

Human Rights and Poverty*

The United Nations University, in its effort to gain a wider perspective and an interdisciplinary approach to both local and global problems, has adopted five broad themes to guide its choice of projects in the years to come. The first of these themes is on: peace, security, conflict resolution and global transformation. In describing this theme, the university made the observation that "there is need for a deeper understanding of the structural and institutional conditions that could make the processes of social, economic and political change more consistent with the basic values of peace, equity and human dignity."

The Pastoral Perspective

Within the framework of this theme, I have been invited today to lecture on the topic of human rights and poverty — in the hope that my reflections might somehow make "a distinctive scientific and intellectual contribution," but being neither a scientist nor an academician, I must beg your indulgence if I express my views through the perspective I know best — which is that of a churchman, a priest and pastor. By viewing the topic pastorally, I can at least be hopeful of making my humble contribution to that interdisciplinary approach which the university wishes to safeguard in the discussion of this topic.

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A recent article by professor Hannes Alfven, the 1970 awardee of the nobel prize in physics, starts with a historical footnote about Confucius,¹ when asked what would be his first act should he become emperor of China, he answered: "The most important thing is the rectification of words." In my case, I take this to mean that as a pastor, I must take care to use the semantics proper to my expertise and not to confuse my audience with pretensions in areas, such as the political and the scientific, which are not central to my vocation.

What conceptual dimensions make up a pastoral perspective and serve as assumptions to his treatment of human issues? Permit me to list some of its key elements.

Firstly, the pastor possesses a biblical memory that has been termed "subversive" on two counts, namely: (1) the remembrance of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ which poses a challenge to those whose earthly powers are secured through injustice and oppression; and (2) because biblical history views human affairs from the standpoint of the victims rather than of the victors.

Secondly, the pastoral perspective is influenced by the philosophy of integral humanism whose focus is on man, as expressed by Pope John Paul II in the first encyclical of his pontificate: "Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being — in the sphere of society, his own nation or people — this man is the primary route that the church must travel in fulfilling her mission, he is the primary and fundamental way for the church..."²

The third dimension within the pastoral perspective is the prophetic which is deeply rooted in biblical traditions. Because mankind encounters violations of basic rights at every turn of history, and because the human person has a unique worth that transcends his physical existence — there then arises the need for the critical role of a prophet denouncing injustice and upholding the dignity of the human person.

¹ Hannes Alfven, "Annihilators and Omnicide," *Development Dialogue*, 1984: 1-2, pp. 3-12.

² Pope John Paul II. *Redemptor Hominis*. 1979.

This brief exposition of some key factors that constitute a pastoral perspective of human rights and poverty was not meant to be comprehensive but only clarificatory in order to define the traditions that influence my thinking.

For although I fully recognize the limits of the pastoral perspective in the analysis and solution of human problems, still I venture to propose that the biblical, humanistic and prophetic background I have described might possess some interdisciplinary relevance, for whether we be scientist, politician, academician, religious minister or laborer — we shall sooner or later be asked fundamental questions such as: "Do you stand on the side of the oppressor or of his victims?" "How do you define man?" "Do you possess the courage to assume prophetic action in the face of injustice?"

The State as Matrix of Human Rights

The increasing violations of human rights in contemporary societies, coupled with the continued existence of massive poverty are evidence of modern man's persistent failure to build for this generation a stable and mature political order. It has already been observed that in politics as in economics, the gap between developed political systems and underdeveloped ones has widened.³ I also believe that a similar gap separates the mature state from the immature and primitive political system, as it is my assumption that the immature political system has been responsible for a great number of human rights violations. I now wish to give the reasons behind the argument.

Primitive political systems abound in characteristics that render them prolific breeding grounds for crimes against human rights.

What are some of these characteristics?

The primitive state is primarily a non-political entity. Cicero long ago defined the factors that constitute a political community, namely: "the coming together of a considerable number of men and women who are united by a common agreement upon law and rights and by the desire to participate in mutual advantages."

³ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 1968.

The neurotic nervousness of the primitive state against any threat to its existence makes any coming together of a considerable number of its citizens impossible and subversive. Common agreement upon law and rights is not promoted in a non-political society where legislation originates through a single will or head. Such a monolithic government fears the critical participation of its citizens in decision making and prefers the sanitized debates on technical issues that only experts can understand.

