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Notes for a Theology of Development

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Notes for a Theology of Development

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I. On the Christological Foundations of a Theology of Development

1

For the Christian it is fitting that a vision of development should begin with Christ. (St. Paul to the Colossians 1: 15-20) The perspective of his faith suggests this from the start. "Jesus Christ...constitutes, according to the scriptures, the origin and foundation of being, the archetype and prototype, the light and power, the meaning and the value, the support and purpose of creation."¹

The New Testament texts with this burden are many; we can only touch on a few.

From *1 Corinthians*. Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor 8:6)

All things are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor 3:22).

From *Hebrews*: Jesus Christ is the one "whom (God) appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects

¹ Cf. Hans Küng, *Justification*, London, Burns and Oates, 1964, p. 130. Küng is here engaged in dialogue with Karl Barth's thought, to indicate lines of convergence with Catholic theology.

the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power." (Hebr. 1:2-3). And it is said of him, "Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands." (Hebr. 1:10)

From *John*: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:3f.)

Their concern, of course, and that of the sacred writers, is not to speculate on the origins of the universe. Rather their message is that it is in the light of the redeeming task, it is in the light of man's fulfillment by God *in and through Christ the saviour* that creation is to be seen. In God's design it is in Christ the *redeemer* that man is to find salvation and fulfillment and that the universe is to find completion, as it is *in Christ* that man and the world were brought into being. Christ the Incarnate Son is the reconciler of men, and the key to man's fulfillment and to the completion of the rest of the universe, just as he was with the Father in the creation of all things.

Thus the three "moments" (so to speak) of God's action in man's regard, — creation, reconciliation and the final fulfillment of all things — take place in and through Christ, they take place *for* Christ. "The total action of man's God," someone has written, "is christoform: it starts with Christ, proceeds through Christ, and is completed in Christ. . . . The whole of the world order in which we exist is christoform: created through, reconciled from its sinfulness by, finally to be fulfilled in Christ." Christ came to save and fulfill what was basically already his.²

This is what the great christological canticles tell us in the majestic texts of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians, as well as the difficult passage from Romans 8. Nothing of course surpasses the statement on the cosmic place of Christ in the hymn in the first chapter of Colossians, where Christ is

² Cf. *inter alia* Robert Butterworth, "Christ and Creation," in *The Way*, Supplement: *The Shape of Theology*, London, 1967, 15-23, and Michael Richards, "Towards a theology of development," *The Clergy Review*, July 1969, 510-518.

spoken of as the image of the invisible God, the first-born from among the dead.³

(a) *Image of the invisible God and first-born of all creation:* for Paul, recalling the texts of Proverbs, Christ "the son of the Father's love" is God's Wisdom, collaborating with the Father in the work of creation. Perfect self-expression of the Father in his whole being, he is *his* fullest revelation. And thus in fashioning the universe and man, it is the Son who serves as the pattern of his work, the model of its shaping, the showingforth of his glory. In Christ, through him, and for him the whole world was made; all things have him as their meeting point; all things are joined and hold together in him; all things refer to him as to the one through whom they shall come to fullness. Distinct from things heavenly and earthly, yet he is their *sense*, the intelligibility of each and of the whole. He is present to them all, he gives meaning to the *cosmos* and it bears his imprint from its first beginnings.

From the first, then, the universe is not devoid of pattern or meaning; finally, (contrary to the pessimism of the existentialist) it is not absurd. Finally it has purpose and its thrust is not blind: it is moving toward the term God has set for it, toward Christ as end, as its fulfillment. To seek to know the earth then is to seek the Wisdom of God; to listen to the earth is to cup one's ear to his Word; to seek to develop the earth is

³ *Vid.* the splendid work of A. Feuillet, *Le Christ, Sagesse de Dieu d'après les épîtres pauliniennes*, Paris, Gabalda, 1966, especially the sixth chapter, on Colossians 1, 15-20, pp. 163-273. Yves Congar's preface, itself well worth careful reflection on this matter, says that "an entire theology of terrestrial realities finds its foundation here, and Feuillet indicates how such a theology should be christological. It should go beyond the untenable separation between the so-called profane world and a supernatural domain which would not be involved in our day-to-day life. The cosmic role of Christ and, in its wake, that of the Church or the messianic people, demands that we get beyond such a point of view; the bonds which obtain between the *cosmos* and man require the same thing. In this whole matter an extrinsicist viewpoint is unacceptable. Christ and after him the Church are the bearers the absolute future of the world: it is gratuitous and supernatural by the very fact that it is absolute, but it is the future of the world. That toward which history is tending, unity and wholeness, is given to the

to bring it to its glory and completion in Christ; to love the earth, truly and rightly to love it, is in the final showing to love the "Son of his love."⁴

And man, in Christ the new man, is a creature larger than any horizons he might set for himself: he is made unto the image of God's own Son, and destined to be, in him, also the son of the Father and sharer in the inner life of God in grace and glory. To seek to affirm man and the true fullness of human life, of human peace and joyousness then, is to proclaim Christ and to hymn his glory.

(b) In the text from Colossians Christ is the Saviour too, the first-born among the dead, the head of the Church which is his body. In the incarnation of the Son, man — in both his wonder and his lowliness — has been assumed by God; in the Christ the new man the fullness of God's gifts finds a dwelling-place in the midst of men, in the very heart of the world.

And in Christ's work, what sin has sundered, God puts together again: through Christ's blood on the cross he reconciles all who are at enmity, all who are estranged; he directs men to growth and to fulness, to forgiveness and acceptance of each other, to love. God in Christ is reconciling all men to himself and to each other, bringing them into the sweep of convergence in Christ, in whom they — we — become part of

world and will be given to the world from on high, but that gift does fulfill and will fulfill the longing which is at work in all things: *creatura expectat* (Rom. 8, 19)." In Feuillet, *op cit.*, pp. 1-12. The thought of Teilhard de Chardin on this theme is well-known, and it will suffice to note here the work by George Moloney, *The Cosmic Christ: from Paul to Teilhard*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1968. A profound book with much the same burden is Emile Mersch's *Le Christ, l'homme et l'Univers*, Bruges, Museum Lessianum, Desclee de Brouwer, 1962. (It is worth noting that Mersch seems to have arrived at his ideas without any contact with the work of Teilhard.)

