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Reflections on the Qualitative Concept of Development

RAMON C. REYES

DEVELOPMENT, according to a very common cliché we hear nowadays, is more than just a quantitative accumulation of goods measured whether by gross national product or average calorie consumption or per capita utilization of steel and industrial energy; development is a qualitative concept signifying a complex of various elements. If this is so, perhaps it would not be idle work to ask ourselves what development might be, if it is not mere quantitative accumulation.

Primarily, development denotes the human value of liberation from the rigors and determinisms imposed by nature's forces. In this regard, we find four basic logical, if not chronological, stages in man's struggle against nature. First, there is the stage where man opposes his brute physical force against that of nature, as in the case of a Roman ship powered by galley-slaves or a rickshaw drawn by a coolie. There is the second stage where man learns to harness nature's own force against herself as in the case of a windmill threshing grain or a carabao pulling a plow. The third stage comes when man does not merely avail himself of the raw forces of nature but learns to transform them prior to utilization. Thus, there is a basic difference between a horse-drawn carriage and a steam-powered locomotive pulling a train, or between a mill driven by the force of a river and a hydroelectric dam generating kilovolts for a factory thousands of miles away, or between a galleon

waiting for the tide and the trade winds and a jetliner shooting off to the sky. There is perhaps a fourth stage, which is still in process — that of automation, where machines, self-correcting through feedback mechanisms, maintain a certain equilibrium pre-set by man. In this stage, we see nature's forces coming into a new form of equilibrium and homeostasis, governed no longer by the eternal return of cosmic processes but by the dynamic designs imposed by man. At this point, we witness man attaining to that status of free life, which Aristotle was already speaking about, it is true, not however reserved only for a few as in the case of Antiquity, but now accessible to all. And this leads us to the second value of development.

Development does not only connote a modification in the struggle of man against nature, it also signifies a change in the relationship between man and man in society.

A society that has not discovered the modern principle of transforming the forces of nature is always destined to be a society of exploitation. For eventually, it has to utilize the physical labor of some or a greater part of its population to do the deadening chores of household work, and the tasks of planting the fields and of digging out the metals and ores from the bowels of the earth; to provide the energy demanded by the various crafts and industries, by the carriers and vehicles of transportation and communication. On the other hand, such a society is by necessity static and rigid, stratified according to the natural accidents of kinship and traditional classes.

With development comes the rationalization of social organization. Premised on the principles of efficiency and productivity and full employment of natural and human resources, the modern or developed society is governed by the rational norms of functionality and fair competition, resulting in the equalization of human opportunities. Thus, we may truly say that the modern society, as opposed to the Aristotelian, is such that a man is never a slave except by choice. The movement for the emancipation of women, for example, could only be possible in a developed society, wherein the capacity to furnish

physical labor is no longer at a premium and household work has been simplified with machines and appliances.

If development signifies the liberation of man from the traditional encumbrances of nature and society, it would seem clear therefore, that such a modern concept has an ethical content. For now we see that the implicit term and finality of development is that point where the human spirit is finally able to return to itself in a community of all free men, where man passes from a society of want and exploited labor to a society of leisure where, if he chooses, he could finally act not as dictated by the circumstances of nature's determinisms, but in obedience only to himself as reason and liberty in reciprocal relations with fellowmen, not necessarily irenic and moral, for social relationships will precisely be determined by human choice and design, but nonetheless human, transpiring on the level of human discourse. Laying down the mechanics that suppress the traditional violence issuing from nature and a society, development makes the human capacity for truth or falsity, good or evil, universally accessible.

Admittedly, development will bring and has brought its own problems, such that there are problems of development as well as those of underdevelopment. Nonetheless, it would seem that problems like pollution, population explosion, and urban deracination are in themselves transitory, not inherent to development itself. In the passage from a state of equilibrium governed by nature to that rationalized by man, there is bound to be a period of imbalance and maladjustment, which, though of great human import and consequence, is in principle correctible.

On the other hand, there is an aspect of development which does seem problematic, and where a possibility of a theology of development would, properly speaking, emerge. It is that point where technology and development begin to be a closed humanism, that point where all human problems are presumed to be reducible to mere problems of technique and organization.

We may catch glimpses of it here and there, as in the case of the modern military man, employing all the resources of the

natural sciences and experimental psychology in the procedure of torturing or brainwashing prisoners of war; or in the case of an economic power bloc seizing control of the main centers of mass media and deliberately deforming the universe of human discourse. We may feel it in the case of a husband and wife crossing out the possibility of another child for no other reason except that there is no room for him in a nicely programmed life of secure job, house and car insurance, vacation leave, retirement pay, and pre-need memorial park and services. Or again in some modern technocrat who, with all the lucidity and powers given him by the social and organizational sciences coolly opts, in the name of some theory of deferred consumption, for a program of accelerated development at the expense and sacrifice of some social group or other.

Here perhaps is the most proper role of a theology of development, in its prophetic and salvific function, in this area where modern man, having achieved natural and social emancipation, reveals himself most vulnerable, most in need. Caught in some technological *hubris*, as it were, stricken by an ontological hardness of hearing, here he lies manifest in his brokenness, in need of redemption and grace.

COMMENTS

REV. CIRILO A. RIGOS

I think I speak in behalf of all of us when I say that the presentations of the three gentlemen were all excellent; but maybe there is a need for theologians, when speaking to a group like us, to use a more simple language, and there is need for laymen like you and me—I am still a layman—to study theology. We know what pollution is, we know what housing is, we speak in terms of population explosion and things like that, but certainly the word eschatology as Dr. Nacpil says, is not only big, it sometimes sounds quite meaningless.

We believe that for the Churches to contribute concretely to a clear understanding of the issue, links between theological reflections and practical actions must be sought. After all, theology does not achieve its purpose unless it's translated into practical action. The insights of theological reflections must be shared especially with

the government. The great task of development is in its hands, even if it does not have a monopoly on it. These reflections must be shared not only with the government and with those civic groups engaged in the task of human development, but also with the divisions of the Churches also engaged in development projects. In the World Council of Churches, there is a commission or a committee on theological studies, but, I must confess, my division, the Division of Inter-Church Aid, which is in charge of many projects throughout the world, very seldom talks of theology or of the findings of that committee. A few years ago, when the World Council of Churches decided that the next few years should be devoted to development, there was little difficulty in the minds of the executive committee about the meaning of development. They appealed to the member Churches of the WCC to contribute a certain percentage of their income for development. Actually a good amount of money began pouring in. Then, when we had some money for development, we began to theologize about development. The more we theologized, the more we did not know what it was. I hope that does not happen here.

In our theological reflections we must not overlook the missionary character of our labors so that our concern will be not only for participation but also for pioneering work. Of course we are committed to participate. In some cases the best that we can do is to cooperate with the government and with other civic groups. We believe in participation, but certainly there are areas where the Church must do some pioneering work. Finally, I suggest that our theological reflections must certainly include the subject of how we, as Church and Christians can contribute in effecting moral regeneration in our country. It is a little bit ironical that sometime ago the great leader of moral regeneration was a politician. Perhaps that was some kind of a judgment on the Churches. Perhaps it was a revelation of the fact that we as Churches have failed to provide leadership in moral regeneration. If human development is to achieve its purpose, the Church must bring about moral regeneration. Thank you.