concept of an option for the poor which found its first official acceptance by Church leaders just the year after the publication of the encyclical.

This major breakthrough in Catholic Social teaching came when the Latin American bishops at Medellín made an option for the poor in 1968. As I mentioned already, they committed themselves to take the side of the poor in their non-violent struggle for justice. A central aspect of this option is the recognition that if effective change is to be brought about it is very likely that the initiative and the pressure must come ‘from the bottom up,’ that is by committed and concerted action by poor and marginalized people encouraged and supported by Church leaders and Church agencies such as those which are sponsoring this conference. Linked to this is the acknowledgment that a *consensus* model of change will often need to be complemented by the adoption of a more robust *confrontational* model. A preferential option for the poor was accepted, at least in principle, by Pope John Paul II. But we have had to wait for Pope Francis to give it his ringing enthusiastic support

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¹ The other Caritas agencies supporting the project were, CAFOD (England and Wales), ‘Development and Peace’ (Canada), and the Irish Bishops’ Development agency Trócaire, which acted as the lead agency.
especially in his powerful addresses, in Rome and in Bolivia, to the members of the ‘popular movements,’ that is to on-the-ground activists for justice, peace, and respect for the environment.

(2) VIOLENT STRUGGLE?

Closely linked to this is a second key point addressed in the encyclical. This is the issue of whether or not it could ever be morally justified for those engaged in the struggle against oppression and injustice to resort to violence. On this vital question Paul VI took one small but vital step away from the teaching of Pope Leo XIII who had issued the first of the great social encyclicals Rerum Novarum 1891. Leo had encouraged workers to look for justice. But he went on to insist on the duty of workers ‘never to resort to violence in defending their own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder’ (RN 16). In other encyclicals Leo had considered the case where all peaceful efforts to replace a grossly unjust government had failed. He had insisted that in this situation the citizens are not entitled to use violent means in their efforts to overthrow an oppressive government. For him there was no such thing as a justified revolution. Leo considered that the value of social justice had to take second place to the values of stability and order. So he held that any resistance which transgressed against the laws of the regime can never be countenanced, no matter how unjust the regime may be. In doing so he abandoned the traditional teaching worked out by the scholastics, which had held that an unjust government had lost the right to the obedience of its citizens.

In Populorum Progressio, Pope Paul addressed this issue in a very nuanced and significant manner. On the one hand, he was strongly opposed to violent revolution; and in fact his reservations about Latin American liberation theology centred on his fear that this theology might be used as a justification for violence. But on the other hand, he knew that if he simply accepted the position of Leo XIII then he would, like Leo, be going against a strong and ancient teaching of the Church; and furthermore he would effectively be undermining the credibility of the official Church on a key issue of social justice. If he had followed the teaching Leo XIII it would have effectively put him on the side of oppressive governments by explicitly and absolutely condemning the kind of struggles for liberation which took place not many years later in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe.

In a very carefully-phrased paragraph (PP 31) Pope Paul succeeded in avoiding the simplistic dilemma which would demand that he either approve of violent revolution or reject it out of hand. He pointed out that a revolutionary uprising produces new injustices, imbalances, and disasters. But his rejection of revolution was not absolute. He inserted a qualifying parenthesis into the passage where he argued against a violent insurrection:

- a revolutionary uprising—unless there is question of flagrant and long-standing tyranny which would violate the fundamental rights of the human person and inflict grave injury on the common good of the State—produces new injustices ... and provokes people to further destructive outrage. (PP 31 my translation)

The parenthesis in this key paragraph is clearly meant to suggest that in certain extreme situations a revolution might be justified. Paul’s statement indicates that Church leaders are not bound to condemn outright all struggles for liberation. But at the same time the subtlety of his wording means that he does not say explicitly that violence is justified.

By adopting this position Paul opened the way for the kind of gradualist approach to difficult moral problems which is now favoured by Pope Francis and a growing number of other influential Church leaders and moral theologians. The teaching in the encyclical added a new component to official Catholic Social Teaching, one which now allows and inspires
Pope Francis to boldly embrace liberation theology,\(^2\) while at the same time providing a strong mandate for him and other Church leaders to adopt and promote non-violent ways of struggling for justice. This is very much in line with the approach adopted at the hugely important April 2016 Vatican conference on non-violence, with Pope Francis’ Message for World Day of Peace 2017, and with the ‘Voices of Faith’ event held in the Vatican on 8 March 2017.