⁴Cf. Yves Congar, *Jesus Christ*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1966, p. 19 and *passim*. Hans Urs von Balthasar's rich but difficult work, *A Theology of History*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963 and the more recent *Man in History: A Theological Study*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1968.

each other. Thus all things come together, through man, in the crucified and risen one, in his risen body, in the fulfillment of the creative task that was from the first, as the redeeming work was itself, through Christ and for him and in him. "The mystery [which it was God's purpose to reveal] is Christ among you, your hope of glory. This is the Christ we proclaim, this is the wisdom in which we thoroughly train everyone and instruct everyone, to make them all perfect in Christ."

This vision of Christ the principle of creation, of Christ at the heart of things, Christ the centerpoint and norm of history, Christ at work in the healing and shaping of the human community, Christ the pattern of man's growth and progress and peace, must be for the christian the vision of development. Our involvement in the task of development is a seconding of the three 'moments' of God's action in man's regard: it is to be our affirmation of Christ in the world of things and the world of man, in the world of power, technology, politics, human relatedness, human oneness in justice and in peace. It is our sharing in God's "opening up of spaces" for human knowledge, freedom, creativeness, community, love and fulness of life: our call to share in the world's making and in the building up of the city of man.⁵

2

Some Latin American theologians as we know prefer not to speak of "development" but of "*liberation*." They feel that the notion of development, as it is accepted in much current talk, has built into it a pre-judgment, on the part of much of the developed world of the affluent West, — a pre-judgment of what it means to be "modern man and modern society come to fulfillment," with its focus on the TV set and the burdened table, the airconditioned house *cum* swimming pool, an evening with the beautiful people, a seat on the 747 to Paris. While

⁵ We could gather together a splendid *florilegium* of texts from Vatican II speaking of the Christian's task in building up the world. *Gaudium et spes* alone yields some key sections, nn. 22, 32, 34, 39, 43, 45. Cf. also *Lumen Gentium*, n. 48, and the decree on the apostolate of the laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*.

liberation asks that the Latin American be allowed the freedom to grow towards what he himself would want to become, towards the society expressing the *configuration* of values he himself chooses, towards the good life for man as he sees it, not as he is told to see it by others. For these thinkers are alive to the reality of a cultural imperialism which Harvey Cox has described as using massive means to brainwash Latin Americans on what they must want (multi-colored toilet tissue, Barbie dolls in ski togs, Max Factor cosmetics and all the rest), a cultural imperialism which is, he says, hastening *mis-development* in that continent, which is establishing what he terms "a whole diabolical system of empire."⁶ And so liberation means that each people is progressively freed, politically, economically, culturally, so that it can have "the room and space and air" to realize its own vision of a world of human friendship and communion. Liberation, as one writer tells us, means that the Latin American can say, to the economic and cultural imperialist especially, "*Let us be. Let us find our own ways. Let us shape our own future as we choose to.*"

The understanding, from the part of a man of the Third World, that *development is liberation*, can be rooted in the

⁶ *Vid.* Harvey G. Cox, "Barbie doll and the spectre of cultural imperialism" in *Christianity and Crisis*, April 27, 1970, 81-82. Also Michel Peuchmaurd, O.P., "Let us be," in *New Blackfriars*, 50 (1968-69), 136-143.

⁷ "Let us be. Leave us to find our own ways." This sums up what Latin Americans expect of us now. The time of domination and assistance is over. Such a demand is very congenial to the catholicity of the Church. Yet the structures that correspond to this spirit need to be built up. What is at stake is the life of the Church: living together in diversity. — Peuchmaurd's article, cited above, ends with these words. And Harvey Cox, *art. super. cit.*: "What Latin Americans need from us more than anything else is not our aid, or our missionaries, or our Barbie dolls. They need us to get off their backs and out of their heads. They need the right to define who they are and where they want to go without our cajoling or coercion."

In this context, see Richard Shaull's "Towards a theology of human liberation." In *New Blackfriars*, 49 (1967-1968), 509-517, as well as Gustavo Gutierrez, "Notes for a theology of liberation," in *Theological Studies*, 31 (1970), 243-261 and Rubem Alves, *The Theology of Human Hope*, Corpus Books, Washington, D.C., 1970.

Christian understanding of what it means for the Church to be truly *catholic*, and what it means for Christ to be at the heart — at the root — of all honest human approaches to truth, all true human values, all true human culture, all genuine human development.

For the Church to be truly catholic, as we understand it, means that the community that is God's people on pilgrimage is open to all that is positively human, and therefore that whatever is true and good in man has a place in her existence — for all of man and human life is to be brought to fulfillment in the restoration of all things in Christ. "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." The Church thus "strives constantly and effectively to gather all humanity and all its riches under Christ its head, in the unity of his Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 13). This is a theme that the documents of the Second Vatican Council take up, but these texts have a solid parentage in Christian tradition.⁸

The People of God, in the Second Vatican Council's decree on the Church, is said "to take to its heart (the qualities and values of every people)" and "purifies, strengthens, raises up and consecrates them all. In this, the Church is mindful that she must work with and for that king to whom the nations were given for an inheritance, to whose city they bring their presents and gifts" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 13).

⁸ Cf. the Second Vatican Council's decrees, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13; *Ad Gentes*, no. 22, and the reference given to the word "catholicity" in the index of the Abbott-Gallagher paperback, *Documents of Vatican II*, Guild Press, N. Y., 1966. I have briefly outlined some elements of this theme on p. 9 of the proceedings of the East Asian Jesuit Secretariat Conference (EAJSC) sponsored by *Jesuit Missions*, Hongkong, 1968 (copyright by Jesuit Missions, New York).

See also, among other works, *Liberté des jeunes églises*, Louvain, Semaine de Missiologie, 1968. Cf. E. Löffeld, "Nature propre et consistance de l'église locale," in the volume just cited, pp. 122-143.

