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## **Some Comments on the AECD Report on Theological Perspectives**

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# Some Comments on the AECD Report on Theological Perspectives

EMERITO P. NACPIL

1. Let me introduce the text briefly by noting a few things about its production.

The Workshop that produced it had in its *membership*  
four Roman Catholic bishops,  
three professional theologians,  
two professors of Christian ethics,  
two social scientists  
two lay leaders,  
one director of relief work,  
one youth  
one representative from the World Council of Churches, and  
one representative from the Vatican City.

The Workshop was given two *guidelines* for its work. First, it was to consider the issues of development theologically with the Asian setting clearly in mind; second, its report must be written in simple and clear language which the ordinary man in the street can understand. These two guidelines seem pretty apt for a theological group, for theologians are notorious for their inability to keep both feet on the ground, and when they talk they speak only in 'heavenly' language. How well the group succeeded in steering away from this snare is not for me to tell. However, Mary Hollnsteiner thinks the group did succeed. After the session which adopted the report of the Workshop, I

met Mary in the hallway and she said to me: "You've done something I never expected you to do: your report really communicates."

The *procedure* adopted by the Workshop was as follows: after the initial orientation session, the Workshop divided into three sections. One section was asked to deal with the scope and basis of the Christian concern for development. Another section was to consider the issues of poverty and affluence, power and justice. The third section was to suggest ways and means of engendering development. The three sections met several times and then drafted reports embodying the results of their discussions. These reports were then discussed by the whole Workshop and subsequently recommitted to the sections for redrafting. One section had to produce an entirely different report. After a second round of discussion by the entire workshop on the section reports, two persons prepared a draft of the Report for the whole workshop, the final report embodying the section reports. This final draft was submitted to the plenary assembly and was adopted with very little change.

2. The Workshop was given the *task* of suggesting theological perspectives for the goals and tasks of development in Asia. We were made to understand in no uncertain signs, however, that our work must not assume front seat in the affairs of development; its place is rather in the backseat. I would have thought that what we were asked to do was to provide a retrospective rather than a perspective on development. Theologians like to say the last and final word, anyway!

A perspective is a vantage point for a look-through. It is supposed to indicate the relationship or proportion of the parts of a whole seen from a particular standpoint or point in time. It is expected to indicate a frame of reference for evaluating the relative importance of the elements of an issue. In our case, the issue we were supposed to illuminate is that of development in Asia and the standpoint from which to view it is that of Christian theology. I must say that the people who assigned us this task must be congratulated for the courage of assuming that Christian theology could illuminate the issue of development. This is a leap of faith, indeed: more faith than the theo-

logians think they have! However, in the title of our Workshop the word 'perspective' appears in the plural. This suggests that we were to provide more than one or two theological perspectives, thus anticipating the fact that theologians are not likely to agree on anything! The expectation, of course, was not unfulfilled. What three or four different perspectives would do to clarity, I would not dare imagine! In any case, as theological perspectives, they must at least meet the following conditions:

- a. they must illuminate the issues of development in their *Christian* proportions;
- b. they must not bring about a polarization between mission and development;
- c. they must enable christians and churches to participate in development with conviction and direction;
- d. they must enable christians to maintain a transcendent relation to development for a prophetic criticism of it.

The Document does list four likely perspectives for the goals and tasks of development. They are discussed briefly in the third and fourth paragraphs. My reasons for this preference are the following:

- a. The concept of the Kingdom of God is Comprehensive, covering both the potentialities of man opened to him in history by development and of his destiny beyond history.
- b. The kingdom of God is central to the thought, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- c. The kingdom of God commits the Church to mission in history understood from the perspective of eschatology, i.e., from the future of man and the world in Christ.
- d. The kingdom of God, when illuminated by the Lord's Prayer, provides a set of criteria for indicating and evaluating what sort of things Christians can do in participating in development.
- e. The kingdom of God through the Resurrection of Jesus opens up a vision of the fullness of human development in the community of a holy city.

- f. The concept of the kingdom of God gathers up and does justice to the various insights embodied in or stressed by the other models suggested in the text.

3. Let me at this point leave the theological part of my comments and turn to the humanistic part, without no less being theological, I hope. Abraham Heschel wrote: "[Man] is never finished, never immutable. Humanity is not something he comes upon in the recesses of the self. He always looks for a model or an example to follow. What determines one's being human is the image one adopts. . . . A theory about the stars never becomes a part of the being of the stars. A theory about man enters his consciousness, determines his self-understanding, and modifies his very existence. The image of man affects the nature of man" (*Who is Man*, p. 8).

Since an image of man has this power of affecting man's nature and modifying his existence, it would do well for us to be clear—as best we can—about the image of man implied in development or modernization and to evaluate this image from the viewpoint of Christian humanism. I can only suggest what is involved here. It seems that the image of man implied in development has the following elements in it:

- (a) it implies a type of man who has learned to accept the fact that change is the normal state of reality, including man himself, and that he uses change to his advantage and is not a mere victim of it. Man in the West has this image of himself: he knows that nature evolves, that the form of human life is historical, that society can be changed by human effort, that reality responds to human purposes and activity, and that man has the knowledge, power, and tools to become a participant in the creative process of change.
- (b) Development requires a type of man who is rational, methodical, and pragmatic.
- (c) It requires a type of man who includes in his idea of goodness the values of material progress and tangible achievement.

- (d) It requires a type of man who understands himself as an individual self who is free to make decisions for himself in his manifold relations based on reason and conscience.
- (e) Development requires an image of man who participates in society as a responsible member.

Perhaps, I could summarize this by quoting a sketch of the profile of the New Filipino as suggested by Dr. Juan Salcedo in a speech he gave some years ago. He said: the New Filipino is oriented to change, has a disposition to be interested in issues beyond his immediate environment, looks toward the future, not to the past, believes in his ability to mould his future, relies on science and technology, values the dignity of man, and recognizes his responsibility to the community.

These at least are some of the lines and hues of a new image a Filipino must have of himself if he is to develop in the sense of the development ideology we are considering. The question now arises: can Christian theology, out of its own resources and perspective, contribute to the reshaping and refining of such an image of man? I have some ideas on the matter. I will have time in this text to mention them only! There are some images of man in the biblical tradition which I think are prototypical:

- the image of man of faith typified by Abraham,
- the image of man as a trustee and steward of creation symbolized by Adam,
- the image of man as a liberator and a law-abider typified by Moses,
- the image of man the sinner typified by every man,
- the image of the man for God and for others!

One of the tasks of Christian theology in the development effort is to articulate its view of man to the extent that such a view becomes a formative element in the self-understanding of contemporary man.