Mastering the Future

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SOCIAL PROGRESS means far more than merely making material improvements to the inhuman conditions in which, unhappily, too many human beings have still to work.

This has been realised for nearly thirty years, during which time efforts have been concentrated on giving workers a larger say in the decisions concerning them. The International Labour Organisation has played a valuable role by helping to set up and strengthen the institutions without which there could be no economic and social progress offering equal opportunities to all. The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948, and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949, both directly inspired by the Declaration of Philadelphia, have been the major instruments of ILO action in this field.

Social progress has taken on a new dimension: the need to shape the future. To shape the world of today is no longer challenge enough to the active solidarity of those who live in it. But to master the future—that is the common task facing mankind. It is up to us to ensure that future generations grow up in conditions befitting human beings.

The Apostolic Letter which His Holiness Pope Paul VI sent recently to Cardinal Roy, the President of the Pontifical Commission " Justice and Peace ", is a sign of the trend noted above.[2] It was written on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, but could of course not be confined to the few points dealt with in that encyclical. It is intended to offer new possibilities of action to what Albert Thomas, the first Director of the ILO, described as the vast movement resulting from the encyclical. And it affords an opportunity for everyone to consider what it takes to master the future as well as his own individual responsibility in this connection.

The basic theme running through the Apostolic Letter is the duty of mankind to master present problems in order to give rational shape

[1] International Labour Office.

[2] *Octogesima Adveniens*, 14 May 1971.

to the future. But because of the wide range of ideologies prescribing different courses of action, this can be achieved without violence only by engaging in dialogue. It is through the legal order that the concord of wills must be sealed and that unity must be forged to bring about further progress in conditions of freedom.

Mastery of the future as an imperative necessity

Two factors make it imperative to master the future: the changes that are taking place in our way of life, and industrial expansion. Both present a real challenge to mankind.

All over the world people are undergoing irreversible changes in their way of life. This is confirmed by ethnologists and sociologists: the alternative confronting the few marginal groups that still pursue their age-old life pattern is to be absorbed by modern civilisation or, sooner or later, to be eliminated by it. The urban phenomenon is characteristic of this. The magnetism of the town is felt in developed and developing countries alike. In order to quench his thirst for knowledge, to enjoy a freer social life, offering a chance to obtain a high position and play a fuller role in society, modern man tolerates living, working and environmental conditions and numerous other constraints of which he complains but which, finally, he accepts because of his " will to be great ".[1]

Urban growth has been brought about by industrial expansion which, in turn, stems from technological research and the transformation of nature. Industrialisation, Pope Paul has said, " gives proof of incessant creativity ".[2]

But this combination of urbanisation and industrialisation is a real challenge to mankind. Far from slackening, their mutual effect is likely to have even greater repercussions. Just as increasing urban concentration creates a need for new inventions and makes fresh demands upon science and industry to satisfy the needs to which it gives rise, the wider role thus conferred upon industry compels it to base its operations on ever-larger concentrations of men and materials. Without a broad resource base industry would be handicapped in its research, production and commercial activities.

Contemporary industrial society is already feeling the effects of this. " Urbanisation upsets both the ways of life and the habitual structures of existence: the family, the neighbourhood, and the very framework of the Christian community. Man is experiencing a new loneliness; it is not in the face of a hostile nature which it has taken him centuries to

[1] Encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI: *On the development of peoples*, para. 49.

[2] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 9.

subdue, but in an anonymous crowd which surrounds him and in which he feels himself a stranger." [1]

What should be man's attitude in the face of this " irreversible " situation? What solutions will he find to the innumerable problems of organising modern society? How is he to take decisions—decisions that will have a far-reaching influence on the way of life of future generations, that will determine the growth of new proletariats and whether or not large numbers of people are to be condemned to " dehumanising living conditions, degrading for conscience? " [2] On these questions the Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Roy takes up one of the themes that dominated the Pope's Address to the International Labour Conference on 10 June 1969. In this Address the Pope described man as being " carried away by the formidable forces which he unleashes ", " swallowed up by the gigantic progress of his work ", " swept along by the irresistible current of his inventions " and " stunned by the growing contrast between the prodigious increase of the goods at his disposal, and their distribution, so easily made unjustly, between men and between peoples ".[3] Every man today faces a psychological dilemma, and only he can decide how it is to be resolved: either he will press on regardless, hoping that greater power and wealth will bring peace to mankind or, if he listens to his conscience, he will shoulder his responsibilities and give a sense of purpose to his existence.

