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Theological “Places” for a Program in Human Development The Philippines (1970’); Reflections on the Christian Life

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Theological "Places" for a Program in Human Development THE PHILIPPINES (1970's): Reflections on the Christian Life

A. V. ROMUALDEZ

Among the insights contemporary man has gained in self-understanding, one of the more significant has been the realization that authentic human development is a self-creation.¹ Man, we are told, makes himself; he either grows or stagnates and deteriorates according to the appropriateness and the fullness of his response to his concrete historically situated world. The challenge of existence, therefore, is for contemporary man a challenge of responsibility: a vocation to be in the world, to transform it as much as its history and man's own dynamically creative faculties permit, toward human growth. For this reason, man has come to regard himself even as he is rooted in history, as radically oriented toward the future.² He has consequently

1. The notion of self-creation is explicitly proposed by Leslie Dewart in *The Foundations of Belief* (New York, 1969), esp. pp. 264-270. Cf. also Ruben A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (New York, 1969), esp. 1-17.

2. This fact is evident in the rise of "futurological" speculation and study in Europe and in the United States of America; needless to say, futurology has found favor particularly among Protestant theologians, especially under the influence of the World Council of Churches. A brief survey of materials on "futurology" may be found in the Spanish-language journal, *Mensaje*, 19 (1970), pp. 138 ff. See also L. A. Gomez de Souza, "El futuro de las ideologías y las ideologías del futuro," *Vispera*, 3 (1969), 12-31. In North America, this pre-occupation with the future has been studied and greatly enhanced too by the recent best seller, *Future Shock*, by Alvin Toffler (New York, 1970). Of particular interest for us in the academic world is Toffler's chapter 18, on "Education in the Future Tense." Also Symptomatic is the popularity of such philosophers of hope as Ernst Bloch and, in a real sense, Herbert Marcuse. For an excellent introduction and survey on modern man's future orientation, see Walter H. Capps' very scholarly introduction to *The Future of Hope*, edited by

tended to view life with no small measure of optimism. It is not, however, an optimism that is free from tragic undertones, for it has resulted in a tendency to overlook the perennial problem of man's self-contradiction. In spite of his innumerable achievements in the various human and natural sciences, in technology, and in the arts, contemporary man remains a man in the midst of his own violence.³ In the very process of self-creation, amidst his many creative projects, he nevertheless has continued to realize situations that threaten not only himself but also his communal life, that thereby threaten too that very future to which aspires.⁴ It seems that in the very area which crucially demands genuine responsibility of him, in the area of creative interpersonal and intersocietal relationships, contemporary man's achievements have yet to match his triumphs in the other aspects of his existence.

Recent events, partly of our own making and partly natural, have laid bare the more urgent challenges to the responsibility of our people; have, thereby, provided occasion for extraordinary self-creative response on the part of our community. In many

Capps himself (Philadelphia, 1970) which is the published version of the proceedings of the symposium on "The Future of Hope", sponsored in 1968 by the Department and Institute of Religious Studies, University of California, Sta. Barbara Campus.

3. The point is perhaps most vividly expressed in our literature. A passage from Amado Hernandez's "Tao 2" in *Isang Dipang Langit* (Manila: Makabayan News-Feature, Inc., 1961), p. 23: "Tao: . . . Lumikha ng mga tuntuni't panuto, ng mga alamat/at ng mga sangkap, kailanga't gamit, ng mga diyoses/na kanyang sinambang buong pananalig; nguni't ang pag-ibig ng tao't paghanga, ang paniniwala/samyong nawawala, kislap, tamis, bula; /muling sinisira/at iginigiba/ang dating dambana; /pati Paraiso ay handang talikdan/upang sa desyerto humanap ng oasis."

4. Cf. A. Toffler, *op. cit.*, especially chapter 20, "The Strategy of Social Futurism," where, among other things, he notes that "the ultimate objective of social futurism" is "not merely the transcendence of technocracy and the substitution of more humane, more far-sighted, more democratic planning, but the subjection of the process of evolution itself to conscious human guidance" (p. 485). This, of course, presupposes community, a fact which is better brought out in Leslie Dewart, *Religion, Language and Truth* (New York, 1970), chapter 6. "Man and God", pp. 127-144, especially pp. 137-138. Cf. also Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief*, pp. 477-480.

areas of the nation, our people still suffer the effects of the calamities that last year wrought havoc among us — the rains and the floods in the north, and the drought in the south, each with its concomitant human problems. More significantly, in a large measure through our own inability to live in conditions of mutually creative community, we must today live under an extraordinarily rigorous regime of political discipline. The challenges that have emerged under these conditions may perhaps be summed up in a word which, though much abused in our age, communicates aptly still the breadth and depth of the requirements of authentic human development today: ours is a time of *revolution*. Our consciousness of our real needs today and our aspirations for a higher life style tomorrow has rendered our oldest institutions and other response-structures problematic — has intensified the urgency for us to rise to the occasion as one people with greater heroism. It is a heroism, however, that the human spirit can muster only if, somehow, it succeeds in overcoming the self-contradiction that is man himself.

