"RELIGIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN ASIA"

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I

Our concern with the development process today bears an essential resemblance to the search for the "elixir of life," which - I am sure - is part of the traditional folklore in most of the cultures represented here. For our search deals with the revitalization and rejuvenation of nations and societies. The social sciences have helped us to identify many of the factors and some of the basic relationships that are involved in this process. However, the question as to what breathes life into this process, what sparks that revitalization remains a secret still to be unlocked.

Most of us here are undoubtedly familiar with the various theories of economic development in existence. They start off by identifying factors that have a bearing on the growth rate of the net domestic product, on savings and investment rates and capital output ratios. However, many of the theoretical models which have been designed with the use of these indices or concepts, while useful in increasing our understanding of economic development, say nothing about how to get development going. Also, they tend to read into the development process a simple rationality which increasingly prove to be unrealistic and

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Footnote: The author wants to make clear that he is speaking as a non-Christian, although he does not believe that it makes any difference to the argument he presents.

removed from life. Essentially, they deal with the externals of the development process, and its measurable symptoms. The compulsion towards increasing refinement of measurements, and the craving for theoretical elegance and symmetry further adds to the irrelevance of these models to those of us who, while deeply involved in the development process itself, are not economists One also gets the impression that the various development strategies that have been suggested were designed from hypotheses which, consciously or unconsciously, try to explain the failures of many less developed societies to get rapid development going or to conform in their process of change to the bench marks of the historical western model. The strategies of balanced growth, of the big push and unbalanced growth, strategies concentrating on so-called "leading sectors" to the exclusion of others, tend to fall within this category. Likewise, as we all come to realize that development is not only an economic process and that there are crucial cultural, social and political elements which have to be considered, a number of theories of political development have been developed. But all these models seem to be based on single variables and unilinear explanations operating within a single system. The impact of such variables on a system in motion or a system in process of transformation will undoubtedly be different

from the impact of those variables within a static system. The factors for instance that can be identified and measured in their impact on the growth rate may turn out to have only very limited relevance in a rapidly changing society. It is significant that there are few theories which try to relate economic development with the process of political growth.

Be that as it may, we still do not know how exactly the development process can be set into motion, and even less and at what point growth can become a self-sustaining process. And while there is no doubt that our understanding of the development process has greatly increased as a result of the empirical and theoretical work that has been done, those that have a stake in the development of their nation quite often are very acutely aware of the lack of operational guidelines which might help them in their efforts to overcome the sluggishness or stagnation of their societies and the frustration and despair that go with it. However intellectually stimulating, there is then a lifeless quality about these models and these theories.

In wondering why these products of the social sciences so far seem to show this sterilized quality, four points suggest themselves in answer. In the first place, they seem to remove the problems of development away from the reality of power and politics

and in this way seem to reduce the decisions that have to be taken to simple technocratic and bureaucratic ones. But each of us knows how intensely political the simple choice of the site for a dam or a factory in our own community can be, or for instance the choice between a weapons system and a road and harbor system. Also, social change and development is bound to have political implications which will have a bearing on the distribution of power. Likewise, the degree of power a government is able to exert significantly influences the range of economic policy options open to her. Therefore, until the economics of the development process is more directly related to the political process much of the operational irrelevance will remain.

Secondly, they overlook the importance of the cognitive factors in development and growth. Man is a future-oriented animal. It is his vision of the future, his hopes, fears and expectations that determine his actions in the present, though his awareness of the past influences him as well. It is impossible to understand the dynamics of a social system responding to new problems and challenges -- and this is what development is all about -- unless one also has an understanding of these hopes and aspirations as well as of the self image and sense of identity of the people within that system. And until we take into account how

man in a given society perceives his own problems, his interests and his goals, we really have no clue as to how and why he will react in a particular way and not in another. In our search for understanding of the dynamics of development and for operational relevance we should therefore concern ourselves with the perception of values, goals and purposes underlying the organization of a society, with motivations to social action and with the dynamic implications of national and group self image and identity.

