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Workshop 7

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Workshop 7—Background Paper 517:1 Notes Concerning Theological Reflection on “Development”

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At a recent symposium in Bogota Bishop Leonidas Proano of Riobamba, Ecuador, said that “the foreign and domestic dependence which burdens most of our people in Latin America cannot be allowed to remain, not for fear of communism, but because such social and economic dependency *runs contrary to the will of God.*”

Similar things are being said in many places these days. Such statements are important and one can only be grateful that they are made, but they do also stand in need of being developed at greater depth. Not that they lack justification in terms of theology and ecclesiology. On the contrary, as Bishop Proano stressed at the Bogota meeting, “Christianity intrinsically means liberation in that the life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ left such a legacy of liberation for the world and us.” But the implications of this and like statements have yet to be worked out a good deal on the theological plane if they are to be of full use in the field of action. Or to put it another way: what is happening in the area of development and liberation movements must be sufficiently reflected upon theologically if the action that takes place is to be for the good of human beings and the human family at the deepest level.

The vision of a united human family developing to its fullest potential, discovering anew the meaning of its humanity, rejoicing in its liberty, was conjured up in powerfully descriptive terms for Roman Catholics by the Second Vatican Council. In the Council new insights about the mission of the Church emerged. Among the more powerful was that of the

Church as the instrument willed by Christ for the total liberation and development of humankind.

This is an insight of inestimable value in promoting the speedy and effective involvement of the Church in the push for development that is going on in every part of the world. It is an insight which carries with it too the dangers of any such idea if taken out of context and allowed to grow in isolation from the rest of the Church's history, life and theological reflection.

As well, conviction about the involvement of the Church in what has been traditionally considered the secular sphere is still lacking among notable numbers of Christians of all Churches. In fact there are those who are actively disturbed about certain aspects of the new emphasis.

"Perhaps the last half of the twentieth century will some day be called the age of man rather than the age of the Son of Man, another brief season of humanism in the long history of the holy Catholic Church. This Vestry believes that the Church's future transcends the total immersion of some of her leadership in the social issues of the minute." That statement was in fact made by the vestry of an Episcopal Church in U.S.A. It could have come from a number of Roman Catholics or members of other Christian Churches.

Christians who think like this tend to believe that concern for development is not really part of the Church's task. Time is fleeting, the processes of society are ephemeral and in the long run unimportant. What really matters is individual men and their salvation. The Church therefore has no right to expend so much of its energies on what concerns this present life and the conditions of human society.

For the sake of such Christians who are genuinely concerned about the Church and its mission, for the sake of the whole Christian impulse to take part in development, it is quite vital that the efforts to theologize about the Church's secular involvement should catch up with what is actually taking place. Only so can a reaction of many Church members

against the Church's service of the world be prevented. Only if this happens can the right relation be kept between the Church's duty of being alongside men in the world and its task of uttering God's Word (sometimes a word of judgement and a call to repentance) to the world. In the long run the effectiveness of what the Church does to help development will spring from its faithfulness to what Christ has called it to be. A balanced perspective can come from honest theological effort to understand in what measure development concerns can and must be an integral part of the mission of the Church.

In the U.S.A. the provincial superiors of the Jesuit Order have begun to take practical stands on some social problems in a way that is almost a definition of their objectives as a religious society. Several of the provinces have worked out formulations of purpose which recognized a corporate mission to put justice into American society, stating this variously as "the Christian reformation of social structures" and "the transformation of human society according to the vision of Christian community." In so acknowledging that political responsibility devolves upon them *because* they are a religious order, the Society of Jesus in America would seem to be following the counsel of its Superior General, Father Arrupe. He recently said:

"There is political involvement as the highest level when you fight social injustices, and to take a passive political attitude before social injustice is to thwart the Gospel and feed inequity. . . . Often political decisions and actions in the secular world violate and harm fundamental rights, thus frustrating the true meaning of human existence for the individual and the community. How, for instance, can a Jesuit priest remain passive in the face of racial injustice, or in the face of institutionalized violence? To remain inactive would mean betraying our calling in life."

The issue was put with equal clarity in a recent statement by the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Archbishop Sergio Pignedoli stressed the relation

between faith and development work. The actual inadequacy of development efforts is due, he said, "to the weakness of religious conscience. We are weak as 'social workers' because our Christian faith is weak. The only true way of advancing the cause of development is that of vitalizing the faith of our Christian communities."

