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The Role of the Church in World Cooperation for Development and Self-Reliance

MRS. MEDINA LACSON DE LEON

Preliminary Statement

AT the Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development that was held in Tokyo last July 14 through 22 this year and attended by almost 200 delegates, observers and visitors from 19 Asian countries belonging to the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, the message that rang loud and clear urged the "churches to involve themselves in the development programs in a spirit of continued co-operation."

This Seminar, as I was made to understand, seeks to give meaning to what had been discussed and decided at the Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development, identify those programs most relevant to the requirements of our country and perhaps find ways and means to carry them out.

It is in this light that, having been one of the privileged participants in that Tokyo confab, I shall attempt to discuss with you the topic assigned to me.

World Development Situation

On the basis of material well-being and in terms of man's application of technologies to the control of nature's resources

in order to bring about a marked increase in the growth of output per head of population, the countries of the world today are classified into developed and developing.

This well-defined classification has probably prompted the nations to be more conscious of their economic difficulties. Singly or collectively, they have not been only indulging in the continuing appraisal of their resources and the factors that tend to retard their growth, but have also been partly blaming the developed countries for their unsettling handicaps.

During the first meeting of some 77 nations in Algiers on October 10, 1967 in connection with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the developing nations were arrayed against the developed ones and rose as one man, eloquently demanding concessions from the developed nations in an obsessive desire to narrow down the economic chasm that divides them.

Among the most pressing demands of the developing nations in that historic meeting were included the dismantling of tariff restrictions imposed by the developed countries upon imports of agricultural produce and other primary products and the giving up of raising agricultural and primary products already traditionally produced by the developing countries.

As expected, the developed countries lent their collective ear in undisguised politeness, assuring that such demands would be given due consideration and serious study.

While waiting for the result of the consideration and study promised, the developing countries buckled down to work aiming at more beneficial performance. They had succeeded during the development decade of the sixties in chalking up an economic progress, which reflects slightly over four per cent of their gross domestic product in terms of per capita income. Undoubtedly, their performance was appreciable. And as to per capita growth, the developing countries registered an increase of two percent, but the developed countries showed an increment of about four percent.

In the area of exports in volume and value, the developing nations achieved a phenomenal growth rate of an average of over four per cent per annum during the sixties but still they failed to outpace the highly developed countries in the field of foreign trade. In fact, their proportionate share in the international trade, which stood at 31 per cent in 1950 nose-dived to 21 percent in 1960 and further declined to 18 per cent towards the close of the decade.

It is evident that the developing countries cannot seem to overtake the developed nations. Thus, the rich nations continue to stay rich, if not grow richer while the poor nations remain poor.

If the poor nations cannot for the present catch up with the affluent countries, it may be ascribed to certain factors like work attitudes, degree of national discipline and quality of education. Such factors however, are by no means permanent and irremediable, and they are not self-correcting either.

Various world study surveys have been conducted by responsible experts to discover and determine the pathways to pervasive world development in a manner that may wipe out the clear-cut distinction between developed and developing nations.

A number of these survey reports have prescribed in one form or another the establishment or strengthening of physical and social foundations that encourage private individuals and firms to produce and sell more goods and services, the attraction of foreign investments, the streamlining of governmental administrative machinery, the shifting of emphasis from cultural to technological goals in school curricula and the innovation of production methods and distribution systems, as well as the adoption of effective fiscal measures and credit administration.

To follow blindly without taking into account the local circumstances and economic milieu might produce opposite results, as a medicine to one may be a poison to another. Invention, not imitation, of procedures in attaining the desired level of growth can bring better results.

For the developing nations do recognize the fact that constant impressive outpouring of material products, the ever-increasing reliance on energy resources and the increased productivity will mean to them greater economic abundance—more food, more clothing and better homes, plus the conveniences of graceful living.

AECD's Proposals

Among the pertinent national measures designed to enable the developing countries to keep pace with the developed nations, as recommended at the last Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development for action are:

1. Every developing country should actively pursue a policy that aims at achieving self-reliance in as short a period as possible.

2. The developing countries should constantly bear in mind that the equitable distribution of income and wealth, of opportunities and of justice is as important as end-measure, and that the vigorous pursuit of a more just egalitarian society itself will generate the forces conducive to rapid economic, social and cultural advance.

3. More serious attempts should be made to promote exports, to seek regional cooperation, and to remove monopolies that work against the interests of the countries.