These same questions also appear in the Apostolic Letter, where the Pope raises the issue of man's capacity to face up to the new problems created by industrialisation and urbanisation, asking whether " man is not turning back against himself the results of his activity. Having rationally endeavoured to control nature, is he not now becoming the slave of the objects which he makes? " [4]

Although in no way concealing the uncertainty which, in his opinion, overshadows the future of humanity, the Pope nevertheless affirms his fundamental optimism. He is convinced that man will not renege on his responsibilities. He dismisses the idea that through negligence man might let himself be overtaken by events and fail to foresee in good time the emergence of new social problems.[5] Despite the difficult problems thrown up by urbanisation, the Pope hopes that man, by his imagination and power of invention, will find a way " to master its growth, regulate its organisation, and successfully accomplish its animation for the good of all ".[6]

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[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 10.

[2] Ibid., para. 11.

[3] ILO: *Address of Pope Paul VI on the fiftieth anniversary of the International Labour Organisation* (Geneva, 1969), p. 8.

[4] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 9.

[5] Ibid., para. 19.

[6] Ibid., para. 10.

Dialogue, an essential condition for the rational mastery of the future

Mastery of the present in order to build the future necessarily depends on one's concept of man and his destiny, his nature and his role on earth.[1]

The confrontation of differing ideologies might lead to violence if the separation of political and religious authority did not enable a distinction to be made between spiritual values and the social system in which they are embodied [2], and if modern humanism had not succeeded in bringing about general awareness of the fact that man himself is the immutable value on which all schools of thought can agree to build the " open society ". The present Director-General of the ILO had the same idea in mind when he stated, a few years ago: " The fruitfulness of any dialogue . . . does not require any identity of view or unanimity of outcome. It does call for a sufficient minimum of common values to make possible an increasing measure of common action or common restraint." [3]

Pope Paul VI also attaches considerable importance to dialogue in his letter to Cardinal Roy. The idea that there can be no progress in society without exchanges and confrontation of different views, that is to say without dialogue, has run through his thinking like a *leitmotif* ever since his first encyclical.[4]

He sees an essential justification of dialogue in the fact that democratic society abhors the idea of authoritarian government, under which decisions are taken without the persons chiefly concerned being consulted on an equal footing. The idea of participation is fundamental in present-day society.

The most important social legislation to have been adopted since the Second World War is that which has resulted in the dealings between workers and employers being conducted on a basis of equality. Likewise, one of the aims of international social policy has been to establish the fundamental principles underlying this concept of equality and to set up machinery to see they are applied.[5]

Despite the sweeping social changes that have taken place, the present social disturbances seem to show that this policy has not achieved its objectives and even imply that it is still far from achieving them.

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[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 30.

[2] Cf. J. Joblin, SJ: " The Papal encyclical ' Pacem in Terris ' ", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXXXVIII, No. 1, July 1963, pp. 1-14.

[3] Wilfred Jenks: " This land of dialogue ", speech made at the closing meeting of the Third Session of the ILO African Advisory Committee, Dakar, 20 October 1967.

[4] *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964).

[5] In particular, the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), and the Governing Body Committee on Freedom of Association.

The reason lies not in any shortcomings of the instruments that have been created but in the lack of a " spirit of innovation " on the part of those responsible for applying them. The ideological scissions that already separate the countries of the world into rival blocs are now taking place within individual nations. In so far as the system of freedom of association is seen as the projection of a certain concept of social relationships, it is inevitable that it should find disfavour with another value system. A turning point has now been reached: either there will be a return to the fratricidal struggles which for centuries steeped Europe in blood in the name of different conceptions of civilisation, with the risk that these struggles will extend to the whole world; or, rejecting conflict, the peoples of the world will agree to " enrich by dialogue " the minimum that is accepted by all: the right of all men, without exception, to pursue their material well-being and their spiritual development.[1]

The appeal to the common good is the ultimate justification of dialogue. It explains the need for dialogue by introducing the future into an equation based only on present needs. Obviously, those who take decisions are in a sense mortgaging the future and must therefore also shape it as far as possible if they wish to be consistent. The ill-considered exploitation of nature is a striking example of the need to think of the future when decisions are taken, for it not only threatens our physical environment but is becoming a permanent menace affecting the quality of life to the extent of " creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable ".[2]

Man cannot evade the responsibility of mastering the future. But since everybody's idea of the future is not the same, it is not possible to proceed to build the future of mankind as a whole without a dialogue that will make it possible to distinguish the different features it is to embody.