Thirdly, economic development cannot be understood in isolation. It is part of a more general process of social transformation. At no point in that process are we simply concerned with the attainment of economic goals or the creation of a new economic system. We are dealing with major changes in a society, with the building of a new nation, with painful processes of disintegration and reintegration at various levels of society. Nation building has its own requirements, its own priorities as well as its own dynamics flowing out of the history, the cultures and the geo-political situation of that nation. Décolonization has left a number of Asian nations with a heritage of unresolved conflicts, resulting from or aggravated by the arbitrariness with which colonial boundaries had been drawn, the preferential treatment accorded certain ethnic or communal groups, the existence of

unintegrated minorities. National independence now requires as a condition of national survival, the welding of these often quite disparate elements into a single polity capable of coping with the requirements of the 20th century, an endeavor generally called nation building, and the goals and priorities, the phasing of economic development as well as the feasibility of specific economic policies inevitably are deeply affected by these overall nation building requirements. The transformation of old societies into new nations, their reintegration in a manner which will enable them to cope with the realities of modern life inevitably lead to some of the ultimate questions undergirding a nation and a culture: questions regarding the meaning of life on this earth, the legitimacy of the pursuit of material improvement, the relationship of man to his fellow man and society, and of man's relationship to the divine. This is especially true in Asia where generally religion has determined the inner shape of traditional society, has structured the social system, and where the traditional purposes of the state have little to do with the pursuit of material goals, but rather with a transcendental order. Nation building and development then raise some basic questions of a moral and normative character going far beyond the capacity of any empirical model to answer.

Fourthly, there is the one-dimensionality that characterizes these models. It is a weakness which afflicts much of the social science research relating to the less developed countries. I think it is important to realize that in nation building and development we are not dealing with unilinear processes of gradual and rational adjustment and redirection, but with strains and stresses, conflict and disorder, that put to the test the viability of whole social and political systems. We have to take into account the possibility of the collapse or the deliberate destruction of such systems and the chaos and almost inconceivable violence attendant to such historical convulsions. It is important, too, to be sensitive to the possibility of failure, to the risks and the dangers involved in any process of social transformation. We should also be aware of the depth of human emotions, of the hope and fervor, the fear and despair which are involved. History, and we do not have to go very far either in time or in geography, is replete with examples of the terrible violence and cruelty of which man is capable in extreme historical situations. And only intellectual arrogance could blind us for the role irrational forces play in such processes of transformation, and in the life of nations.

Our whole discussion about the development process cannot and should not be removed from the terrible magnitude and

frightening urgency of the problems most Asian developing societies face which threaten to overwhelm these nations and may destroy their social and political fabric. The pressure of population increase on resources, the massive and rapidly growing unemployment problem, the pressures resulting from urbanization and from increasingly inadequate educational systems incapable of coping with the educational needs of a rapidly growing population and unsuited to serve developmental purposes make a rapid rate of development - irrespective of their politico-economic system - an essential pre-condition for the viability of many new Asian states.

It is against this background that I would now like to offer a few reflections of my own on development as a problem of social dynamics. These reflections are necessarily shaped by the Indonesian experience, but I hope that they will have some broader relevance as well.

II

Development obviously does not occur in a political vacuum. Unless there is a government that has a strong commitment to economic development, no sustained development is possible.

Such a commitment does not only imply the willingness to avoid war, external or internal, and to avoid expenditures that only satisfy the craving for grandeur and splendor which is so often rooted in a deep national inferiority complex.* It also means the political courage to bring about administrative reform and the forging of national discipline, necessary requirements for the effectiveness of any set of development policies. That courage - as well as a sufficient power base - will also be necessary to implement the unpopular measures that may be crucial to the success of the development process.

But above all such a commitment means the willingness, the courage and the capability to organize the whole nation for development, not only economically but also politically. In many cases this involves structural changes in the economic

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* Footnote: Although there are cases in which war or the threat of war coupled with a massive transfer of external resources have led to development, this essay will limit itself to a discussion of the indigenous dynamics of development. The whole range of problems relating to foreign aid, its impact on the development process, or pertaining to the aid relationship and the international framework of aid and trade, will likewise be left out.

field; tax reform for example may increase the government's

capacity to mobilize domestic resources. Land reform may

increase productivity and may lead to higher levels of production.