Of special interest are Pope Paul VI's remarks on September 28, 1968, to a delegation of African statesmen, and the speeches and parts of addresses on the theme of the *Africanization of the Church* which he gave during his visit to Ruanda.

For thus each nation strives to express Christ's message in its own way. At the same time, a living exchange is fostered between the Church and the diverse cultures. (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 44)

The catholicity of the Church is thus an expression of the transcendence and universality of Christ's double task at work within the world and in all peoples, opening the Christian community to a wonderful universality and pluralism in its life: for all human cultures, all human civilizations, modes of thought, feeling and expression, are seen in Christ, *fons et finis*: he is at their root, he is the term of their completion.

The Christian vision of development can thus be a liberating leaven; it is of its essence "non-imperialist," it can find the space for genuine nationalism and the search for national identity that plays so large a role in the growth of the new nations, the space for the yearning in Asian man and Asian peoples to be free to find their own ways and perfect their own cultures and traditions. There is space in the Christian vision for this, because it believes that Christ is 'behind, beneath and ahead of' all this penetrating the dynamism of growth, informing the thrust toward freedom and toward the future from within.

The Christian vision of development, of liberation, is thus essentially *optimistic*, hope-filled, and fruitful for joy, because it sees the process bathed in the light of Christ's redeeming victory. It believes that Christ, crucified and risen, has freed the world already from the slavery of sin; that in Christ redeemed man has broken through already to the new life, that this liberation is being brought to completion even now by "Christ in us, the hope of glory."

Hence this vision is one of joy, an opening out to what Chesterton called the gigantic secret of the Christian. At a conference two years ago a Christian from Europe spoke of his experience "of Asian Christians who have found in Christ a new life of immense gratitude and joy."⁹ He spoke of a

⁹ Cf. the Jesuit Missions conference proceedings indicated in the preceding footnote, p. 71.

"Christianity in Asia is a 'young' faith, and Asia itself is young. Reading publications from Europe and North America which exhibit

transparent, contagious joy that he met among Christians in our own host country, and how this gave him the realization of the "newness" of Christ. This secret the Christian in Asia must try to share with all of his brothers; perhaps in this there is a contribution the Christian in our part of the world can make to development which is *his* truly to make, but not as from him, but from Christ who makes all things new, who gladdens the heart of our youthfulness. In a world where the soul of the elder children of the Christian faith — it seems — is so often shrouded over with a mantle of futility and hopelessness, of boredom or lack of nerve, perhaps the Asian is called to reveal to them anew the meaning of Christ for man, the joy of the message which they have forgotten, the bursting forth of God's love in the world which for them begins to be dim memory only, but which for us is the reality of our hope.

This is surely a task of the servant Church in Asia, to serve our peoples in their search to find themselves, to serve the growth of Asian man to the fulness of his stature in Christ. The Church in Asia is called to be handmaid to that fulfillment of peoples in a truly human communion which, beyond needful economic and material sufficiency, is what

what one theologian calls a massive 'loss of nerve' among Christians in the First World, one wonders, with the Jesuit Father General, Pedro Arrupe, if the history of Christianity is ready to open a new chapter, in Asia and Africa, where the good tidings of the faith will be received as *good tidings* by the young peoples of the world" — I quote these lines from a term paper submitted by one of my students. He concludes: "Have Europe and America grown too old, too cynical, too tired, to be gripped by the *newness* of the faith?" I might refer the reader also to TIME magazine, January 12, 1970, where the story, "Another base," appears on page 46. I will beg the reader's indulgence for reproducing the item in full:

At the turn of the century, most Christians were either Europeans, Russians or North Americans. By the year 2000, however, nearly 60% of Christendom's 1.9 billion souls will be living in the so-called Third World — Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America. As never before, Christianity is on the move — southward — and on the way to becoming predominantly a religion of non-whites.

So predicts Dr. David B. Barrett, author of *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (1968) and secretary of an ecumenical research team based in Nairobi. Christianity's growth in Africa is the most dramatic aspect of

development, finally, is all about.¹⁰ This is the servant task which the Christian and the Christian Churches of Asia can give themselves to, with a profound sense of hope: knowing that growth will be, if illumined by the Word of God, the emergence of Christ, the revealing of (to use a shopworn phrase) the Asian visage of Christ, and the growth of Asian man toward Christ toward whom man, all men and all creation "groan" with the hope of coming to the glory of sons in the Son of God (cf. Romans 8).

3

Antoine de St-Exupery's book, *Wind, Sand and Stars* ends with his account of a railway trip when he decided to walk through the train through all its length, making his way through the third class carriages crowded with hundreds of Polish workmen sent home from their jobs in France. He tells of stepping over sprawling bodies, peering into compartments, seeing men, women and children stirring uneasily in their sleep, hearing obscure moans and raucous snoring, seeing a whole nation, all humps and hollows and dirt, returning (he says) to its native poverty.

the geographic and ethnic shift. By the end of the 20th century, the number of African Christians of all faiths will have grown from 4,000,000 in 1900 (3% of the continent's population) to 351 million (46%). In the process, Christianity in Africa will have surpassed its rival Islam by 25 million adherents. The remarkable growth is attributable to normal population increase and a high incidence of conversion: one of every three African Christians is a first-generation convert.

"For sheer size and rapidity of growth, this must be one of the most spectacular stories in history," says Theodore L. Tucker, executive director of the Africa Department of the National Council of Churches. Three hundred million African Christians "might well give Christianity a permanent non-Western base." With Christianity in mild decline in the developed world (a projected 65% of its populace in 2000, as opposed to 77% in 1900), the day may well come when African and South American missionaries are sent to the far north for the purpose, in Melville's phrase, of christianizing Christendom.

¹⁰ See, among the many titles we might cite, Paul Caspersz, "The Role of the Church in Asia," and "Ceylon and the search for an Asianized Church," in *New Blackfriars*, January 1970, 17-29 and 288-296.