There should be no dichotomy between evangelization and development, he said. "They are not opposed to each other, but are complementary. To try to oppose religious values to earthly values is to show that one understands neither God nor man. God wishes to save the 'whole' man with both the temporal needs of his body and the eternal aspirations of his soul."

The archbishop specified his attitude in saying that man's eternal destiny "has priority; it conditions his earthly existence and gives it its meaning." And he denied that to love God it is sufficient to love one's neighbour. "The correct road is not from development to evangelization, but the other way round."

He tried to diminish polarity, in favour of a balance, as he declared, missionaries have "to try to make the work of development more and more the 'work of all humanity that is well off' on behalf of 'all humanity that is in need.' We need to take to heart the words of Isaiah: 'Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out.' We feel ourselves more and more citizens of the whole earth, precisely because we are Christians and missionaries, and we are grateful to God that even the confines of our earth are now being extended."

Perhaps the first step, admittedly still to be consolidated, is taken in the above kind of statement. It recognizes that development is one of the issues that today try men's souls, and as such it is also a theological problem. If the Church is being faithful to its theological task it must become progressively aware of the scope of God's design in the family of man. Growing awareness of human ability and self-sufficiency in the universe requires to be translated into the Church's consciousness of the will of God. What man is, what he can become,

and how he is at present hampered in achieving this potential—these are issues from which theology cannot hold aloof.

To my mind one factor which has to be grappled with in this whole problem is the relation of man to the world. Here 'world' means "all things", the "panta", everything that has come to be and exists (Jn 1, 3). It is the time and space in which man dwells, the domain and stage of his life. On the other hand man is the basis and source of the existence of the world; the world only exists intelligibly in man; it only sees, hears and understands itself in him.

This world is by origin a gift of the "Logos". It owes its being, not to itself, but to "the Word" (Jn 1, 3). The Word gives it its life and does so by causing it to emerge into intelligibility in man (Jn 1, 4). Therefore there is a real sense in which the world is the revelation and exposition of that Word. In itself and through itself it allows the Word to be heard by man.

But in fact the world is not successful in this role. It has succumbed to the temptation to shut itself in; it has obscured the Word which seeks to enlighten man, and has therefore lessened man's possibility of attaining his full humanity. So the term that St. John uses in his Gospel to describe the state of the world is 'darkness'. It is a darkness which is incessantly seeking to overcome man by making him opaque to the Word. It is the world setting itself up as the reason for its own existence and it threatens the liberty of each man as it allures him to do likewise. Thus it has become an unreal world, the source of a false autonomy, an illusory freedom, shut off from the truth of the Word. This presence of the unreal, the counterfeit, of an autonomous, self-willed existence is always a factor in human choice. If it is not discerned, the effort towards true human development runs the risk of ending in frustration rather than in fulfilment, of imposing a pattern on human life that turns out to be a futile slavery.

That falsehood, sin and death cannot and will not reduce the world to absolute darkness has been affirmed definitively in the Word made flesh. In him the appeal of the luminous

reality of a life bestowed by the primordial Word cannot be extinguished. Human existence in search of itself is pointed on its way. This takes more than knowledge of the truth or a desire for it. It is achieved only by the new appearance of the Word in the midst of this world which again is given the hope and the possibility of being open to and revealing the source of its reality. The full response to this fact is given in the faith which, hearing and seeing, opens itself to Him who is the Light. The affirmation of humanity which accepts humanity in its totality is to be found here. The world is discerned for what it is, with its potential for the destruction of man, but, more powerfully, with its regained possibility of enabling man to find himself. This is a process unfolding in the course of history, continually assuming new forms.

Vatican II presented its theology of the Church and its mission against the background of such a vision of a world restored. Hence it was able to indicate in some degree how development concerns flow from, indeed are part of, the mission of the Church.

As we continue to draw out the implications of the conciliar documents we see more and more how two elements energize the dynamic relationship that is the Church. The kingdom of God is not the Church, but it is begun in this world and the seed of it is the Church. The life and mission of the Church is a process by which the world is being prepared to become the kingdom of God. The new age has begun in Christ, even though it still remains partly hidden, and salvation means that it is mankind, the world as a whole, which is being redeemed and men are saved by entering into the new humanity. Development begins here when we acknowledge that the earth and human history have a purpose, a goal, a consummation. It is part of our faith that this concrete world of ours is to be united and transformed through Christ, itself becoming more adequately a means of revealing him.