The activity that characterizes the primitive state is never related to community-building goals where men and women devote their energies to create a political order by compromising and balancing their diverse interests, instead, the primitive state pours its energies into cultivating a permanent state of civil war, a never-ending struggle against subversives. It is in such a contrived scenario of instability and disorder that the primitive state is able to unleash and often hide its assaults against the freedom and basic rights of its people.

It follows then that the primitive state is also an anti-people entity. Since it systematically marginalizes its people from exercising judgment and control over governmental policies and processes, the primitive state alienates its own people. It solves national problems through technical reason alone, fearing to engage its citizens in open debate where a rational consensus can be achieved. Such a state is unable to tap a vast reserve of human resources for nation building purposes. Since it stands in adversary position against its own people, the state compulsively acquires foreign armaments to the detriment of educational, health and other developmental programs.

Aside from being anti-political and anti-people, the primitive state is also anti-moral. Genuine politics cannot be divorced from ends or values since it must reflect the community's ethos and pursuit of truth, freedom and justice. One aspect of its strategy to depoliticize its people, is to eliminate from public debate all discussions on the morality of political acts. Only debate on technical issues are granted such as the workings of irrigation systems, the progress of the green revolution — topics that do not easily give openings for the moral conscience to question the authority of the absolute state.

It might be instructive to recall here an observation of Albert Speer in his book: "Inside the Third Reich", on how Nazi bureaucracies facilitated organized violence by compartmentalizing thought and blurring all considerations and feelings of humanity. "I felt," Speer wrote, "that there was no need for one to take political positions at all. Nazi education aimed at separatist thinking. I was expected to confine myself to the job of building."

The Reflective State

Since the non-political state holds few restraints against human rights violations, since its anti-people and anti-moral posture make it a fertile breeding ground for crimes against humanity — it must follow that the Church joins all men and women of goodwill in opting for the establishment of mature political systems.

Here, the pastoral viewpoint can make its contribution. In the face of a politics that orients itself only to what is quantifiable, empirical and responsive to technical manipulation, the Church offers moral and theological principles to aid the state overcome its primitive condition, the Church can help the state reflect and reach a more humane level of political reflection. Questions such as the final end of man, the elements that constitute a good life, the intrinsic dignity of human beings that endows them with inalienable rights — are considerations that raise the level of political discourse.

As the German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas noted: "... only a higher stage of reflection, a consciousness of acting human beings moving forward in the direction of emancipation..." can rationalize history.⁴ To this can be added the statement which Dr. Soedjatmoko, who was then the ambassador of Indonesia to the United States of America, gave in 1970 to the Asian ecumenical conference for development, in his speech on "Religions and the Development Process in Asia". Dr. Soedjatmoko said:

"The establishment of a new, creative relationship to social reality, the integrative re-ordering of one's conceptual and emotional frame of value reference regard-

⁴ J. Habermas, "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision", pp. 275-276.

ing man, society and the divine... pivots around the development of a new sense of identity, ... the kind of person I want to be, the kind of relations I want to have with my fellow man, the kind of society I want to live in — are the central questions in the search for this identity and in the process of national building.”

Dr. Soedjatmoko then points to the role which the great religions of Asia have played not only in giving meaning and salvation to the individual soul but also in helping to shape systems of social organizations.

My exposition thus far, has assigned the burden of human rights violations on the insecure and irrational side of the so-called primitive state. But while a significant proportion of its deviant behaviour is due to endogenous factors, still, its entrenchment within an international system renders an individual state vulnerable to outside interventions.

In Old Testament times, the sufferings of the people of Israel were largely inflicted by great empires, such as those of Assyria and Egypt. This led to prophetic denunciations such as those of Amos the shepherd who lived in the eighth century before Christ. His list of human rights violations by the Assyrian invaders reads like many contemporary crimes, for example: the massacre of war prisoners, deportations of innocent people, disregard for agreements, murder of pregnant women. But even-handedly, Amos also called attention to the violations against the rights of Yahweh and of his people which the Israelites perpetrated.