And he thinks of all the human beauty, all the human promise and quality that poverty and dirt and dehumanizing labor had destroyed in these people, of the little houses and tiny garden plots they had been torn from, of the loves and hopes which had been allowed to wither and die in their hearts. He looks at a derelict of a man, head shaven, hunched over in sluggish sleep, and a shabby woman, grown prematurely old with work and weariness, asleep beside him.

I may at this point be permitted to quote him at length:

Between the man and the woman a child had hollowed himself out a place and fallen asleep. He turned in his slumber, and in the dim lamplight I saw his face. What an adorable face! A golden fruit had been born of these two peasants, . . . a miracle of delight and grace.

I bent over the smooth brow, over those mildly pouting lips, and I said to myself: This is a musician's face. This is the child Mozart. This is a life full of beautiful promise. Little princes in legends are not different from this. Protected, sheltered, cultivated, what could not this child become?

When by mutation a new rose is born in a garden, all the gardeners rejoice. They isolate the rose, tend it, foster it. But there is no gardener for men. This little Mozart will be shaped like the rest by the common stamping machine. This little Mozart will love shoddy music in the stench of night dives. This little Mozart is condemned.

I went back to my sleeping car. I said to myself: Their fate causes these people no suffering. It is not an impulse to charity that has upset me like this. I am not weeping over an eternally open wound. Those who carry the wound do not feel it. It is the human race and not the individual that is wounded here, is outraged here. I do not believe in pity. What torments me tonight is the gardener's point of view. What torments me is not this poverty to which after all a man can accustom himself as easily as to sloth. . . . What torments me is not the humps nor hollows nor the ugliness. It is the sight, a little bit in all these men, of Mozart murdered.

And he concludes:

Only the Spirit, if it breathe upon the clay, can create man.¹¹

May I suggest that perhaps this anecdote recalls for us something of the motivation for our commitment to develop-

¹¹ Antoine de St. Exupery, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Harbrace paperback, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1967, pp. 239-243.

ment? Nearly all of us present here come from nations which, in any lining-up of the rich and the poor peoples, belong to the column of the poor. We have our acres of slums, our rows of shanties set up in swamps of filth, our masses of unemployed and underemployed, our urchins sleeping on sidewalks each night, scavenging for food in garbage heaps, our beggars, our uncared-for sick, our emigrating professionals (the draining of our best energies), our hopeless and often despairing young. It is these images we are asked to keep before us: call up the living memories of individual children, men, women, the sick, the leprous, the aged we have seen, so that we remain aware in our hearts of what we are talking about, and not of economic facts and statistical figures *only*, (not of gross national product *only*) . . . so that we do not end up with another sea of words which we ourselves will not return to later, but be with our whole beings summoned to deeds we must do in the pursuit of the Gospel.

May I suggest that we look upon our peoples, in their poverty, in their hunger, in their need for literacy, for education, for opportunity, for liberty, as the little child in St. Exupery's pages: the child in whom Mozart lies sleeping, Mozart and Choang-tzu, Yoshida-shoin and Rizal and Gandhi, a hundred geniuses whose creativity is meant to enrich the world . . . and silent in that slumber, music which will never perhaps be sung to gladden the hearts of men, poetry which will never lift up their souls, color, the sweep of columns and arches, pages of immortal thought, which could enrich the heritage of all men, which could bring light and joy, wonderment and courage to ages still to come. In our undernourished, poorly clothed, badly educated peoples, their hidden greatness, the gifts they can lay at the tables of their fellowmen, their contributions to history . . . all these lie dormant, never to be called forth perhaps because poverty imprisons their humanity and stunts its possibilities perpetually. In each of our poor, in each of our peoples, there is a little, not of Mozart only, but (if we are to believe the Scriptures), of Christ himself, stillborn, murdered, because they have been kept in the most

terrible of bondages, that which holds them from becoming all they were meant to be.

Let it be a torment then to us: not so much perhaps the dirt and the poverty, the squalor and the ugliness. But the torment of the gardener: the sight, a little bit in all our brothers, of Christ not come to fruition, of the dead, the still-born Christ.

4

One last word which, strangely enough, even in assemblies such as this one, sometimes takes courage to say. And it is this: for the Christian there must be, in all this concern for development, a constant reference, a constant return to the person of Jesus Christ. The Christ in whom and for whom man and his world was made, the same Christ as the Jesus of the Gospels, the carpenter's son and the son of God who came to serve man and to lay down his life for man.¹²

The Christian is one who has, in his life, come to know the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and has been given (not as a privilege but as a humbling task) some experience of the reality of the living Christ. And henceforth he meets his brother in a love and a concern that finds its foundation and energy within that faith and that experience. I must confess I do not understand the mentality (more, I do not understand the thrust behind the mentality) that wishes to make the person of Jesus Christ and the life and gospel he gives us as something finally unnecessary and irrelevant or at most implicit in the mind and heart, in the personal belief and life of *the Christian* in the world. For me, the Christian's own self-giving to the labor and the concerns of the development and liberation of man depends for its authenticity and enduringness on his faith and his commitment to God in Jesus Christ. Love for the brother will finally not be brave words only, but genuine self-gift in the measure that it is rooted in the surpassing knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and in obedience

¹² Henri de Lubac, "The Church in the Present Crisis," in *Clergy Monthly*, Ranchi, India, May 1970.

to his Spirit. This is, I believe, the message of Paul and John as I read them, and no secular reading of the Gospel — if it remains a reading of the Gospel and not its surrogate — will, finally, change the reality of this.

The task of development is finally the liberation of the full imprint of Christ in man, in every man, in all of mankind. This is the vision of faith. And this task will not be conceived and carried out on local and international planning boards only, but in the purpose, dedication and courage of individual men and women for whom “preaching the good news to the poor, the proclaiming of the release of captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, the setting at liberty of those who are oppressed” — people for whom all these things are not formulae and phrases merely, but deeds and the task of life itself. Such was the pattern of the life of Jesus; such was the shape of the self-giving of the Christians we call saints; and it is our faith that this is the norm for the life of the disciple till the end of time.