By all rights, the enormity, of the tasks of relief and rehabilitation and, ultimately, of revolution, of creating a new society, compounded a hundredfold by the self-seeking of not a few among us, should suffice to drive us all into the hell of despair. Our radical disposition as Christians in the Philippines must nevertheless be one of Hope. We must recall the good news announced and made real by Jesus Christ. It tells of a new order to be established now and for the future by God and man in covenant, a new man, therefore, no longer to be thwarted by self-contradiction but moved by a refreshing Inspiration,⁵ and re-oriented toward projects genuinely creative of man and society. As we plunge more deeply into the various tasks our new situation has confronted us with, we should perhaps reflect on the present demands of our Christian Commitment in the light of the requirements of current Philippine history — this, more to revitalize our own lives of faith here and now than to

5. I have capitalized the word "Inspiration" to call attention to the fact that what I am referring to here is the presence of the Spirit to Man, the "In-dwelling of the Holy Spirit."

offer our non-Christian brothers a glimpse of the new creation of which our lives as Christians are meant to be the sign.

If ours is a revolutionary age, a time when everyone is being asked to detach himself from the comfortable milieu of familiar institutions and life styles in order to be able at the very least to question the relevance of these to the present situation, and, perhaps, even to re-form these radically according to new needs — if, indeed, ours are revolutionary times, then we must assert with some confidence that these days are of special significance to Christian responsibility. For the commitment of faith has always implied a revolutionary attitude, a readiness to leave the present for a future whose realization, though already begun in these last times, awaits completion in the mystery of Jesus' return.⁶ Herein, as a matter of fact, lies the special value of the Christian faith for man: by it, man's vocation to self-creation, to the creation of history, is given effectuality, appropriate substance and direction. This, after all, is the salvation in which we have for so long believed.

In the past many of us failed to appreciate the revolutionary attitude proper to the Christian because we understood Jesus' call to repentance in terms more of our individual personal sins than of the radical orientation of our total lives. Not a few among us took for granted that the realization in our midst of the Kingdom of God, as announced by Jesus, relieved man of all responsibility for history. Because we interpreted the principle of love's gratuitousness much too abstractly, we tended to respond to Christ's commandment of love according to our own pre-conceived patterns of loving activities, either completely ignoring or inadequately realizing the historically defined needs of our neighbor. It has consequently been difficult for us today to recognize the possibility that our acts of love till now may be effecting not the liberation and development but the oppression of our fellowmen.

The revolutionary character of the Christian faith is expressed

6. This theme, the Christian revolutionary stance, and its ground in the awaited "Second Coming", is the topic of Ruben Alves' *A Theology of Human Hope*. See especially pp. 114—132.

concisely and well in Jesus' exhortation that man "seek first" the Kingdom of God rather than be anxious over earthly ambitions.⁷ Here the radical existential comprehensiveness of the Kingdom is indicated; here too its demand for repentance, a total and unqualified commitment, is revealed.

Jesus' call to the Kingdom of God, we must constantly remind ourselves, is an invitation not so much to a new place as to a new situation, one that may be made real where we are — in the very heart of history. It is a situation made new by man himself, but man transformed by God's ruling presence in his total life. We catch a glimpse of the Kingdom in the life of Israel under the covenant. The history revealed beneath the diverse forms in the Old Testament is that of a people's deepening consciousness of the major role played by God's ruling presence in their development as a nation.⁸ If out of the loose confederation of more or less autonomous Hebrew clans and tribes liberated from Egypt there emerged a people one not only in experience but also in a sense of national personality, it was chiefly because God's rule, offered and accepted on Sinai and historically concretized in the decalogue, had created the appropriate situation for it. The Ten Commandments, as a significant part of the pact between God and His people, as well as His assured presence provided the proper matrix for harmonious living among the tribes and clans whose traditions of strictly exclusive tribal solidarity would otherwise have fostered not the birth but the abortion of the Israelite nation. This creative character of God's rule, then, is what the Psalmist celebrates, singing as he does that "The Law of the Lord is perfect,/ . . . More to be desired . . . than gold,/ even much fine gold;/ sweeter also than honey/ and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:8—11).⁹