Here we must affirm that the physical universe and secular history are more than the religiously unimportant back-

ground for God's saving work in the hearts of individuals. The world, with its darkness and evil, but with its possibilities for revealing the Word provides the context in which the kingdom of God has already begun and in which it will finally be achieved. Perhaps it is also along this line that a more satisfactory statement of transcendence may come to be worked out no longer as that which explains the gaps in our knowledge, but as that which is to be our future, in some way continuous with the human world of history and into which we have even now begun to enter.

Not that the final manifestation of the kingdom will be an earthly achievement any more than are the salvific and revelatory possibilities once again opened up for the world by the incarnate Word. The triumph of the kingdom, the very physical reality of this world transformed into the kingdom of God can only be God's transcendent act. It is towards this consummation that God is leading the universe in all its aspects including the secular ones.

So Vatican II in its document, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, contrasts "the period between times" in which we now live with the "restoration of all things" towards which we are moving. "Then the human race as well as the entire world which is intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him will be perfectly re-established in Christ. . . . In the Church. . . we learn through faith the meaning too of our temporal life, as we perform, with hope of good things to come, the task committed to us in this world. . . . The final age of the world has already come upon us. The renovation of the world has been irrevocably decreed and in this age is already anticipated in some real way."

The thought is continued in the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This document acknowledges that "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic evolutionary one." In speaking of the worldwide increase of "interdependence and the growing demands for a social order consonant with human dignity" for all, it says that "God's Spirit, who with a mar-

vellous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth is not absent from this development. The ferment of the Gospel too, has aroused and continues to arouse in man's heart the irresistible requirements of his dignity."

"Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

"Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God."

A second factor in the discussion about development and its theological meaning is surely the nature of the Church and its mission to the world. The question of Church and world has become a central problem in modern theology. Previously the Church had been considered as a self-contained organism, an hierarchical institution of salvation, joining in itself the human and the divine, channeling from a supernatural level the grace that would enable individuals to escape fully from this world to the life above.

Vatican II uncovered the far richer reality when it shows the Church as the Israel of God, journeying out of the old age into that future which has begun in Christ, even though it is not yet fully manifest. The Church is the "germ and beginning" of the kingdom of God. It is the privileged instrument of the power of the Word, but is not all inclusive of that Word which seeks to be revealed in the whole of the world. Already the Word is incarnate. The process by which God has begun the redemption of mankind as a whole, is taking place in all the processes of history. The increasing actualization of human potentialities is to be acknowledged as being under the influence of justifying grace, even if not explicitly so. Because the goal of the Word is to reveal himself in and through the world and in such a way that man, by being

transparent to this Light, becomes more truly himself. So that in this perspective it becomes true to say that humanization is the mission of the Church, without claiming that this is all that could be said about the "missio Dei." In the same line it could be declared that we are baptized into the Church first of all to be men. As Christ, the Word reveals God he is the full, entire, authentic human person. Baptized into him we are to be human beings who have dignity, responsibility and a purposeful destiny, both for ourselves and for others. Without claiming to exhaust all that must be said about Baptism it may be stated that by affirming our new and intensified solidarity with all men it is faithful to the lesson of the baptism of Jesus. In the river Jordan the Trinity is unveiled, the deity of our Lord is disclosed precisely when he identifies himself with the sinful condition of the mass of common humanity.

The Word of God addresses himself to the world. The gathered community is the point at which the world responds. It is not apart from the world; it is the world aware, responsible and obedient to the Word addressed to it. This is what we learn from the history of Israel. The meaning of the Chosen People is the creation of a new point of reference within the historical continuum which gave sense and meaning to the whole. The Church is the world insofar as it has become conscious of and has begun to respond to God's summons addressed to it in Christ. The "gathered" or "called together" character of the Church is an election; it is not an exclusivism. It is a continual actualization of the original redemptive event which is Word. So the mission of the Church is to be the world continually aware of and open to the creative possibilities of the Word. This is both its present and its future. Which implies a discontinuity as well as a continuity. Because the opacity of the world, its darkness to the Word, means that an easy optimism and affirmation of the world cannot be the whole story. With suffering, in each age, the Church is called by God to testify to what he is doing in the world. Not distinct from the world, but the magnetic

point of awareness as the world begins to respond, the Church is the nucleus of new being in Christ, called to share in his future.