II. The Church on the Side of the Poor

It is commonplace now to say that to speak of development from the standpoint of emerging peoples is to speak of revolution:¹ for many Christians revolution is seen as a Christian imperative. What is called for is that the Christian move from words to deeds. The great abyss the Churches have not been able to cross, we are told, is this gulf between theory and praxis, between speeches given and lives placed where words are already beginning to turn stale.

1

A Christian leader, already well-known as a spokesman for the underdeveloped world, speaking on the theme, misery is violence, has described the three-fold violence which crushes the underdeveloped part of mankind.²

—First there is, he has said, *the violence of "herodian" oppressors*, the phenomenon of internal colonialism: the wealth of a small privileged group is maintained without reference to, and more often than not at the expense of the misery of millions of their countrymen. Pope Paul VI has spoken of social and economic development in the underdeveloped nations "practically by-passing the great majority of the people, in most cases abandoning them to a level below human dignity, and, at times, exploiting them." In my own country, some twelve percent of our families have to divide less than 1-1/2%

¹ See the brief introduction in *Herder Correspondence*, August 1968, "The Theology of Revolution," 227-233. Also, *The Church Amid Revolution*, edited by Harvey Cox, N. Y., Association Press, 1967.

² Dom Helder Camara, in his conference, "Violence and misery," *Herder Correspondence*, June 1969, 177-179 and *New Blackfriars*, 50 (1968-1969), 491-496. See also his book, *The Church and Colonialism*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1968. On Dom Helder's own work, read José de Broucker, *Dom Helder Camara*, Fayard, Paris, 1968; *Informations catholiques internationales*, 15 May 1968, 4-7, and M. de Certeau, *Etudes* (Paris), July 1970, 104-113.

of the nation's income, while the upper 4% of the people receive more than 25% of the nation's total income. Land distribution although bad, does not (as far as I know) match Brazil's 6% of proprietors owning 95% of the acreage. Still, conditions like these, as Dom Helder Camara (whom I am citing here) has said, amount to a state of genuine violence.

—Secondly, there is *the violence imposed by the developed world on the underdeveloped world*: there is the international monetary and trade system devised by the rich nations to suit their own needs and in many cases to exploit the poor nations: "the rich countries refuse to allow the poor nations to own and use whatever material resources they possess—for their own interests, and in their own way." Capitalism so often and on so large a scale subordinates human beings to profits and makes use of international politics and cultural imperialism for its own purposes. On the other hand, socialist super-powers nurture super-militarism too, promote wars, count the individual and his freedom for naught.³

In the face of this second violence, our times have seen the awakening, in the new nations, of what Pope Paul VI has called "an enormous restlessness." Peoples in the developing regions have come to the realization of their need and their right "to move from a modest and often miserable standard of living to a higher, richer, worthier and more human level."⁴

[All this] leads them, [Paul VI continues] to compare their condition of life with those of developed countries, and confronting their

³ The literature on the question of economic imperialism is abundant. By way of sampling, see Peter J. Riga, "American Foreign Policy, Some Moral Considerations," in *World Justice*, Louvain University, XI (1969-1970), December 1969, 211-225, and the Pelican paperback, *The Dialectics of Liberation*, edited by David Cooper, London, 1969, especially the essays by John Gerassi, Paul Sweezy and Herbert Marcuse, pp. 72-109 and 175-192.

Jeremias Montemayor, in his Tokyo AECD paper indicates some of the lines of thinking on economic aid ("moral reparations") from the former colonizing nations.

⁴ Pope Paul VI, on the first anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, March 27, 1968. (See an English version in *Osservatore Romano*, 4 April 1968).

situation of inferiority, . . . they resent the very well-being which has been brought about in their midst and which is enjoyed only by the few—whether foreigners or native-born—to their almost exclusive advantage. . . . Tears and anger more often than not mark the psychology of these young nations. They suffer from a new fever, a fever which was at first unnoticed but is now felt as unbearable: an awareness of the economic and social imbalance which separates them from, and humiliates them when set side by side with more prosperous nations.

—The third form of *violence* is that *exercised by governments which support the two forms of violence* which have just been described; in the name of law and good order, often using the Christian name as shield, they collaborate in the perpetuation of present structures of oppression and injustice in their own countries.

And thus we have Christians (as we have said) who speak of the necessity of revolution. The contrast is made between *reformism* which accepts the given structures and merely desires to change their workings for the better, *evolutionism* (developmentism) which seeks by planned improvement of the technology and economics of nations gradually to narrow the gap between the frontrunners and the rest of the world, and *revolution*, which seeks to subvert the present *dis-order* which obtains, "to transform the foundations of these systems," radically and rapidly to create new structures which will be geared toward building up a freer, more just humanity. And, it is urged, we as Christians in the Third World must opt for, must be in the vanguard of the revolution: the only issue is the choice of means—the peaceful use of power or its violent employ; the sheathed weapon or the naked edge.⁵

⁵ On the theology of liberation, there is of course the work of Rubem Alves, *The Theology of Human Hope*, Corpus Books, Washington, D. C., 1970, and the general introduction by Gustavo Gutierrez, "Notes for a theology of liberation," in *Theological Studies*, 1970, 243-261, and Gustavo Perez Ramirez, "Pâques en Amerique latine: liberation," in *Verbum Caro: Communio*, 1970, 18-27.

Father Juan Luis Segundo, of the Centro Pedro Fabro in Montevideo, Uruguay, and his associates at the center, have written on the theology of liberation from the Latin American perspective. See Segundo's articles in *Perspectivas de Dialogo*, the monthly published at Montevideo, Uruguay. See also Richard Shaull's essay, referred to in the preceding paper.

Confronted with views like this, which no thoughtful Christian can in conscience dismiss out of hand; confronted with the fact that even now committed Christians in some nations are jailed and tortured for taking positions which in all conscience they believe derive from the Gospel; the question must be raised in all seriousness. We must ourselves raise it here at our conference: must the Christian, must the Church, opt for revolution?⁶ Must the Christian churches in Asia align themselves unequivocally with the poor and the victims of social injustice, with poor men, and the poor nations as well—against unjust structures which impede justice and impede development? Since development meets insurmountable barriers in Dom Helder Camara's "three forms of violence" in the underdeveloped world, and if development is the primary task of the Church in our midst today—must the Church in Asia not take its stand once and for all with the poor?