7. Luke 12:31. Cf. Matt. 6:33.

8. God's intervening activity, his ruling presence in the development of Israel as a nation, is celebrated in Exodus. This has prompted one scholar to note that "it was only in the light of the exodus that Israel was able to look back into the past and piece together her earlier history. It was also the exodus which provided the prophets with a key to the understanding of Israel's future." Cf. James Plastaras, *The God of Exodus* (Milwaukee, 1966), p. 7.

9. Cf. Norbert Lohfink's excellent essay on "Law and Grace" which

Israel's consciousness, therefore, comprehended the acts of God that made possible their liberation and self-creation, achievements which, in retrospect, they knew they would have failed to realize had they been left apart from God. Their radical aspiration to liberation and self-development notwithstanding, they were fully aware of their own contradictory tendencies which had occasionally surfaced as they struggled through the wilderness of Sinai; in the face of danger and starvation, they had stooped to blaming and cursing Moses and even God for having led them away from the fleshpots of Egypt.¹⁰ The events of the Exodus and Israel's subsequent history made the chosen People realize then that God's rule is loving and liberating. Loving, because it was a grace extended to them on the divine initiative alone.¹¹ As they groaned in their misery, crying to no one in particular, God nevertheless heard them, saw their predicament and reached out to them. Liberating, because God entered their history to liberate them from the oppression of Pharaoh, and, more significantly, to liberate their energies in order that they might build themselves up as a nation. In the context of this history, Israel came to understand God's self-revelation to them as Yahweh in terms of personal relationships: the God Yahweh was, for His people, not primarily the omnipresent Supreme Being of the philosophers, but the personal God who willed to be with them to do things for them.¹²

constitutes chapter 6 of his book on *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament* (London, 1968), pp. 103–119, which is an attempt to understand reasons for the two completely different evaluations of the Mosaic Law in Scripture, the early Old Testament view and the Pauline view. Of special interest in relation to this topic is Bernhard W. Anderson's "The New Covenant and the Old," in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, ed. by Bernhard W. Anderson (New York, 1969), pp. 225–242.

10. Cf. Ruben A. Alves, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108.

11. Exodus 2:23–25. Cf. James Plastaras' treatment of this text, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59. He says: "Thus, while verses 23b–25 present the groaning of the Israelites as a quasilamentation rite, they still preserve the primacy of the divine initiative. The Israelites are heard, not because of piety or fervor, but simply because of their suffering and helplessness. God comes to save them at a time when they are not yet able to call upon his name." Cf. also Hosea 2:19–20 and 11:1–11. Isaiah 54:5–10; Jeremiah 31:3 which speaks of God's love in terms similar to Exodus 19:3b ff – as "drawing".

12. Exodus 3:14. Cf. J. Plastaras on the divine name Yahweh, p. 98.

The fertile ground of Israelitic experience, under the loving care of God's ever-present Spirit, yielded a harvest of theological insights concerning, among others, the appropriate relationship between God and mankind. The fundamental truths affirmed in these theologies are presented with special vividness in the early chapters of Genesis.¹³ Here again we may catch a glimpse of the Kingdom, of God's loving and liberating rule as it is offered to mankind, pictured from the point of view of Israelite culture in the tenth century before Christ. The Garden of Eden, the Israelite world exorcised of all evil, depicting a condition conducive in all its aspects to human development, is there made to represent the creative situation the loving and liberating God-Creator must intend for mankind. A world fraught with evil and all sorts of oppression could not have been the intention of a Creator who showed Himself gracious not once but many times in the history of the People His rule had, in a real sense, helped to create. That the world of man is nevertheless so reflects not the divine will but human willfulness, a willfulness which, in its self-alienation from God, has brought self-contradiction upon itself.¹⁴ The events that follow after the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve vividly illustrate the consequences of man's self-contradiction; we note in them a common theme: the disintegration of the human community, the break-up, for example, of the human family in the story of Cain and Abel, or the fragmentation of human society in the story of the Tower of Babel.

Jesus' invitation to repentance is, therefore, a call to revolution: it is a call to a new life, one that radically alters the existential order, for it would alter man who, in fact, is the dynamic center of that order.¹⁵ To respond affirmatively to

13. See Henricus Renkens, S.J., *Israel's Concept of Beginning* (New York, 1964), especially pp. 104-127 and 156 to the end.