But both are also a means to release new developmental

impulses in the society at large. Economic growth can up to a

point take place without radical structural changes in the social

system, but it would be an illusion to think that the point of self-

sustaining development could be achieved without structural

economic and political change. In any case, we should also

realize that structural change is not only a condition for

development, but may also arise as a result of economic

development. Such structural changes inevitably bring in their

wake shifts in the distribution of power. The green revolution for

instance is bound to affect the ratio of the labor force in each

village for agricultural production. The establishment of farmers'

cooperatives, to use another example, which will be an inevitable

corollary to the modernization of agriculture will lead to changes

in the balance of power in every village with likely repercussions

on regional and national balances of forces. Thus the inevitable

emergence of more goal-oriented organizations on the various

levels of our transitional societies is bound to lead not only to

growing political awareness but more importantly to the formation

of new centers of power, affecting the general distribution of power.

The capacity of a government committed to economic development to stay the course and to maintain the momentum it has developed will, therefore, also depend on the courage and wisdom it has to absorb the political consequences of development, and to accept some degree of damage to its own power base. Unless a government shows the skills to appeal to the new elements of power that will emerge in the successive phases of development and to recruit them into its power base, frustration and disaffection are bound to develop. In the extreme this may lead to the possible collapse of the development effort and the government which had initiated it. Development then, continually creates new constituencies which will require their integration into a continuously broadened or shifting power base. The political risks to the government are, of course, obvious. The political system which made development possible may as a result itself change. Furthermore, economic growth often leads to increasing or new inegalities and unless these inegalities and the sense of injustice that they evoke are compensated in politically adequate ways, the momentum of development will be threatened and serious challenges to the government will be inevitable.

Development, therefore, does not immediately lead to political stability, but is inevitably accompanied by some measure of instability which the political system must develop the capacity to absorb.

While we have spoken of the need for strong initial power and support as a launching pad for development, at the same time, the history of most developing nations has shown the very obvious limits of governmental power in developing societies. Irrespective whether such power is structured at the center, as a democracy or an autocracy, the low level of managerial effectiveness, the limited span of control and the generally inefficient bureaucracy puts very distinct limits on the implementation of developmental policies by governmental fiat. It is therefore obvious that self-sustaining economic development cannot rest on the government bureaucracy alone. In part these bureaucratic limitations can be circumvented by entrusting specific developmental policies to special autonomous agencies outside the traditional governmental bureaucracy and unencumbered by its rules and regulations. At the same time, unless governmental leadership succeeds in setting in motion widening areas of auto-activity geared to development within the social system as a whole, there is very little hope that developmental plans can take on life and reality.

Effective governmental leadership, therefore, depends not only on the availability of power and support of appropriate developmental policies, but also on the capacity of that leadership to instigate, to stimulate voluntary popular participation, and to help nurture the organizational capacity of especially those segments of society which are crucial to the successful implementation of the initial stages of the developmental process. The importance of continuously broadening popular participation and the organizational revolution that is required toward this end is an essential element in the developmental process which is too often overlooked. In the final analysis self-sustained development and modernization concern the capacity of the entire social system to deal rationally with new problems and challenges. In this respect the general capability of establishing and developing the voluntary associations for specific new development-oriented purposes is just as important as the organizational and managerial capabilities of the government. It is these networks of voluntary associations which constitute the new emancipating forces, the new instrumentalities capable of harnessing the spontaneous impulses for change and progress in the society at large. And finally it is these networks that will lay the foundation for that redistribution of power which will make possible the growth of an increasingly open society.