2

Perhaps in order to answer this question, we must first ask ourselves another: in the Scripture teaching on the rich and the poor, on the mighty and the powerless, on whose side does God place himself? And we are told, are we not, that nothing is more clear in the sacred writings than this: that God places himself on the side of the weak, of the poor, of those without influence or power, that God comes again and again to be their protector, their advocate, their defender—he who proves himself their father.⁷

⁶ José de Broucker, "Has the Church opted for revolution?" in *New Blackfriars*, 49 (1967-1968), 540-543.

⁷ Joao da Veiga Coutinho, "The Church and the Third World," *Cross Currents*, 18 (1968), 435-449. Reprinted in *Impact* (Manila), January 1970, 4-10.

Cardinal Bea Studies, Volume I, *Mission and Development Ecumenical Conversations*, Quezon City, Cardinal Bea Institute, 1970, devotes an entire symposium to this remarkable article. (Edited by Pedro S. de Achutegui)

⁸ The reader is asked to go over the entries on *Poverty* in any recent biblical dictionary or dictionary of biblical theology for indications of the evidence on this point. See for instance X. Leon-Dufour's *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, G. Chapman, London, 1969, s. v. "Poor," pp. 386-388.

The poor who are the victims of man's injustice, whose frightful misery Job describes (24:2-12), are defended by the prophets of Israel. Amos blushes with shame over the crimes of Israel (2:6 ff., 4:1 ff., 5:11 ff.); other prophets (e.g., Ezech 22:29) denounce the violence and robbery which stain the conscience of the nation: the crimes perpetrated against the poor, frauds in trading which victimize them (e.g., Amos 8:5 ff., Hosea 12:8), land-grabbing (e.g., Micah 2:2; Isaiah 5:8), enslavement of the little ones (e.g., Jer. 34:8-22; cf. Nehemiah 5:1-13), the abuse of power and the perversion of justice itself.

Yahweh promises justice to the oppressed; he warns the rich of the misfortunes which are to visit them (Isaiah 5:8-10; 10:1-4; Hosea 12:8-9).

The "cry of the poor," the voice of the afflicted, the persecuted, the heavily-burdened, pierces the very ears of Yahweh (Job 34:28); the downtrodden express their hopes for a better and fuller tomorrow when the situation will be reversed (Pss. 54:7 ff; 69:23-30), but they look for their help from Yahweh, who is their strength in weakness, and who will stand for them. Their enemies are thus God's enemies (Pss. 18:28; 9:14-19). Their very need and distress is itself a title to Yahweh's care and love (Ps. 10:14; Isaiah 66:1-2).

Thus it will be one of the tasks of the Messiah on his coming to defend the rights of the wretched and the poor (Isaiah 11:4; 49:13; Pss. 72:2 ff, 12ff; 106; 112). A sign of his coming is the blessing of the poor with good things: the good things of the earth, prosperity and the fullest human well-being (Matt. 11:26; Luke 1:46-55; 4:17-21, cf. Is 61:1; 6:20-26).

The poor are the heirs of the kingdom (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20; 16:19-31). The promises are given to them.

Thus Mary, in whom the mind and heart of God's poor, the *anawim*, finds expression and is summed up, rejoices in her canticle in the threefold upheaval that has been foretold of the messianic era:^{*}

^{*} Vid. Herman Hendrickx, "Poverty, Riches and Equal Distribution of Goods," in *Impact*, May 1970, 17-20 and June 1970, 20-24.

the little ones receive mercy; the proud are scattered in their conceit;

the mighty are put down from thrones and the lowly are raised up in their stead;

the rich are sent away with empty hands, but the hungry are filled with good things. (Luke 1:46-55)

Lastly, Christ himself came as one of the poor: he is born in poverty, as the Lucan narrative on Bethlehem tells us; he grows up in the obscurity, laboriousness and lowliness of Nazareth; as an itinerant preacher he "has nowhere to lay his head." (Luke 2:6 ff.; Matt 8:18-20; John 19:23; 2 Cor 8:9). He has a predilection for the poor and he is to be recognized in the poor—it is in the poor we encounter him; it is with the poor he identifies himself.¹⁰ "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was naked and you clothed me; as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

If these indications are correct, God must be said to be on the side of the poor. The meaning of the poor in these texts is of course not limited to the economically deprived, or to the *poor of Yahweh*, "the pious souls, humble and trusting in God, the *anawim* of whom the Old Testament so frequently speaks." Père Benoit equates them with "everyone who is unfortunate or unhappy in the eyes of men, the sick, the crippled, the ugly, whether in body or in soul or in mind, the despised, the rejected, the disreputable, and, of course, sinners."¹¹ For all these, Jesus has a pronounced predilection. He seeks them out. He commits himself to their company. He pursues them so as to save them both physically and morally." May we not say, the poor are the *underdeveloped*—persons in need, and by extension, people, nations in need and caught in the grip of exploitation, violence, dependency?

¹⁰ Yves Congar, "God reveals himself in poverty," in his book, *Jesus Christ*, trans. Luke O'Neill, Herder and Herder, 1966, pp. 66-85, a beautiful and inspiring essay. See also the same author's *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Baltimore, Helicon, 1964. (Cf. *Philippine Studies*, July 1965, 725-733.)

¹¹ Cited by Congar, in the chapter cited above, pp. 69-70. *L'éveque dans l'Eglise du Christ*, Paris, Desclee de Brouwer, 1963, p. 360.

And thus the question must be asked: If God is on the side of the poor, where should the Church, where should Christians stand? If Christ identifies himself with the powerless and deprived, with whom should the Church take its place?¹²

In recent years it has been said again and again, that the Church must side with the poor. It has been argued that within the Third World especially the very preaching of the Gospel—if it is to be credible at all—demands that the Church take this stand. And yet of course the objection is raised: the Church is the Church of all and for all, rich and poor, those at ease and those deprived by life. The Church cannot be on the side of one group of men ranged against another side.