The social evolution of recent decades makes dialogue even more necessary since the present objectives of economic and social policy cannot be achieved without the co-operation of all. Social progress depends, as never before, on the active co-operation of men of good will, that is to say all those who genuinely wish to serve the common good of humanity taking account of the interests of present and future generations alike. Men will only co-operate freely if there is frank and open dialogue between all those involved.

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[1] As the Director-General of the ILO said in his report to this year's session of the International Labour Conference: " All of us are apt to use such strength as we have to get what we can. Is it wise to use our strength regardless of the views or interests of others or of the claims of the common good on all of us? Much of history has followed that pattern. We can follow it again. The tension and violence in the world will continue to grow." (ILO: *Freedom by dialogue* (Geneva, 1971), p. 51.)

[2] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 21.

But fruitful dialogue implies the fulfilment of a certain number of conditions:

(a) The rejection of irresponsible protest groups. Those who deny society and every effort made within it, or are blind to everything but its defects, have no useful contribution to make to the open society. Their chiliastic vision of the coming of an earthly paradise cannot be a serious basis for positive action.

(b) Freedom of research and of expression in order to understand and appraise problems and to propose solutions to them.

(c) Freedom of association. It is important that man should not feel isolated and that the fundamental social ties from which he derives support and through which his personality fulfils itself should find expression in institutions that have a definite role to play in society.

In this context of dialogue and collective action, the Pope introduces in a number of passages the idea of discernment. This is a useful concept, since it helps towards an understanding of what dialogue involves: in fact it concerns the most intimate views that each individual holds about the future of humanity. It follows that great lucidity is required if everyone is to remain faithful to his original idea: not only must he be aware of the danger of letting himself become " consumed by an ideology "[1], " attracted by and then imprisoned within a system whose limitations . . . may well become evident to him too late, if he does not perceive them in their roots "[2]; but above all, he must become a master in the art of exercising " an ever finer discernment . . . in order to strike at the roots of newly arising situations of injustice and to establish progressively a justice which will be less and less imperfect ".[3]

The legal order as a guarantee of progress with freedom

Nowadays the legal order is subject to much criticism. It is reproached with being inflexible and rigid so that it restricts spontaneity, impedes necessary changes, consolidates unjust situations and is oppressive because it paralyses men's desire for freedom and emancipation.

This general criticism of legal systems and customs becomes more specific when levelled against " power " and " authority " as such. After all it is the authorities who lay down the legal order, and even though it may well be perfectly adapted to a particular situation at a given moment, it will no longer be completely so when the situation has changed.

[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 28.

[2] Ibid., para. 36.

[3] Ibid., para. 15.

This anarchical opposition is very widespread in contemporary society, especially among the more active and militant groups which are noted for their vigorous criticism of existing social and political institutions. These groups have done much to break down the constraints which covertly keep certain peoples and sections of the population in a marginal position—in the sense that they take no part in decisions concerning them—and in a state of inferiority in that many of the facilities provided by society (as regards education, health, work and housing) are denied them.

A whole section of the movement for social progress shares this view, both in the developed and in the developing countries. The protests of young people in the rich countries stem from their feeling of revolt against a closed society they have no desire to be part of. In the developing countries the protest movements have set out to bring home the truth of their situation to as many people as possible so that they will join forces to remedy the political and economic evils of which they are the victims.

In view of this calling into question of society, the course chosen by the Pope acquires even greater significance; its main landmarks are the necessary existence of institutions, the creation of a legal system and, to ensure that the system remains flexible, the institution of democracy.

There can be no group without cohesion. This is affirmed several times in the Apostolic Letter since it is a fact which is not universally recognised today. But those who equate it with recommending an authoritarian and despotic régime are wrong. If authority is to be viable and acceptable, it must be based on consensus.

In the dialogue which, in one form or another, takes place in all societies, divergent opinions are inevitably expressed. All those involved in the decision-making process have therefore to arbitrate between the interests of the present generation, which are immediately apparent, and those of future generations, which are also entrusted to them.

This is the point at which courses of action are determined that choose between various forms of development projects and are therefore decisive for the future shape of society. It is here too that the legal system comes into play. Far from being oppressive, the legal order results from an agreement between the various parties at a given point in time, serving as a basis for their future work together. Thus the legal order is seen to be an essential element of progress in freedom. It consolidates the outcome of dialogue whenever a broader measure of agreement is reached, and in this way helps to lay the foundations of the new society.