It is therefore not only the degree of power and popular support available to the government, the strength of its commitment and its political courage that will determine a government's capacity to initiate and maintain the development process. Given adequate initial power, success will very much depend on the quality of its political leadership; its capability, not in suppressing the conflicts and tensions that are bound to develop in the course of the development process, but in creatively using these tensions for further action. Such dynamic leadership is only possible if it is not solely guided by notions regarding the overall growth target to be reached, or by calculations for the preservation and perpetuation of power. It requires a leadership that is fully aware of development as a question of social dynamics to be nurtured through intricate combinations of economic, political and social factors. The willingness of such a leadership to take the necessary risks implicit in continuous adjustments of its power-base is then very obviously a function of the clarity and persuasiveness of the social vision which motivates it.

III

The forward movement of a whole social system obviously depends on a broad consensus regarding goals and means. There must be some shared vision relating to the future, capable of

arousing new hope. Without such hope no movement is possible. That vision of the future, of course, should relate not only to the character and structure of the society that is aimed at, but should also be capable of providing the principles and guidelines for the understanding of present problems. Unless realities can be seen with new eyes and hope translated into a sense of new opportunities on the day-to-day level, such vision as I am talking about will have little motivating value. The relatively brief history of new independent nations at the same time has made it clear that unless the new goals, new objectives and new purposes in life are related to prevailing notions, attitudes and values, it is almost impossible to mobilize broad sectors of our transitional societies. The familiar exhortations by politicians on progress and development fail to activate social action unless these new goals are directly or indirectly related to the motivations that are more deeply embedded in the social structure of tradition.

The system of social organization in most of our traditional Asian societies was shaped by religion and we cannot begin to understand their social dynamics, nor can we develop ways of utilizing or circumventing them in the development process unless we understand how religion meshes into social relations and into collective as well as individual human

behavior. These religions can both be a strong movitating and integrative force. They can also be an obstacle to necessary change. Most religions have at one point or another in history played either of these roles and it would be folly to ignore the potential religions have to facilitate or to hamper the process of development and nation building.

There are other motivating forces that can play a role in the development process. One of them is self-confidence and pride. Success in the attainment of intermediate goals in trade, industry or politics may have a spill over effect affecting other sectors of society, stimulating them to greater efforts and generating a climate of renewed hope and heightened activity. Fear and the danger to national survival may spur a society to great exertations and to the fullest use of its capabilities. Class hatred, fuelled by deliberate class struggle and welded into an instrument of power, may be the trigger, but also the simple desire for freedom and justice and the yearning for a better life. It is the task of ideology to relate the elements of hope, the capacity to look at the difficulties of one's situation in the light of new opportunities and man's basic yearnings for better material conditions, for education, for justice and equality, as well as for spiritual development into a consistent structure of thought and perspective. Unless progress, modernization and development are incorporated into

new structures of meaning capable of relating then to the deepest

wellsprings for social action that life embedded in the history and

the traditional heritage of a nation, we cannot hope for a new

socially creative dynamism. Models, rational strategies for

development, utopian blue prints, therefore, are not enough.

What is needed is a vision that is at the same time a roadmap

towards its realization as well as a method to fight for that

attainment.

This means that there is no general strategy for

development. Each nation will have to develop its own vision of

the future out of the materials of its own history, its own problems,

its own national make-up and its own geographical location. The

debate about the danger of imitating western models of modernization

is, therefore, quite unrealistic. Moreover, the existence of non-

western models, i.e., the Russian and the Japanese models are

convincing evidence of the historical freedom that each nation has

in shaping its own future. Within limits no nation is an island unto

itself. It may then very well turn out that the western model is not

the rule, but rather the exception.

IV

The development process, however, has no built-in

guarantee against failure or derailment, nor does it have a built-in

mechanism for the automatic maintenance of its momentum. While
we speak in terms of new goals, new purposes and values, however,
we should not close our eyes to the pains of social transformation.
The breakdown of traditional value systems, of familiar modes of
behavior and of standards of conduct, without the emergence of
alternative frames of references of sufficient coherence leads, and
has led, to the loss of many of the essential certitudes that man
needs for guidance, reassurance and spiritual comfort.

Rapid social change is inevitably accompanied by
growing uncertainties, disorientation, deep anxieties and fear,
leading towards increasing resistance to change. The capacity of
a culture to resist change is of course equally important to the
health of that culture, as is its capacity to innovate and to absorb
change. Without such resistance there would be neither structure
nor continuity.