(3) INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT

A third key feature of the encyclical is the account which Pope Paul gives of development. Previously, Church leaders, including those who prepared the documents of Vatican II, were inclined to start with the current economic conception of development which gave the central place to what was called ‘progress.’ Starting from there, the Church leaders made important corrections and additions. But it was more or less assumed that so-called economic development was still the key element in human development. Those who drafted the encyclical for Pope Paul took a very different and far better approach. The encyclical maintains that what is required is ‘the development of each person and the whole person’ (PP 14). It invites us to move from less human to more human conditions (PP 21). Furthermore, it insists that development is not something that others can do for a person or for a whole community of nation; as the encyclical says, all peoples are entitled to be ‘the artisans of their destiny’ (PP 65).

All this means that, rather than just making economic progress the central element of development, the encyclical adopted an approach which also includes personal-psychological and spiritual development, as well as development of families and communities at the social and cultural levels. The reason why this is so important is that invites all of us to think afresh about the real meaning of development and to look critically at a whole variety of problems which frequently arise when countries engage in rapid so-called 'development'. For instance, economic expansion often leads to a great widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, to the undervaluing of family farming leading to flight of rural people from the land into huge cities, with millions of jobless or exploited workers, many living in shanty settlements or grossly overcrowded housing, where people of different cultural groups are fearful of each other, the undermining of the priceless values of non-Western cultures, and the bringing about of enormous and irreparable environmental problems.

*Populorum Progressio* was issued fifty years ago at a time when people were only just beginning to be aware of the enormous damage to the environment caused by an insensitive adoption of the Western style of economic development. So the encyclical does not focus on ecological issues. But its account of the nature of true development has opened the way for the great encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, which deals not just with ecology but with the whole question of integral sustainable development and integral ecology.

Pope Paul’s encyclical invited us to move away from an individualistic approach to human development. It brought out the point that self-interest is not opposed to concern for others and to the common good. It encouraged us to have a sense of *solidarity* with other people. This notion of human solidarity was further developed in the teaching of Pope John Paul. And Pope Francis has taken a further giant step by insisting that we need to

\(^{2}\) E.g. Address to Participants in the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), July 9, 2015; http://w2.vatican.va.
have a sense of solidarity not only with other humans but also with rest of creation—with the animals, the plants, and even with the stars, which produced the atoms of our bodies.

IN PRACTICE

I want now to point out that the approach to development adopted by Pope Paul in his encyclical and expanded by Pope Francis has enormous practical significance. This understanding of integral development provides a solid basis in spirituality and theology for our Christian commitment to working for justice, for peace, and for respect for the environment. It provides the spirituality which underpins the project ‘Just Faith’ and the work of SCIAF, ‘Justice & Peace Scotland,’ and Missio Scotland.

This is the spirituality which animates the justice and ecological campaigners among you. I am thinking here of those of you who are struggling for justice for those who have been left on the margins of society here in Scotland—people who have lost their jobs or have been pushed out of their homes, and the refugees and migrants who have come here seeking for refuge and respect. Our spirituality of solidarity inspires us also to reach out to the millions of people in our world who have become victims of war, or poverty, or ecological problems.

It also inspires some of you to commit yourself to radical respect for animals and for nature. I have no doubt that many of you are aghast as you look back on the Highland Clearances of 250 years ago and at the fact that 99% of the ancient Caledonian forest has been cut down and replaced by huge estates inhabited mainly by sheep or grouse and deer. These estates are the reserve of a tiny number of enormously wealthy people whose recreation is the shooting of a stag. George Monbiot has put forward a strong case in support of the view that the absentee owners of these huge estates are not only preventing the ecological regeneration of huge areas of Scotland but also acting as a hindrance to the authentic economic and human development of large areas of Scotland (Monbiot, Feral: Rewilding the land, Sea and Human Life, Penguin, 2014, p. 102). Inspired by Populorum Progressio to take a fresh look at the nature of genuine development, some of you go so far as to engage in or encourage the whole process of what has come to be called ‘rewilding.’

CONCLUSION

I hope that what I have been saying will have helped to give you a sense of the importance of this encyclical which was issued by Pope Paul fifty years ago—and why it invites and challenges us to commit ourselves to an active and radical spirituality of working and struggling for justice, for peace, and for the protection of creation.