14. See *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown, S.J., Joseph A. Fitzmayer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968); 2:22-29; 2:30 and 2:49. The opposite is shown in Isaiah 25:6 where community, represented in the divine banquet, is participated in by those who have been saved.

15. Biblically, the special place of man in the universal order is seen in

Christ's call is to suffer a revolution within oneself, to gain a new heart filled deeply with God's loving and liberating rule,¹⁶ and, thereby, to be made a new man, a new creation.¹⁷ The Christian message is good news because it announces a ground for human hope. Jesus, by his personal presence and by his activities, had definitively and finally realized among men this divine Kingdom, God's loving and liberating rule — that which we could but glimpse in the history and theologies of Israel, revealed in many and diverse ways through the prophets.¹⁸

Besides manifesting the actual presence of the divine rule among men, God's self-revelation in and through Jesus, in his words and works, also makes accessible to those who express faith in him the very dynamism of that Kingdom. The same love with which Jesus heals the wounds of men, in the sick and in the sinner, is given to those who accept his challenge of repentance.¹⁹ To commit oneself fully to Jesus is to live finally in truth,²⁰ it places man in the situation appropriate to self-creation, one in which man's power for self-development is liberated so that he is able to live with his fellows in creative community. This is why the apostle John's witness is of the life that is the truth, and of the truth that makes men free. In the liberation that Jesus brings, man grows in self-presence, in self-possession. To each and

the fact that man is graced with being the "image and likeness" of God, i.e., graced with a special relationship with God, not that of creature to its creator, but of Son to a Father. Man's central place in the universal order, his dominion over all creation, is shown as a consequence of this grace. Renkens, *op. cit.*, pp. 170—171, deals with the same topic but relative to the account of man's creation in Gen. 2.

16. Jeremiah 31:31—34, esp. 33b; 32:40; Ezekiel 36:26—27.

17. 2 Corinthians 5:17a; Rev. 21:5.

18. Hebrews 1:1—3.

19. Romans 1:16—19; 3:20—26; 8:9—11; 26—30; 1 Cor. 130; 15:45; Gal. 2:20—21; John 1:4, 12, 16.

20. Truth here is best understood in terms of the Hebraic notions of Truth and Knowledge. What is fundamentally referred to here is not so much a knowledge of God, i.e., an intellectual apprehension of divinity, as the experience of God, man's act of relating himself to God. To live in the truth is, therefore, to live in relationship to God, or relationship that is authentically fruitful for man. As authentically fruitful, it is thereby liberating.

all the faithful, the assurance Jesus gives is that "your faith has made you whole."²¹ Indeed, it is to the "whole" man, the man "integrated in Christ", who alone may rule his total life with love, that the contemporary world must turn for the establishment of an authentically communal life.

As it was in the life of the primitive Christian community, so it is today: the challenge of the new covenant,²² of the new and everlasting life,²³ is a loving commitment to God and to our fellowmen. Indeed, loving and liberating events remain the signs of the presence of the Kingdom among men. What we have perhaps not emphasized enough, however, is the rootedness in history of any act of love.²⁴ Love, if it is authentic, derives significance not only from the intention of the lover, but also — and more importantly for us in underdeveloped contexts — from the concrete historically defined situation of those we profess to love. To give alms, for example, to a people in need because of economic or political or social structures that perpetuate an inequitable distribution of the fruits of labor, or that usurp power from the people to lay it in the hands of a few individuals or families, cannot truly be seen as love. It rather constitutes a move evasive of the real demand of love which, perhaps a little oversimply put, is the radical reform of the structures themselves.

21. Mark 5:34; Matt. 9:22; Luke 8:48. Cf. *JBC*, 42:16, especially where comment is made on Mark 2:5 apropos the *faith* of those who experienced the miracles of Jesus.

22. "New Covenant": the phrase presupposes the whole Jewish and Israelitic tradition. Its challenge, expressed in terms of that tradition, would refer to the "great" or "first" commandment. See Mark 12: 28-34 (Matt. 22:34-40).

23. "The new and everlasting life": the phrase presupposes a gentile perspective. See Luke 10: 25-28.