In our times, the small states continue to be under the pervasive influence of big powers. The exercise of coercive power to reduce the periphery into submissive and dependent postures vis-a-vis the dominant states is no longer as crude as in colonial times. Today there is less need to intervene militarily in the affairs of another nation. Instead, the elite decision makers of the third world are educated and coopted to adopt not only the expensive life style of wealthy first world nations but also to serve their financial and economic interests. A lethal panoply of arms is passed on from the north to the national security apparatus of the south. The primary centers for the training of the police

force of developing countries are located in the first world — and one hears now and then that part of the training curriculum is the use of torture to exact vital information from so-called subversivos.

The presence of nuclear arms in the lands and waters of the third world represents the ultimate form of intervention since this threat of "omnicide" as the American philosopher John Somerville has termed it — is maintained without the approval of the ordinary citizens of these marginal countries, the issue of their physical survival is not subject to the control of third world people; where nuclear bombs are stored; which cities have been targeted for nuclear destruction; what mega-death weapons are stored in vessels that enter one's territory — these are vital human rights issues for which no adequate mechanisms of information and control exist in the third world.

In his time, the prophet Jeremiah lamented the perilous condition of his people, a cry we in our age can sympathize with:

"Evil I bring from the north
And great destruction.
Up comes the lion from his lair,
The destroyer of nations has set out
To turn your land into desolation
Till your cities lie waste and empty."
(Jeremiah 5:6-7)

A further symbol of man's frustration and failure to humanize his condition is the number of international conferences on trade and development and on disarmament and development that ended in futility and disillusionment. Invariably, in both sets of issues, it is development that loses out to protectionism or to escalating expenditures for arms. Man continues to take giant steps towards instant global annihilation and the slow economic strangulation of poor countries — but seldom a serious commitment to adequately shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, feed the hungry and liberate prisoners of conscience.

And so it is, that to walk by the front of the United Nations building in New York, where a sculpture depicts the biblical message to "transform swords into plows" — leads to a medita-

tion on why man continues to prefer the things that lead to his death — a question asked long ago by the psalmist:

Too long have I lived
Among people who hate peace,
Who, when I propose peace,
Are all for war.
(Psalm 120).

As we enter the end of this century and do a reconnaissance of man's present condition, we are tempted to be either a cynic or a recluse. The world in 2000 will see more mega-death weapons proliferate among nations, many of them socially and politically unstable. The global 2000 report to the American president predicted that as we enter the twenty-first century, there will be more people, more pollution, more poverty, more destruction of the planet's life-supporting capabilities, and we could sadly add: more human rights violations, more cultural destruction, more potent instrument by which men can more effectively deny freedom, truth and justice from humanity.

There is nothing significantly new about the dismal statistics of poverty and of offenses against human rights. They have long been a part of the rhetorical baggage that accompanies many international conferences, nor is there any lack of knowledge regarding the technical and social measures required to solve poverty and eliminate the apparatuses that promote torture, untruth and injustice.

What is lacking is the will to be human, to fully grasp the totality of one's humanity as an individual, as a people, as a species — and to express this through a renaissance of the human spirit whose nobility is made to permeate every corner of our globe.

A Mature Political Order

Having given indications of those characteristics that incline the primitive state to be midwife to violations of human rights, it might now be useful, in brief compass, to describe what constitutes a mature political order.

In March of 1983, in the presence of the prime minister of the Philippines, I had proposed that the first characteristic of a mature state is its recognition of the sacredness of man, the immunities guaranteed citizens from illegal encroachments by the state are an acknowledgement not only of their constitutional rights but also of that moral status vested in them by the divine creature and which led the psalmist to declare:

You have made him little less than a God,
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
Made him lord over the work of your hands.
You have put all under his dominion.

(Psalm 8:5-6).

Taking into account the dignity of the human person who is by divine grace the child and friend of God and an heir of eternal glory — Pope John XXIII issued his *Pacem in terris*. This 1963 encyclical listed human rights under eight headings, namely: (1) the right to life and a worthy standard of living; (2) rights pertaining to moral and cultural values — under which is the right to freedom in searching for truth and in expressing and communicating his opinion; (3) the right to worship God according to one's conscience; (4) the right to choose freely one's state of life — and here the pope deals with the right to set up a family with equal rights and duties for man and woman; (5) economic rights whose emphasis is on the right of workers to a wage determined according to the criterion of justice and sufficient to enable him and his family to enjoy a standard of living in keeping with the dignity of the human person; (6) the right of assembly and association by which man may form a great variety of organizations and intermediary groups that enable him to exercise his freedom and creativity; (7) the right to emigrate and immigrate by virtue of his membership in the human family and of his citizenship in the world community; and lastly (8) political rights which involve the right to be active in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good.