The anxieties and fears in the wake of development
however tend to stiffen resistance to change, and especially when
these fears are played upon for political reasons, new and
dangerous rigidities may develop within the system. Our discussion
has already brought out the shifts in power base and in the
distribution of forces resulting from development. Institutions and
vested interests but also cherished values are threatened. Thus
in cultures where the family is the most important social unit in

society, and where family loyalty and solidarity are virtues of the highest order, the growth of superseding and overarching loyalties to the nation as a whole and its national institutions, essential to the solidification and effectiveness of the new nation state, may be difficult to accomplish, even though its need may be intellectually conceded. The persistence of corruption in some nations may reflect the incompleteness of this transition to the more impersonal organizational requirements of modern life.

Adding to the difficulties may be the failures of specific developmental projects as a result of overzealousness and highhandedness on the part of its implementors: mistakes in planning as a result of misconceptions regarding the needs for development itself, its goals, its values, its methods and instrumentalities. It is only recently for instance that the awareness has been forcefully brought home to many of us, that the singleminded pursuit of a particular growth rate through the introduction of sophisticated capital intensive technology from the developed nations might perpetuate and increase our dependency from the rich and powerful countries, while leaving unattended the pressing problems arising out of massive rural unemployment which cry out for the development and application of a new, intermediate technology suited to the needs and the resource base

of the country. Most serious however are the problems which arise from the increasing irrelevance of traditional conceptions regarding social reality, and the consequent persistence of political preoccupations and conflict patterns which bear no relationship whatsoever to the new and urgent problems that have emerged. Much of the incapacity of the traditional sectors in our transitional societies in this connection stems from the lack of a consistent frame of orientation capable of overcoming the contradictions in the perception of the new dimensions. In a sense these inabilities reflect the inner fragmentation and identity crises through which social transformation takes man.

The establishment of a new, creative relationship to social reality, the integrative reordering of one's conceptual and emotional frame of value reference regarding man, society and the divine, regarding history, the present and the future, as well as the reformulation of a new system of commitments then pivots around the development of a new sense of identity, on the collective and on the personal level. The kind of person I want to be, the kind of relations I want to have with my fellow man, the kind of society and the kind of world I want to live in are the central questions in the search for this identity and in the process of nation building. It is, of course, possible to answer these

questions from the perspective which the humanities and the social sciences provide. Some secular ideologies have shown to have the integrative and motivational power to do this also. However, it would be a serious mistake to overlook the transcendental and essentially religious dimensions to these questions. Few people and very few cultures are able to live among the happenings of our day-to-day life without some sense of meaning - a sense which a transcendental vantage point provides. Man's mortality, the cycle of birth and death, growth and decay, the seeming senselessness of much of human experience only becomes bearable within the context of some kind of awareness of eternal truth and reality. And especially in Asia, where religions have not only been roads to the salvation of the individual soul, but also have helped shape systems of social organization this aspect should be taken into account in any analysis of social dynamics.

As claimants to ultimate truth and reality, all religions have had difficulty in their relationship to history and social change. While both history and social change inevitably bear the stamp of the prevailing religion, both at the same time continue to escape the precepts, norms and injunctions of religion. Of course, the tension between religion on the one hand and society

with its own autonomy so to speak, on the other is a basic and
permanent one. Mostly, that tension is a creative one, and it is
from this tension that many of man's cultural and artistic
achievements flow. Rapid social change, however, disproportionately
aggravates the already difficult relationship between religion and
society. Rapid social change leads to mutations in the area of
morality and of human conduct, which run counter to the norms and
standards of behavior which have, over time, grown around religion
as a social and historical phenomenon. This in turn may strengthen
the inclination to perceive the nature of the problems created by
social change as simply moral problems; which makes it even more
difficult for the religion concerned to relate creatively to change.
Bewilderment, frustration and despair therefore often turn towards
a more fundamentalistic and rigidly traditionalistic position, or on
the other extreme, to religious and even secular utopianism or
total neutralization. The difficulties a religion has in coping with
rapid social change may, then, lead either to loss of influence and
irrelevance, or to serious social rigidities which only compound
the already complex process of social transformation. Explosive
social tensions then almost become unavoidable. If, however, the
prevailing religion in a society in the process of social transformation
develops, through its leaders, an adequate comprehension of the