The Pope's views on this subject are clear, but I feel that the Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Roy, on which this article is based, should be supplemented by the Papal Address given two years ago at the International Labour Conference, if his thinking on the right to development and the furthering of human rights is to be filled out.

The right to development

This is a field in which the present generation has no choice but to go forward, since the commitments into which it has entered rule out the possibility of retreat. Flagrant inequalities between nations exist in respect of economic, cultural and political development.[1] This fact is well known and, despite the world-wide "yearning for more justice", neither the peoples nor their leaders have been able to construct "a better guaranteed peace in mutual respect among individuals and peoples"[1], in conditions of equality, with everyone entitled to share in the fruits of growth. The human mind seems incapable of situating "the problems created by the modern economy in the wider context of a new civilisation".[2]

The Apostolic Letter further spotlights the unjust structures that are largely responsible for keeping many peoples in a state of underdevelopment. This is because the relations between peoples are based on their relative strength, leading mankind into "a climate of struggle which opens the way to situations of extreme violence and to abuses". Relations between States are governed by the spirit of domination to such an extent that "we can see new economic powers emerging, the multinational enterprises"[3], so powerful that they can often pursue policies that are independent of the national political authorities and are likely to have a dominant effect in the social, cultural and even political fields.

This tendency is spreading and is taking the world in the opposite direction to that which it should take if the goal is greater justice and peace. The first objective should be to guarantee each country the right to promote its own development by co-operative efforts free from any kind of domination, whether economic or political: If this objective is accepted, the relations between nations will have to be revised and an assessment made of the growth models of the rich nations, and minds will have to be opened to the priority of international obligations; this is bound to lead to the international agencies being overhauled to increase their effectiveness.

These are the conditions for the creation of "a real international law of labour, as between the peoples".[4] Such a law offers them an opportunity of self-determination (in the material, technical and cultural spheres) in decisions concerning them, of earning a decent living and dealing with other peoples on equal terms. No country can really work out its labour policy unless it enjoys economic independence. Conse-

[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 2.

[2] Ibid., para. 7.

[3] Ibid., para. 44.

[4] *Address of Pope Paul VI . . .*, op. cit., p. 9.

quently one of the aims of social policy must be to bring about a new approach to international trade.

It has been one of the errors of the rich nations that they have failed to attain this objective as embodied in section IV of the Declaration of Philadelphia. So long as the injustices that keep the less developed countries dependent on the rich countries persist, the assistance they receive appears, in their eyes, less a gesture of solidarity helping them towards the achievement of a common destiny than a form of compensation or restitution. As the Pope stated clearly at the International Labour Conference: " you must master the rights of strong peoples, and favour the development of weak peoples, by creating the conditions, not only theoretical but practical, for a real international law of labour, as between the peoples " [1], making private interests give way to a wider view of the common good.

Human rights

Although technical changes are necessary if the future is to be mastered with justice, these changes will be fruitless unless at the same time there is an evolution of the human conscience. Man must have a clearer awareness of the universal common good and of its concrete demands. Here again, legal order is necessary to sustain him in his conquest of the future. It is not enough to aspire to greater freedom, dignity and participation—these fundamental aspirations must have a framework; society must determine the significance it attaches to them and their full implications so that, if it can avert the perils besetting it and justify its highest hopes, justice may be established and peace thereby ensured.

The international institutions have made considerable progress towards " inscribing these two aspirations [to equality and to participation] in deeds and structures ".[2] They have succeeded in defining them more precisely and, above all, have secured agreements whereby they can be effectively applied.

(1) Of course, discrimination—racial, cultural, religious, political and so forth—always tends to reappear, clad in new and often more subtle forms, to ensure the domination of one group over another or to maintain its privileged position, despite the fact that, as stated in the Declaration of Philadelphia, " all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity ".

The same principle is reaffirmed in the Apostolic Letter. Special emphasis is laid on the " perversity " of racial discrimination, which is

[1] *Address of Pope Paul VI...*, op. cit., p. 9.

[2] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 23.

taking humanity on a dangerous course since the division and war it implies can lead only to perdition. It contradicts the fundamental truth that " the members of mankind share the same basic rights and duties, as well as the same supernatural destiny ".[1] International organisations should therefore attach particular importance to this aspect of the question, which generates so much violence within and between nations.

(2) Migration is another of the fundamental human rights. Exercise of this right may run counter to particular national interests; this is why, here too, the international organisations have a special responsibility. Apart from negotiating technical agreements which they are eminently well placed to conclude, they must uphold against the purely nationalistic opponents of migration the basic right of every man to achieve integration in his working environment, to receive vocational training and to have decent accommodation where his family may join him.