I included, secondly, the tolerance of the mature political society for the coexistence within its body politic of groups holding divergent views. A genuine political community is structurally

pluralistic and strives for consensus while respecting divergence and dissent. "Civilization", wrote Thomas Gilbey, "is formed by men locked together in arguments. From this dialogue, the community becomes a political community".⁵

Pluralism then is of the essence of genuine politics and indicates the continuing effort of divergent groups to form one community. This is accomplished through free and guaranteed public deliberations, evaluations and consensus making.

For the third characteristic of a mature state, I posited the active and vigilant pursuit of justice. There are three interrelated modalities of justice which are indispensable for discerning and judging the maturity level of a state. These are: commutative justice, distributive justice and social justice. The first mode, that of commutative justice concerns the sphere of private interaction where fidelity to contracts and agreements is based on the dignity and equality of all persons. On the other hand, distributive justice establishes the equal right of all men and women to share in those social and public goods which are necessary for genuine participation and advancement in the human community. The third mode, social justice is a political virtue which obligates citizens to engage themselves in the creation of just social and political structures even as it also imposes on the state the duty to promote both commutative and distributive justice through its public institutions.⁶

Fidelity to truth was the fourth characteristic we discussed. A democratic state zealously guarantees the people's access to information which enables them to judge, direct and correct government policies and actions. There is a shortage of truth wherever there is an abundance of brutality against humanity. No wonder that Gandhi was led to exclaim: "the way of peace is the way of truth." This too reflected the mind of Pope Paul VI who looked upon truth as the greatest civilizing gift that the Church gave mankind — "a truth which liberates and which alone gives peace of heart... the truth about God, about man and his mysterious destiny."⁷

⁵ Quoted in: John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 1960.

⁶ John C. Haughey, ed., *The Faith That Does Justice*, 1977.

⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975.

A state which is open to societal criticism maintains its grip on reality and increases its capacity for internal reforms. On the other hand, the state that cannot accept any truth about itself, regresses into repeating its negative policies and into blindly defending itself through increased rigidity in its societal controls. The acceptance of truth can lead not only to the reform of political structures but also to the transformation of its citizens. For truth provides the human-community with a liberating consciousness through which man and his society are enabled to continually uplift themselves.

The Maturity of the International Order

These, then, are some of the characteristics that are exemplified in a mature political order. Are they likewise to be discovered within the international political and economic order? One can draw a profile of man's dream for a mature international order by reading the reflections of some of the secretary generals of the United Nations, distinguished statesmen like the Buddhist U Thant and the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld. Both hoped that the United Nations would bring about on a planetary scale, the virtues of love, compassion, understanding and human fraternity. A theme echoed by Martin Luther King when he remarked: "the United Nations is a gesture in the direction of non-violence on a world scale."

One also obtains a glimpse of man's dream for a moral global age in the speeches given by the pontiffs before the United Nations. As Pope John Paul II reminded the World Assembly when he visited its New York headquarters:

"Each one of you represents a particular state, system and political structure, but what you represent above all are individual human beings... each of them a subject endowed with dignity as a human person, with his or her own culture, experiences and aspirations... this relationship is what provides the reason for all political activity, whether national or international... and if political activity is cut off from this fundamental relationship and finality, if it becomes its own end, it loses

much of its reason to exist, even more, it can also give rise to a specific alienation; it can become extraneous to man; it can come to contradict humanity itself."

Poverty in the third world or anywhere else, is an indicator of failure. But the subject and agent of this failure are not the poor themselves; rather, they are the victims of this failed human and technical enterprise. The responsible agents of poverty are the rich and the powerful. The agents of poverty are the economic planners who chose to import capital-intensive technologies and whose victims are the jobless industrial workers. The technocrats of poverty are the educators who promoted school systems that are replicas of foreign universities. Their victims are the youth who became alienated from their own people and culture. The merchants of poverty are those unscrupulous industrialists who manipulate fragile economies and destroy their self-reliant foundations. Their innumerable victims are the small farmers, fishermen and entrepreneurs whose labor and produce are bought cheaply and whose daily rise depends on market decisions made in Chicago or Geneva. The poor are poorer because they must content not only with the exploitative powers or local groups, but of an international network as well.