24. This character of love has only recently come full blown to man's consciousness as a result of reflections in existential phenomenology and certain personalist philosophies, e.g., that of E. Mounier. In theology, this has been taken up and stressed by the Latin American theologians of liberation. See for example Hugo Assmann, *La teología de la liberación* (Montevideo, n.d.), esp. pp. 23-31. This portion of Assmann has been translated and included in the book of readings *Theology of Development and Liberation*, edited by Gorospe, Roche and Romualdez, (Manila, 1972), pp. 218-229. Its anthropological ground is also developed at some length in Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief*, pp. 270-282.

Anything less, in the context of the historical situation of those we profess to love, carries little or no loving significance. It is not love because, in the given situation, it is not truly creative of those we profess to love; in fact, it buries them more deeply in dependency, in a situation that is oppressive.

The fulfillment of the Christian commitment of love, therefore, involves much more than the mere application on the practical level of preconceived or traditionally known notions of loving activities. If Christian responsibility needs grounding in historically situated reality, our reflection as Christians concerning our action and presence in the Philippines today must be critical; it must include a close and realistic scrutiny of our fellow Filipinos' situation. We must seek out data where there are available, in the behavioral sciences, for instance, and in other human sciences.²⁵ If, for example, under sociological investigation, the existing structures of our political life should be shown to be unfruitful because of an unhealthy tension between actually prevailing Filipino response patterns and ideally conceived institutions borrowed from other lands; if, furthermore, it should be observed that this tension has resulted in the loss of power for development among the masses; has in other words distorted our people's political processes and reduced our ability to sub-human conditions, then perhaps it would be seen that the situation demands a specific form of Christian loving action. It would have to be one genuinely liberating and creative, i.e., one projected in view of the historically defined facets of the problem.

The Philippine world today is a world suffering. From north to south, as much amidst the subtle systems of its institutions as amidst the crack of bullets, it groans for liberation, for the freedom of the sons of God.²⁶ It is, as not a few have noted, a "social volcano" on the verge of eruption, seething within with all forms of human contradictions: where, through our educational system, we would prepare our children for authentic

25. Cf. Hugo Assmann, *op. cit.* "Teología y ciencias humanas," pp. 2-16. His anthropological ground is also developed length in Leslie Dowd, *The Foundations of*

social responsibility, we have rather tended to alienate them from their real world.²⁷ where, by means of our political processes, we would unite our people toward a common purpose, we have rather tended to deepen and create feudal divisions;²⁸ indeed, where, through commerce and industry, we would foster human development toward a condition of communal self-creation, we have rather tended to marginalize a continually growing mass of our fellow Filipinos.²⁹ The evil that we do not want is what we do.³⁰ The challenges that confront us are many and complex. The success, nevertheless, of rehabilitation, and of radical revolution, of the creation of the new society, depends ultimately on the will of everyone in the Philippines to assume responsibility for the nation. Ours may be a country sufficiently endowed with natural resources, but if we fail to nurture within our hearts a sense of community, the nation shall remain a volcano of pent-up contradictions. Our industries may be operating the most sophisticated inventions of technology under management methods learned from the best universities, but if we show no genuine social concern, our vision of a common weal shall remain utopian, a dream of no-place. We may, by the fiat of authority, construct socio-economic and political systems that could insure an efficient and relatively affluent life for our citizens, but if we lack communal responsibility, we doom ourselves in our national life first to a loss of human sensitivity, and finally to disintegration. What, in the last analysis, is fundamentally creative of man and his community is love.³¹

27. See Chester Hunt and Thomas McHale, "Education, Attitudinal Change and Philippine Economic Development," *Philippine Sociological Review*, XIII (1965).

28. See for example, Horacio de la Costa, S.J., "Philippine Institutions in Historical Perspective," in *Theology of Development and Liberation*, eds., Gorospe, Roche and Romualdez, esp. pp. 87-88.

29. See, for example, Vicente B. Valdepeñas, Jr., "The Filipino Harvest of Shame," in *Theology of Development and Liberation*, eds. Gorospe, Roche and Romualdez, pp. 92-103.

30. Romans 7:14-20, especially 19.

31. For the structure and significance of this entire paragraph, see 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

Love, its realization here in these islands now, constitutes our good news as bearers of the Christian message, and our responsibility. It is the good news because it is God's liberating self-communication to all men in the person and activities of Jesus Christ, a self-giving that has been assured mankind through the promise of the continual presence of the Spirit "to the consummation of the world". It is our responsibility, because the good news is also an invitation to repentance, to a truly human revolution, to participate in the creation of an order the radical dynamism of which is love. It is, therefore, a call to human development, for, in the last analysis, development is but the fruition of love made real in history.