(3) For a long time no right was more central to working-class dignity than the right to work. The lack of protection and social legislation exposed every worker to the risk of unemployment and poverty. In this sense, work is regarded as the indispensable means whereby man can not only feed his family but also affirm his dignity in society.

Considerable progress has been made in the industrialised countries, but the employment problem remains acute in the developing countries. The collapse of traditional structures, together with the pressure exerted by the growing population, increases the number of destitute and parasites in the towns and even in the country. Employment is therefore seen as a top priority encompassing both the economic and social needs of growth. Mastery of the future must therefore lead to insistence on fuller knowledge of the mechanisms that hold back development and to a series of political decisions to dissipate their effects. " We know the attention given to these problems within international organisations, and it is our lively wish that their members will not delay bringing their actions into line with their declarations." [2]

A new approach to social policy

These last remarks show that the employment issue reaches far beyond the traditional context to which it was long confined. Although it is still, of course, bound up with problems of workplaces, the organisation of recruitment services, selection, guidance and vocational training, etc., workers, employers and governments are becoming increasingly aware that these are but the outward and visible signs of the sweeping change that has taken place in social relations throughout the world,

[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 16.

[2] Ibid., para. 18.

particularly as regards production and trade. Human relations have always been marked by tension in respect of working conditions, the distribution of wealth and the sharing of responsibility. But discussions on these matters have nearly always been concerned with where the frontier should be drawn between one group's interests and another's. Today social conflicts have taken on a new dimension. They occur in the wider context of a new civilisation which is changing so rapidly that man " questions himself about the meaning of his own being and of his collective survival ".[1] The true aim of social policy is to help him to take up the challenge of determining his future by mastering the present.

The answer given to this problem by the Pope does not consist in recommending concrete economic or social measures. The world is changing so rapidly that the necessary solutions must be worked out democratically if the need for greater justice, as felt by a community at a given moment, is to regulate the pace of progress. It follows that these solutions are not only of a technical or economic nature but that they necessarily involve political decisions—the ultimate decision being at the same time the fruit of the individual commitment of the greatest number.

In concrete terms this means that the purpose of social policy is both individual and collective. Individual since man is the ultimate *raison d'être* of any action taken and the measure of its legitimacy; collective, because social policy will affect every member of the present and coming generations alike. Individual, because the solutions proposed can become reality only through the political commitment of the members of society; collective, in that the outcome of the measures taken will be an agreed modification of power ratios, enabling each country to decide the course of its development and to benefit from the co-operation of other countries, free from any spirit of domination.[2]

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This study of mastery of the future, based on the letter from His Holiness Pope Paul VI to Cardinal Roy, would be incomplete if, by way of conclusion, it did not briefly mention its implications for the Christian community. These will become increasingly apparent in the course of the present decade, now designated the Second United Nations Development Decade. From this point of view they are of concern to all who take an interest in social affairs.

The Pope's views can be summed up in four words: cohesion, specificity, mastery, and collaboration.

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[1] *Octogesima Adveniens*, op. cit., para. 7.

[2] Ibid., para. 43.

Invited by the Pastoral constitution on " The Church in the world of today " [1] to be more attentive to the changes in the world and to the aspirations they reflect, Christians are nevertheless warned against any action that might aggravate the differences and conflicts arising out of their varied options to the point of compromising their unity or cohesion.

Christians bring their own message to this quest for a new civilisation. The specificity of their contribution emerges gradually from a comparison of their view of the common good with that of other ideologies. Their faith must be critical and be reflected in social life by a special capacity for discernment. This discernment acts as a brake when they refuse to let themselves be " imprisoned within a system " allowing inevitably limited solutions. It acts positively through the constructive criticism to which they submit when, encouraged by the conviction they derive from their faith, they participate in the common effort of " creativity ".

The slowness of these exchanges should not cause the final objective of social construction to be forgotten. The desire to master the future is really a wager laid on man and on the rationality of his life and his future. The deeper this conviction, the fuller will be the political commitment of each individual, for in the long run the essential transformation can be brought about only through action—political action.

From these principles is derived the confident optimism that recommends collaboration with other social forces. This is bound to entail sweeping changes in the Church's outlook and even in its institutions. Adaptability is thus a necessary virtue in our times and one that requires of everybody, in exercising his fundamental options, to distinguish essential commitments from external forms.

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[1] Cf. J. Joblin, SJ: " ' The Church in the world ': a contribution to pluralism ", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5, May 1966, pp. 459-476.