But the essence of human poverty does not consist merely in material deprivations. Man's poverty is not defined solely on the basis of his daily intake of calories or of the income he ekes out yearly. Nor is the essence of human poverty to be equated merely with political deprivation. Man's entry into a genuine condition of freedom and justice is not assured solely through the exercise of the ballot — which has been used at times to enhance the prestige of authoritarian regimes and to deepen the subservience of its citizens.

Another way of stating this viewpoint, is to argue that the man who is materially poor can still retain his dignity and creative impulses to better his condition. That the man who is a prisoner of conscience often retains his inner freedom. But the man who is culturally deprived loses something more than just his property or enfranchisement, he loses the distinctive marks of his humanity. The man who is prevented from expressing him-

self in the language and symbols of his culture is far poorer than the beggar and the prisoner. Man loses hold of the meaning of his life when he is forbidden to worship his creator in the songs and rituals of his culture, and mankind retrogresses when his aesthetic experiences are denied expression in the art and literature of his culture.

Poverty, therefore, must be viewed in all its dimensions if it is to be adequately solved. Man's activity is not only limited to earning a living or in preserving political rights. His economic and political benefits are the tools by which he can take a more active part in creating, in his life, cultural patterns coherent with the aspirations and imperatives of human existence, namely: harmony with nature, which is the ecological imperative; harmony with man, which is the social imperative; and harmony with his creator, which is the spiritual imperative.

Poverty Solutions

Not so long ago, a variety of solutions to global poverty were being debated in academic circles. One was called: *triage* — an approach applied in wartime field hospitals where, under extreme battle conditions, the wounded were sorted into three categories: the hopeless cases who were not expected to survive from their serious injuries; the walking wounded who would survive even without treatment and finally those with the greatest likelihood of survival if given prompt treatment.

The debate centered on whether distressed nations should not be classified in similar fashion where the hopeless "basketcases" are denied food aid even during times of famine.

The second solution was imaginatively termed: "lifeboat ethics" which a biologist originated. The idea is that our planet is now a lifeboat with a limited storage of food, mostly in the hands of the west. The "ethics" invoked is the right of the rich to protect their supplies and not to let the boat be swamped by bringing on board the starving millions of the developing countries. As its proponent puts it: "What happens if you share

space in a lifeboat? The boat is swamped and everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe."

While the above solutions do not possess the almost demonic ring of the final solution which was inflicted on the Jewish people and to a large extent on the Kampucheans also; still, one senses the chilling presence of a logic, which, should it lose its tenuous anchorage on human values, will once again usher new barbarisms upon our age.

One cannot picture a mother Theresa moving among the wounded and cold-bloodedly sorting out those who would live and those who would be left to die. The love for mankind in this fragile nun spontaneously directs her to give her all, for all — with special priority for the most injured. One cannot picture the gentle U Thant and the mystic Dag Hammarskjöld subscribing to a "lifeboat ethics" — especially since, as someone pointed out, much of the lifeboat's space is being used to store golf clubs.

A third approach to solving poverty is the potent fusion of economics and the national security state. One of the central propositions of this developmental strategy is that "wealth must first be created before it can be distributed." This approach requires the sacrifice of at least one generation for the achievement of economic growth. The sacrifice consists of repressing the civil liberties and political rights of the poor — in effect, of the majority of its citizens — in order to maintain a secure environment for the harsh economic policies of the state. In its more extreme manifestations, this approach would condone the destruction of its environment, the enslavement of its people and the starvation of its children as necessary human costs for economic growth. As a Latin American president once frankly stated: "our economy is doing well; but the people, not." The center of concern in Washington, D.C. called this model a new stage of industrial capitalism that is: "an anti-spiritual, anti-social, and anti-ecological drive, and whose anti-cultural vision of society makes it an enemy of the earth and of the human community."⁸

⁸ John Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Center of Concern, 1984.