But there are answers which are being given too, which point in another direction. These answers state the traditional position, but inflect it to one side.

It seems to me that an absolute requirement of the Gospel, a matter of being faithful to Christ—no matter how wrongly this fidelity may be interpreted—is that the Church, as long as she is able to speak out, as long as her voice is not stifled, should demand changes in the inhuman social structures that are holding up the full development of our people, and that are keeping them in conditions which are sub-human and unworthy of the children of God.¹³

We are well aware of the unfortunate and at times inhuman conditions which many of our brethren still live. We wish to espouse their cause, to feel their impatience for the more equitable distribution of material goods; we shall freely, without fear or favour, denounce unjust economic differences, proclaim the human and Christian dignity of the lowly, defend their personal and collective rights, and with ever greater

¹² See the rather "strong" article, "L'Eglise écartelée," by B. Dumas, OP, in *Parole et Mission* (Paris), 51 (20 July 1970), 293-301 and the comment by the Scripture scholar, Dominique Barthelemy, OP, 301-303. Cf. also 16 Bishops of the Third World, "Gospel and Revolution," *New Blackfriars*, 49, 140-184.

¹³ Dom Helder Camara, at the "Poverty is violence" meeting in London, 13 April 1969. See footnote 2, above.

decisiveness support the rightful aspirations of the world of the working-man.¹⁴

But there is also a more clearly defined stance that says the Church and the Christian must take sides:

We need to redefine the meaning of solidarity in the present situation. On the basis of the common vocation of all men who are truly equal and motivated by universal love, we must redefine relations between persons, groups of men, and between nations. We must face the present situation where nations and classes confront each other in conflict. There is no possibility of changing this without breaking the continuity of the status quo and without taking one's stand on the side of the victims of oppression and injustice; through *this solidarity with the oppressed and victimized*, we shall manifest our own solidarity with those who perpetrate oppression—by freeing them from their role of oppressor.¹⁵

Finally, I suggest that we can say with Jürgen Moltmann, that "the goal of Christian universalism can be realized precisely through the *dialectic* of siding with the humanity of the humiliated and oppressed." It is not with a side-in-conflict that the Church takes its stand, but rather with the *humanity*,

¹⁴ XII Plenary Assembly of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, 1970; *Osservatore Romano*, 13 August 1970. Comunicado de la conferencia episcopal Española, at termino desu XII Asamblea Plenaria, 11 July 1970, as published in *Ecclesia*, no. 1500, July 18, 1970—a valuable document. In connection with the same Plenary Assembly, see the inaugural address of Archbishop Morcillo Gonzalez, on "the Church and the poor."

The address given by Pope Paul VI on "the Church of the poor" at the general audience on 24 June 1970 deserves careful reading. *Osservatore Romano* (Italian daily edition) 25 June 1970. Cf. *Documentation catholique*, 19 July 1970, 657-658.

Also, speaking on the same theme, P. Henri de Riedmatten, OP, at Geneva, International Labor Conference, 17 June 1970, *Documentation catholique*, 19 July 1970, 683-685, and the Cardinal Secretary of State, in the name of Pope Paul VI, to the 57th Semaine Sociale de France: in *Osservatore Romano*, 2 July 1970: Christians must be in the front ranks of those who struggle to vanquish poverty in society. Cardinal Villot's letter is something of an essay at a systematic study of the theme.

¹⁵ Conclusions of the First Andean Regional Conference of the National Commissions of Justice and Peace of the Catholic Hierarchies, 12 May 1970.

with the purpose of the liberation of the humanity, of those whose poverty and powerlessness calls for advocacy and defense, for promotion and growth. And Moltmann speaks well of "the *dialectic* of siding with the humanity of the humiliated and oppressed." For to stand on the side of the poor is *not* to take a stance of enmity or hate against those who possess wealth and power among individuals, or human groupings, or nations, but rather to take issue with attitudes of selfishness and the structures which institutionalize egoisms, against the politics and trade-systems which exploit the poor, against the abuse of power over the lives and livelihood of men; it is to take up, as the Andean Conference on Justice and Peace tells us, the cause of ultimate solidarity with the humanity of those in power against their own misuse of that power, to struggle for the redemption of man from his own injustice and inhumanity, for the reconciliation of brothers.

It has been well said that in the harshly real world we live in, Christians and the Churches will not bring about reconciliation and peace by posing as a supra-historical "meeting place for negotiation and peace," as a "neutral table for conversation and arbitration."¹⁶ Sermons of transcendent and a temporal wisdom receive little hearing (if any) from men bent on pursuing utterly immediate ends, from parties locked in conflict. "*Sub specie aeternitatis*," to cite Moltmann again, all worldly conflicts become relative and insignificant. To reconcile sides, finally, paradoxically enough, one must dialectically take sides, to achieve the purposes of justice and peace.¹⁷

4

So it is that we return to the theme of *the Church as servant*: the Church of the poor at the service of the poor. The theology of the servanthood of the Church, after the pattern of the Ebed Yahweh, is much spoken of these days in all Christian communities. The Second Vatican Council, for

¹⁶Jurgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, New York, Scribners, 1969, pp. 129 ff.