4. A sound, just, dedicated, dynamic and effective, non-corrupt political leadership and public administrative policy should be established, for without this all development efforts, including structural changes and institutional reforms, would be hampered or nullified.

Hand in hand with these general proposals, the AECD specifically urges the churches in the developing countries of Asia (a) to view their actions in the field of development as being complementary to and in support of the development efforts of the states and of voluntary organizations that are geared to the true concept of man's total development and (b) to work towards the eradication of all impediments

to development, such as socio-political tensions, corruption and exploitation of low-income groups.

Encouraging observed changes

It has been observed that in the past the church in Asia posed a major obstacle to development because it was considered the bulwark of traditionalism and a repository of beliefs and values incompatible with technology and ideology of progress.

Now that observation has gone out of touch with reality. The conclusion is sharply focused on the fact that churches in Asia have become massive monoliths paving the road to progress, getting themselves involved in political, social and economic reforms.

Role and Tasks of the churches in the Philippines

The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, including those of other faiths should strive to play a bigger role in evolving common policies, in setting priorities, in mobilizing internal resources and in channeling external assistance.

Within the context of prevailing Philippine conditions, the churches are faced with the overriding task of facilitating, not blocking, the emergence of fundamental changes that will adequately provide opportunities for human welfare and fulfillment.

One area of activity that offers bright opportunities is the organization of credit unions and consumers cooperatives. As proven in many parts of the world, credit unions, which are themselves small banking establishments, owned by the members, have not only effectively combatted usury and inflation but have also eased economic distress. Likewise, consumers cooperatives have not only provided the members with quality goods and services at very reasonable prices but have also shared profits in the form of patronage refunds among the patronizing members.

It is recognized that cooperatives have twin opportunities in developing a country into one of sound and stable status,

and these are (1) to stimulate the sense of pride and stability that go with the feeling of ownership and (2) to serve as laboratories of democracy.

Perhaps, the promotion of self-help projects is another. The churches may find no difficulty in encouraging and supporting any undertaking that will develop vocational skills among the youths who cannot afford to have a formal schooling. If all the idle but able and willing to work can be harnessed to profitable activities, their combined productive efforts can prove to be a tremendous boost.

The mobilization of domestic investible funds is another activity in which the churches can render assistance. They have to coax out money in hiding or help rechannel capital from economically unproductive ventures, like real estate business, to ventures that can serve as engine for growth, like industrial enterprises.

Just ten days ago, the First Asian Investment Promotion Meeting sponsored by the United Nations Development Organization, or UNIDO, ended in Manila with a happy note. Realizing that the economic growth of the developing countries is being definitely impeded by the inadequacy of risk capital and technical knowhow, the UNIDO has organized that investment promotion meeting on a person-to-person basis whereby a would-be entrepreneur presents his project to a foreign investor for his consideration.

There were 23 Filipino industrial projects put before the private investors from developed countries. If all or some of them get favorable action, it is not farfetched for the church to lend a helping hand in its own way to the eventual successful operations of those projects.

Self-Reliance

The people, especially the youths, in our country as in other parts of the world are no longer willing to wait for the realization of avowed social and economic goals expressed in broad and general terms. Platitudes have to give way to

specifics. They are concerned not so much with what is to be done as with how it is to be done.

They want to think for themselves and have work to do. Work opportunities and not handouts are what they hanker for. They are more than convinced that the self-generated internal force can bring about more enduring and more profitable results. The sparkplug required is a favorable climate of job opportunities.

As Myrdal says in his *Asian Drama*, the net impact of development and industrialization is automatically the spreading of well-being to wider and wider sectors of the population.

In the Philippine milieu, conditions and factors that stimulate and induce self-reliance among the people to enable them to reach the plateau of prosperity and peace are pressingly needed.

The church, indeed, can and should fill that need.

COMMENTS

PERFECTO YASAY JR.

Substantially, the report has aptly taken into consideration the broad facets of the national, regional and international situation dealing with the issue of development. It has also pictured the contradictions or antagonisms between development and underdevelopment, the dominating classes and dominated classes. Thus the report mentions the alarming gap between the developed and the developing world. The various schemes employed by the developed countries such as aid strings and other numerous buyers like customs and revenue duties, quantitative restrictions and restrictive practices against goods coming from developing countries, in short exploitation which has wreaked havoc in the lives of many in the developing world. Although parenthetically, I would like to state that others have refused to use the term developing as descriptive of the countries of the Third World, as many of these countries have been stagnated by the various socio-economic, political and cultural forces working against them, and that accordingly the term underdeveloped is more appropriate.