The World Council of Churches at its Sixth Assembly made a similar comment: "the employment of a doctrine of national security to justify the denial of basic human rights has in recent years acquired a wider geographical application. While security is a legitimate concern of all states, the churches must resist its perversion to sanctify a persistent and widening violation of human rights including in some cases genocide."⁹

Hope for New Solutions

When our history confronts us with these periodic eruptions of violence that threaten ruin upon our civilization, I recall the abiding sense of hope which the prophets tried hard to maintain in times of crisis and distress. The source of their hope is beautifully acknowledged by the psalmist in this renowned hymn:

"The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want;
In green pastures, he makes
me rest;
Beside refreshing waters, he
leads me.
He gives me new life;
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the darkest valley,
I fear no harm, for thou art with me."

(Psalm 23:1-4)

Early in 1982, Dr. Kinhide Mushakoji who joined the United Nations University in 1976 as its vice-rector for the human and social development programme and who had been director of the Institute of International Relations at Sophia University, Tokyo — prepared a position paper on: "the Specificity of the United Nations University." I was impressed with Dr. Mushakoji's concern that this university should not duplicate the existing research and publication efforts of other institutions, but

⁹ World Council of Churches, *Statement of Human Rights*, 1983.

that it enter into sustained efforts to increase the capacity of the united nations system to cope with global problems by simultaneous addressing their technical and political aspects. This implies a balancing, with the political dimension, of the prevailing technocratic studies of global problems.

In consonance with my earlier propositions that the state needs more genuine politics rather than less, it necessarily follows that I view this development with great interest and hope, relating it to the paper of Dr. Rajni Kothari, director of the center for developing studies in Delhi. In Dr. Kothari's paper entitled: "Managing Accumulating Sources of Tension" — The Role for the United Nations University" — he noted:

"There is need to find new answers, produce new skills and generate new forms of knowledge to deal with a new human problematic — in a way to restore vision and perspective, but to do so by taking cognizance of new secular and spiritual forces at work."

I believe that Dr. Kothari's paper complements the directions proposed by Dr. Mushakoji, and I wish to suggest that these "new expressions of the human spirit" are to be found today among the non-governmental organization (NGOS) whose dedicated staff work among grassroots communities.

Global survival and social transformation no longer seem to be achievable goals for the governmental and inter-governmental system, both of which are plagued by exploitative structures and the loss of vision of a peaceful and harmonious world. It is time to bring the people back to the center of all efforts towards peace and development.

And it is here that non-governmental organizations can make a decisive contribution. They retain the creativity and flexibility which rigid bureaucracies have lost. They have largely remained incorrupt and idealistic, venturing into the remotest regions in order to reach the poorest of the poor.

But, as observed by Dr. Angelita Yap-Ledesma, research director of the center for the development of human resources in

rural Asia, "to be small is not to be beautiful when it comes to attracting support and understanding from governmental, inter-governmental and International financial institutions. *Ngo* work with small farmers exposes them to charges of subversion by government. Their advocacy of the rights of small communities who are being by-passed by top-down approaches, is faintly acknowledged and quickly put aside in inter-governmental conferences, and the big financial institutions consider it a waste of their time to attend to the small projects that are typical *Ngos*."

It is my hope that the medium-term perspective of the United Nations University might also study the vital role that non-governmental organizations play in fulfillment of its basic charter concern for human survival, development and welfare. As has been pointed out, the United Nations University, because of its strategic advantage in the United Nations system and its special status among institutions of higher learning, has the leverage to make itself heard on sensitive and controversial issues. If the university can serve as catalyst for strengthening the *Ngo* system as a necessary countervailing people's force, it will also have contributed significantly towards "bringing the human being back to the centre of the development process."

The continuing search for another development strategy which is people-oriented, self-reliant and harmony with the environment requires strong bonds of understanding and cooperation between the people of both the developing and developed nations.

Examples of International Cooperation

The rhetoric on human rights and poverty continues to flood the halls of international meetings while leaving unchanged the grim reality that threatens human existence. It is therefore instructive to be able to cite country efforts at mobilizing its official and citizens in the fight against poverty.

In 1979, the churches of the Federal Republic of Germany started a series of meetings with the country's political parties, labor unions, farmers associations, business executives and university people. The objective of these meetings, which culminated

in a nation-wide consultation held in Bonn-bad Godesberg in January 1979, was to influence Germany's decision-makers towards more effective development policies and to motivate its citizens to enter into partnership with third world *Ngos* which promote self-reliant and participatory projects for the poor.