¹⁷ Moltmann, *ibid*.

instance, made it the burden of its very first pronouncement, its message to mankind. The bishops there gathered spoke of Christ's love "impelling us to serve our brothers, patterning ourselves after the example of the Divine Teacher, who came not to be served but to serve. Hence the Church too was not born to dominate but to serve. He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."¹⁸ And again:

We carry in our hearts the hardships, the bodily and mental distress, the sorrows, longings and hopes of all the peoples entrusted to us. . . . Let our concern swiftly focus first of all on those who are especially lowly, poor, and sick. Like Christ, we would have pity on the multitude weighed down with hunger, misery and lack of knowledge. We want to fix a steady gaze on those who still lack the opportune help to achieve a way of life worthy of human beings.¹⁹

Cardinal Lercaro, one of the prophetic voices at the Council, spoke in this vein:

We (the bishops at the Council) shall not meet the truest and deepest demands of our times, we shall not answer the hope of unity shared by all Christians, if we do no more than make the preaching of the Gospel to the poor one of the many themes of the Council. In fact it is not a theme; it is in some measure *the* theme of our council. If it is true to say that the aim of this Council is to bring the Church into closer conformity with the truth of the Gospel and to fit her better to meet the problems of our day, we can say that the central theme of this Council is the Church precisely in so far as she is the Church of the poor.²⁰

In assuming the role of the servant Church at the service of the poor, she is to make sure, first of all, that she is ready to face the kenotic self-emptying, to take up the dedication to and solidarity with the poor that this involves. Certainly her institutional life cannot be an island of affluence in the midst of a sea of misery all around her; she must share in some real way in the deprivation and weakness of the poor.²¹ In Asia

¹⁸ In the Abbott-Gallagher edition, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Angelus Book, Association Press, New York, 1966, pp. 3-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Cited in Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, cf. footnote 10, above, p. 149.

²¹ Avery Dulles, *Dimensions of the Church*, Woodstock Papers, Baltimore, 1967, Newman Press, p. 63.

she lives in the midst of as great and terrible a poverty as is found anywhere on the face of the earth, in the midst of the immense and harrowing need of millions who have only the barest means to sustain life. Surely in these regions above all it is demanded that her servant role emerge with new clarity at a time when wealth and poverty exist side by side in such stark contrast; surely it is demanded that she lay aside the trappings of great wealth and vain pomp, and not be identified with those who put their trust "in chariots and fine horses" and power in the councils of the mighty. "Poverty is a matter of life and death for the Church (in Asia)," it has been said. "Poverty is the sense of effective detachment from material possessions and the actual elimination of luxuries is a weapon of special potency in Asia. . . . Christian leaders. . . . must lead lives which both are, and appear to be, closer to the masses than they are at present."²² In some real way she must share at least by way of renunciation something of the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor.

Without this solidarity her words would mean little. Without this solidarity and what it engenders, the opening of the heart to the suffering of the world, credibility remains hard to buy. Without this solidarity, the Church in Asia cannot do what this hour in history asks of her: to renew herself, to transform herself to become the prophetic community which can effectively proclaim the Gospel to the poor peoples of the developing world.²³ Without this solidarity she cannot take the committed stance against the various forms of injustice and exploitation that the work for the development of peoples will inevitably call for.

And so in the end we come back to the truth that the first revolution that is being asked of Christians, if they are to play an authentically Christian role in the various revolutions which must take place if the peoples of Asia are to come to fuller development, is the basic one, of *conversion to the Gospel*:

²² Paul Caspersz, "The Role of the Church in Asia," *New Blackfriars*, 51 (1969-1970).

²³ Cf. Coutinho, in the article cited in footnote 7, above, last section of the essay.

they must be converted to what, in the light of Christ crucified and risen, they must in the first place be. The Church is asked to follow Christ in poverty and servanthood, she is asked to serve by deeds of self-giving along the whole frontier of development. No task need be foreign to Christians in this work, no matter how new and unaccustomed. But the words of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah and those of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew remain, despite the new largeness, the immensity of the work of development, despite labors which are continent-wide and which span the whole world, tasks as complex as the giant computers and intricate statistical calculations, —despite all these, the Scripture texts remain the charter for the Christian:

He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to bind up the hearts that are broken,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
freedom to those in prison,...
to comfort all those who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2)

For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger and you made me welcome,
naked and you clothed me,
sick and you visited me,
in prison and you came to see me. (Matt. 26:31-36)

"The new criterion of theology and of faith," Jürgen Moltmann has written, "is to be found in praxis." And Johann Metz has said that the men of our time will not listen to the Church if all she has to give them today is more *theoria*, even (as in *Populorum Progressio*) the *theoria* of *this-worldly* action. She must share in the praxis, she must take part in the work, she must "dirty her hands," she must commit herself to collaborating with men of good will in building the new earth for men. The servanthood of the Church must be genuine; "it must bring the hoped-for future into practical contact with the poverty and misery of the present. This is necessary not only on the basis of the modern historical world; it is also the demand of Jesus himself."²⁴

²⁴ Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, p. 139.

The announcement of the coming of the Kingdom must be seen in the crucial points of human development: in the poverty and misery of men, in human hunger and need.

The Christian certainty of hope becomes practical in the transformation of the present. In the expectation of divine transformation we transform ourselves and the conditions around us into the likeness of the new creation. This is a possibility—the very possibility from which Christian faith lives. This possibility is realized in repentance, in conversion, in new birth to living hope and in new life. . . . A messianic stream of renewal runs through history from the Christ of God who died in this world and was raised into the coming new world of God's righteousness. In him there are, and always were found, not only the inner repentance and liberation of the heart but also the reformations, renaissances, and revolutions of external conditions. . . . Christian hope dare not evacuate the present by dreaming about the future; . . . it must rather draw the hoped-for future already into the misery of the present and use it in practical initiatives for overcoming this misery. Through criticism and protest, on the one hand, and creative imagination and action, on the other, we can avail ourselves of freedom for the future.

When we gather together as Christians to confront the massive problems of development, the various forms of violence we can not cope with, let alone overcome, we may perhaps be tempted to despair, to the thought that all we can do is discuss, talk, write pronouncements, and in the end leave things as they are: let misery remain as it has been, and injustice, and poverty and underdevelopment. But we remind ourselves that the faith of the Christian must always, somehow, draw on its reserves of hope. That itself is part of the struggle. For it is in times of despair that we must remember Paul's words, that it is

to shame the wise that God chose what is foolish by human reckoning and to shame what is strong that he chose what is weak by human reckoning; . . . those who are nothing at all to show up those who are everything. (1 Cor. 1:27-29)

As Christians in Asia we are small in numbers and without much influence in the councils of nations. But as the Lord's arm is not shortened, our hope, and the courage born of it, even if constantly broken, is just as constantly renewed.

²⁵ Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 140.