process of social change, of the urgency of development, the social factors impelling it and the requirements that will have to be met as a pre-condition for civility and for the viability of any political system, religion can play an important reintegrative role. Because religion, even more so than a secular ideology, is a total system of integration it contains within itself the capacity for the reordering of values and goals, the rearrangement of functions and norms and for the perception of structures of meaning which help man to live in this world. The inner reformulation of basic religious positions that this requires, however, can only be born out of a genuine religious experience, or through the illumination that may come from searching theological reflections. Be that as it may, one thing seems to be certain and that is that the attainment of, or failure to attain, the goals of development could very much be determined by whether the religions of Asia will be able to absorb and digest the new elements and perspectives that come with social change, without loss of their own integrity. Insofar as this is the case, they will be able to play the essentially reintegrative and motivating role described here. In fact, the manner in which the religions of Asia position themselves relative to the development process is bound to have a profound impact on the political systems that will emerge and on the political process that will develop.

So far in our discussion we have assumed a
homogenous society. The relationship between religion and the
development process becomes even more complicated in
pluralistic societies which are composed of different cultures
and different religions. In those societies in which more than one
religion has traditional roots modus vivendi have emerged which
made peaceful coexistence possible. In a static society, these
unarticulated inter-religious balances did function relatively well.
However, religions do have different capacities to absorb social
change and to adjust to modernization. In some cases extraneous
or incidental factors in the development process, the prevalence
of particular religious attitudes or the role of particular institutions
may seem to work to the advantage of one religion as against another.
The development process, therefore, may seem at some point to
upset the delicate inter-religious balances that had been worked out
and on which religious peace has been built. This is bound to
resuscitate the fears and suspicions of the various religions towards
each other and to compound the religious anxieties and uncertainties
following in the wake of social change and development. In such a
climate the problems of change then tend to be perceived in terms
of religious conflict, provoking major new dangers to the political
and social system as a whole. The violence attendant to the

breakdown of systems of inter-religious accommodation in a
number of our countries has made us realize the crucial necessity
of avoiding social problems from being fought over as theological
or communal problems. In this light it is of the greatest importance
for the viability of the political system in a religiously pluralistic
developing nation that no single religion becomes totally identified
with one or other specific aspect, or the whole of the development
effort to the exclusion of the others. While religious organizations
can play and should play their part in modernizing and development
activities, these endeavors become counter-productive and dangerous
to the political system at the point where religious fears and anxieties
on the part of the other religions become a factor. In religiously
pluralistic societies there is, of course, room for healthy competition
in modernization and developmental activities among the religions.
Such competition serves to accelerate the rate of change and as such
increases the capacity of the social system as a whole for creative
adjustment to the requirements of modern life. But again we should
be aware of the point where such competition becomes counter-
productive.

Each religion in such a pluralistic society then has
a stake not only in the growth of its own developmental capability

and in its own contribution to the development effort, but also in the development of a similar capacity in the other religions of the country. In this way the danger of conflicts which are irrelevant or harmful to the overall development effort can be reduced.

Such an involvement of all religions in the country and their organizations will therefore be an important step towards the building of a transcommunal consensus for development, and in this way contribute to the decommunalization and depolitization of development.

All religions within a single society also have a common interest in developing among themselves the understanding, accommodations and self-restraints, as well as modes of explicit and implicit cooperation which will ensure the continued participation of all religions in the developmental efforts at all levels.

They also have a common stake in strengthening the capacity of the nation as a whole to deal with conflicts - political, social, cultural as well as interreligious or intercommunal conflicts - peacefully, with full regard of the basic human rights. While many of our nations are committed to these basic rights, the social pre-conditions for their effective application are on the whole quite fragile. And this is bound to remain so unless an effective and

militant constituency is forged - out of elements drawn from all religions - on which civility and tolerance could rest.