This means that the entire temporal dimension and all that we call profane can be assumed into a God-related life, given that in the Son the eternal has presented itself personally within temporal and terrestrial realities. In Christ and through him, human existence has become the objective expression of God's absolute communication of himself to man. So that in this Man the function of man to communicate the Word is realized. As a consequence the worldly and temporal remain worldly and temporal. They are not sacralized but sanctified by the presence of the God-centred life of Christ and his faithful.

In this perspective I should like to make two points. First it is true to say that the Church is actively present even where its adequate ecclesial form has not yet appeared. The activity of the Word in the world is in sense the activity also of his Body, the Church. This means there is much in the life of mankind that is ecclesial even when not seen explicitly as such. Just as there is much in the life of the Church that is "non-ecclesial".

It is in this perspective that the biblical exegete, H. Schlier, in his commentary on Ephesians remarks. "There is no sphere of being that is not also the Church's sphere. The Church is fundamentally directed to the universe. Her boundaries are those of the universe. There is no realization of Christ's dominion without the Church or outside her, no 'fulfilment' apart from her. The way in which the universe grows towards Christ is the way the Church grows. There are areas, to be sure, that are opposed to 'fulfilment' through the Church; but ultimately the reason is that they are filled with themselves."

It is in this perspective too that the Church has to assess the urgency, the scope and the limits of its involvement in development and human promotion. Working out what this will mean in practice depends on a number of things. It de-

pendes on the still growing notion of development for one thing. It should probably be conditioned too by reflection on the question of an Orthodox priest who a few years ago asked "if the Roman Church is always right in its traditional presumption . . . to find solutions to all human problems—to guide, to feed, to advise, to rule and to direct, instead of *showing?*" [*sic*. — Ed.]

The second point is this. The construction of the world and the promotion of peoples remain a finite task, the work of men, and as such it shares in the ambiguity of all that is human. The world has been handed over into the hands of men for God's glory. Thus the history of mankind will assert itself as the progressive and prolonged desacralization of earthly structures and functions. For this reason the relation between the Church and the world will have the nature of a dialogue. This does not mean a dialogue between the religious and the profane; it is rather a dialogue between two complementary, authentically Christian expressions of one and the same God-related life concealed in the mystery of Christ. On the one hand there is the strictly ecclesial expression of that life and on the other the worldly expression of the self same life.

In a more complete consideration of the subject one would want to advert also to the ambiguity inherent in the Church insofar as it is part of the world. Enough to say that there is both a blurring of boundaries between Church and world as well as a dialectical tension. The dynamic tendency of the Word-become-men in the world is toward the ecclesial; the tendency in the Church is to sanctify the secular. But since the latter arises from the transcendent community with God in Christ, the Church can never be content to equip rate itself or its mission to that of a service agency.

Theological reflection on development would finally need to range right through the Bible: the creation account, the strictures of the prophets against social injustices, the parables of Jesus in the Gospels, a Johannine incarnational interpretation, the mystical body emphasis of the Pauline letters and

the eschatological emphasis of Revelation. As well as there is the whole range of questions about the nature and destiny of man, the good, moral life, the nature of history.

Here it has not even been possible to touch such a range. However, the emphasis which has been laid on humanization as ultimately being translucency to the Word revealing God through the world, may justify appending the following as conclusions of a more practical sort.

1. While Christians should never underestimate the human importance of material aspects of development, they are obliged to invest most heavily in those things which are linked most clearly to man's freedom, his personal fulfilment and the fuller realization of true humanity in community. Emancipation and reconciliation are two key principles.

2. Christians ought to sponsor many more projects which actively promote the transformation of social relationships rather than primarily those which are designed to meet needs dictated by charity alone. Churches should give more attention—even if this entails the elimination of some relief programmes should that prove necessary—to anticipating and preventing the eruption of man-made social disasters.

3. Development-oriented projects and programmes sponsored by churches should pioneer social justice, either through new types of programme, new groups of people or new areas of a country being served.

4. Christian development efforts should concentrate on people rather than primarily on buildings and physical equipment.

5. Churches most constantly seek to discover new institutional relationships which feed new ideas into a programme and process.

N.B. The above notes are largely derivative. They draw heavily and often verbalism on the following:

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