In continuity with these efforts, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation established a special section whose task was to improve the economic instruments of development cooperation. This assignment arose from a study which discovered that the nation's development banks were not reaching the target groups among the poor. It was realized, therefore, that there was need for new financing schemes which could be brought about by first studying the on-going financial arrangements which *Ngos* utilize to service the small farmers, fishermen and artisans.

Consequently, two groups of German parliamentarians, social scientists, journalists, representatives of farmer and labor associations, students, development aid administrators and Church-related support agencies — went to Thailand in December 1984 and to India in March 1985 in order to gain personal experience of the poverty problem. They lived in the villages, ate the food of the poor, saw the effects of malnourishment on the children and came away edified by the quiet courage and ready hospitality of the poor.

I believe that the United Nations University should also explore its possible contribution in exposing political leaders and members of the international academic and scientific community to the realities of poverty. By supporting such people-to-people exchanges, the university can extend its catalytic influence towards yet another vital area, that of helping decision-makers fathom better the forces that prevent the poor from achieving an adequate living standard.

The Moral Imperative to Solve Poverty

The 1977 United Nations study undertaken by Wassily Leonief and his associates argued for reducing the inequality in income between the developed and the developing countries from

12 to 1 ratio of 1970 to a 7 to 1 ratio by the end of the century. To achieve this latter ratio, which would still be extreme since it will only raise the average gross domestic product of the poorest developing countries to only US\$400 (in 1970 prices) — the Leontieff study arrived at these conclusions:

“The principal limits to sustained economic growth and accelerated development are political, social and institutional in character rather than physical. No insurmountable physical barriers exist within the twentieth century to the accelerated development of the developing regions.”

* * *

“To ensure accelerated development, two general conditions are necessary: first, far-reaching internal changes of a social, political and institutional character in the developing countries, and second, significant changes in the world economic order.”¹⁰

The conclusions of this United Nations study seem to echo the basic argument of my paper, namely, that the immature state whose repressive measures lead to human rights violations and economic deprivation of its citizens is in alliance with a similarly immature international order whose economic structure promotes mechanisms of injustice against the poor.

But the fact that the limits to growth are not physical but political and social in character is an insight laden with hope, for political and social institutions are made up of people; people who, like the samaritan of the gospel, can change when brought in contact with the sufferings of a wounded brother; people whose blindness to the misery around them can be cured by the moral force of love and trust extended by another human being. This is the underlying reason behind my proposal that we seek new paths to relate to one another as persons of worth engaged in small projects whose meaningfulness resides in their retention of the human qualities of trust and faith in the poor.

For the flow of aid through the hardened arteries of bureaucracies has failed to uplift the poor and, in many cases, created new burdens and oppressions for them to bear. We must once again return humanity to the state by supporting a plurality of

¹⁰ Quoted in: Henry Shue, *Basic Rights*, 1980, pp. 107-108.

people's associations which are the conduits of justice and of truth. We must exert every effort to humanize our international environment, by promoting intercultural exchanges where people learn from one another how to live together in peace and charity.

My dear friends, the pastoral perspective on human rights and poverty begins and ends with man — his dignity as a person, his eternal worth as a child of God. Through man, we can establish faith in the power of humanity to transform our global hatreds into universal love. With man, we discover the image of our creator whose fatherhood delivers us from our evil tendencies and blesses us with the moral powers to attain peace, security, the resolution of conflicts and social transformation.

Permit me to end with the following prayer of pope John Paul II on the occasion of his 1980 visit to Hiroshima:

To the creator of nature and humanity, of truth and beauty, I pray:

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victims of all wars and violence among individuals and nations;

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of all children who suffer when people put their faith in weapons and war;

Hear my voice when I beg you to instill into the hearts of all human beings the wisdom of peace, the strength of justice, and the joy of fellowship;

Hear my voice, for I speak for the multitudes in every country and in every history who do not want war and are ready to walk the road of peace;

Hear my voice and grant insight and strength so that we may always respond to hatred with love, to injustice with total dedication to justice, to need with the sharing of self, to war with peace.

O God, hear my voice and grant unto the world your everlasting peace.

JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN
Archbishop of Manila