It is impossible to exaggerate the need for such an effort. Strengthening the "rules of the game" for conflict resolution in our relatively new nation states is therefore a conditio sine qua non for maintaining the political consensus and social cohesiveness on which our national existence depends. It would seem to me that this need and this nation building objective transcends at this stage at least some of the more customary concerns and activities of a number of religions and their institutions in our countries.

V

My argument then points to the desirability, even the necessity of our religions in Asia being involved in the politics of development, at least in some specific ways. Unless they become an unquestioned part of the impulse and momentum for change and development, they cannot play the integrative role towards the shaping of the inner features of the new and expanding national awareness in our countries. A nation's political cohesion and strength for survival after all do not solely depend on a sense of common material interests but also on its capacity for

self-transcendence. Hence the need all revolutions have felt

to explain and legitimize themselves in terms of universal

values. Failure to play this role will only open the way for the

uncontested dominance of strong, secular ideologies with

eschatological pretensions to perform this essential function in

the building of new nations.

Political involvement of religious institutions in

whatever form, however, raises some fundamental questions. How

can a religion immerse itself in the political process without losing

its soul. This question forces religion to reflect on its relationship

to power and to history. And while to some religions in Asia

history is religiously significant, in no way can this be taken to

mean that God simply awaits us at the end of the road towards

progress and development. Nor does the imputed moral significance

of a particular historical trend or process relieve man of his

personal and moral responsibility for his actions at any given point

in time. Furthermore the many instances in history where social

and political systems established in the name of God or Truth have

led to insufferable tyranny and oppression, should give second

thoughts to anyone who is considering to subscribe to the politics

of salvation.

This search for a clearer understanding of our

relationship to history - in which the development process is

imbedded - takes on a particular urgency in the light of the new
eschatological emphasis in some contemporary thought, attitudes
and style of action. Without denying its importance in the
revitalization of some religious institutions in the West, in the
Asian setting the new utopianism and its social activism are
bound to have a different significance, evoking different responses
from those in the developed countries.

In the history of many parts of Asia millenarian
movements have been familiar features. They are rooted in the
a-historical "Weltanschauung" in which the future is not borne
and shaped by the present, but merely temporally succeeding it
without inner connection. The pervasive and persistent expectations
in one form or another of the "Just King" suddenly appearing in
order to lead the establishment of a just and prosperous society
among large segments of the Asian population, and the innumerable
"jacqueries" - violent outbreaks of peasant rebellions -- not leading
to appreciable change in the social or political structure throughout
much of Asia's history, are symptomatic of this outlook. In Asia
therefore, instant utopianism with its constant temptation to violence,
may not so much accelerate structural change as resuscitate archaic
and regressive patterns of thought and behavior which will seriously
set back the fight for emancipation and development.

As someone whose life was shaped by revolution and the violence that goes with it, I would be the last person to deny the role violence can play under certain conditions, in the shaping of new societies. But historical experience also shows how the application of violence in a pluralistic society can lead to the total breakdown of traditional mechanisms for intercommunal accommodation, leading to unimaginable waves of bloodshed. That the new utopianism in some of our countries is not peasant-based but urban-centered, operating among religiously or morally motivated sons of the middle class, should not prevent us from drawing the lessons from these phenomena.

History is not simply a morality play where good and evil are easily identified and personalized. The complexity of the historical process is such that no final judgements are possible, and no certainty as to how one's action ultimately affects its course. And so, in acting out one's commitment one cannot but be deeply aware of the opaqueness of the meaning of history, its multi-interpretability, and of the way history has in serving unintended purposes. The history of both revolutionary and melioristic reform movements also shows the intractability of the big issues of politics and the human condition, and the way they keep recurring in different shapes, and in different conditions. This awareness needs in no way reduce the fullness and strength of one's commitment. But

it serves to emphasize the deep humility of the mind, the tenacity, perseverance as well as historical patience, the ethos of tolerance and the capacity to fight without hatred that will be required before our nations will come into their own.

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