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CULTURAL ISSUES AND "TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE"  
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CULTURAL ISSUES AND "TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE"

Technical Assistance is an unfortunate expression of what French speaking scholars and development experts, quite adequately denominate "cooperation technique".

A Dominican priest, Father Lebret, famous now for his life-long dedication to integral humanism and for his contribution to the Encyclical Populorum Progressio, proposed, already in 1960, to generalize the use of the word "cooperation", instead of "assistance", in order to restore the honor of those who receive it. According to him, "assistance supposes that one affords and the other receives. It is an act of the better off to the worse off, of the wealthier to the poorer, of the better educated to the more ignorant, of the more efficient to the less efficient. Hence, in any act of assistance, there is the danger of a secret and increasing conflict between the one who assists, who behaves as the one who has, and the assisted, who suffers the feeling of being dependent, if not of being dominated or scorned"<sup>1</sup>.

At a time, when, regardless of the expression, "technical assistance" or "cooperation technique" are magic words, and when technicians and experts are traveling around the world as saviors or, so often, as a new form of

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<sup>1</sup>  
Louis J. LEBRET, O.P., Alerte a l"assistance technique,  
Developpement et Civilisations, Paris, no. 2, Juin 1960, p. 15.

colonialism from the West or the East, it is essential to keep alive, as a major cultural issue, the consciousness that technical society is a fearful threat against the PERSON.

I do not pretend to ignore that the growth of technology and mechanization is one of the three axes "without which it is mere self-delusion to suppose that we can conceive or undertake any re-ordering or development of the Earth,"<sup>1</sup> as stated by Teilhard de Chardin.

Technology is more and more an essential and valuable pattern of contemporary society. It is inevitable that the mechanical equipment of society will become all pervading. It is, no doubt, an advantageous phenomenon "since it both facilitates and indefinitely multiplies our activities, not only does it relieve us mechanically of a crushing weight of physical and mental labour," as explained by Teilhard, "But by the miraculous enhancing of our senses, through its powers of enlargement, penetration and exact measurement, it constantly increases the scope and clarity of our perceptions".<sup>2</sup>

Yet, technology is also a destructive force.

With the discoveries of the last decade, the predictions of George Orwell are rapidly becoming reality. The year 1984 seems so close and horrifying "Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself...The old civilizations claimed that they were founded

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<sup>1</sup> Teilhard de CHARDIN, The Future of Man Collins, London, 1965, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

on love and justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy---everything...There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. When we are omnipotent we shall have no more need of science,"<sup>1</sup> says O'Brien to Winston.

The destructive forces of technology are challenges to all underdeveloped areas of the world in which man is striving for a better living. The trap would be to have more -- thanks to technology -- and yet not "to be more", becoming a victim of one's own invention.

I consider this cultural issue as the most relevant to be discussed here among the many others implied by technical cooperation.

What is man in a Technological Society?

Many contemporary thinkers have indicated the dangers of advancing technology. Among them, Junger, who wrote The Failure of Technology,<sup>2</sup> and Paul Tillich, the existentialist theologian: both coincide in pointing out that depersonalization in our mass society is obviously strongly linked with the dangers of technology and large-scale organization.

Tillich, for instance, in his essay The Person in a Technical Society<sup>3</sup> explains that the movement called existentialism, to his understanding, rebels in the name of personality against the depersonalizing

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, 1984. Signet book, 21 ed., 1960, p. 220

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Georg JUNGER, The Failure of Technology, Chicago Gateway ed., 1956

<sup>3</sup> Paul J. TILLICH, The Person in a Technical Society. The revolt against depersonalization in the Modern era; in Varieties of Modern Social Theory. Dutton, New York, 1963, pp. 287-303.

forces of technical society. This rebellion is rooted in the protests of the lonely prophets of the nineteenth century against the threatened destruction of humanity and personality by technical society. In this new society, the person is menaced, being transformed into a thing, a means, and an object of scientific calculation and political management.

Against this chaos, as explained by Tillich, Koerkegaard raised the existentialist protest.

He did it on the basis of faith, asking the individual to break away from technical society in order to save his existence as a person. The existing person can only be saved by Kierkegaard's metaphor of a "leap".

Marx, the sociologist, saw much more clearly than Kierkegaard, says Tillich, that it is not a system of thought but the reality of modern society which is responsible for the reduction of the person to a commodity.

Marx did not think that it is the technical method of production as such which destroys personal freedom, but that the social structure of class society is responsible for it.

He believed in the possibilities of humanizing the technical process, but he did not believe that this could happen within the framework of the class society. Therefore, he became a political rebel against this society.

Tillich analyzes also how existentialism's fight against the dangers of the technical society was carried on at the same time on a third front: in the name of life, against the "nihilism" of the technical culture, as Nietzsche did.

That technical society destroys the creative power of life was his message.

On this basis, he denounces the technical mass civilization, the subjection to the system of values which are accepted in this civilization, including the Christian values, in so far as they are amalgamated with the ideals of Modern Society.

Nietzsche and his followers want to restore the integrity of creative life by looking for some unity below the split into subject and object.

Recent existentialists carry on the same protest, as Sartre, who tried to break the power of technical civilization by isolating the individual from its embracing structure. He tries to save the person by asking him "to create himself, without the aid of norms, laws, and principles, without anybody else or anything else".

For him, the individual's creation of himself is the aim of true humanism.

The conclusion of all this appears to be ambiguous and contradictory. Yet, it helps to face with realism the dangerous challenges of Technical Society. It is within this cultural-frame work of reference and with apprehension that the man of the Third World faces technology, as a necessary tool for development, although so ambiguous and dangerous. That is to say that technical "assistance" should be both provided and accepted with a strong dose of Humanism.

This seems to be the guide-lines of the Ecumenical Council, which provides us with reflexion to enable Catholics and men of good will in the necessary renewal and reshaping of society.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is quite specific in this regard: "Man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that men do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, and more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about."

Humanism is then the key to an adequate use of technology, since human activity is ordered toward man.

Technical "cooperation" ordered that way should be the witness of "the new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all, by his responsibility toward his brothers and toward history."

"This truth grows clearer if we consider how the world is becoming unified and how we have the duty to build a better world based upon truth and justice."

This is the goal to be pursued by technical cooperation in all underdeveloped areas of the World in order to help in creating societies in which every human being has the necessary goods, and services, which enable him to be a Person and to gradually "be more."

If we do not embrace this path of humanism, technical cooperation would simply be a question of following, by parody, the path of one or the other of two contradictory systems which are supposed to struggle against depersonalization, as suggested by Tillich.

The one pretends to save the person within the framework of an Economy of Market, in a bourgeois-capitalistic society, by ways of free enterprise, which ends, so often, by destroying the Person.

The other system pretends to save the Person within the framework of centralized planification. Salvation would be intended in a future state by suppressing the Person in the present for the sake of the expected citizen of the future.

Fortunately, there is already a reaction in the Third World to follow a new path towards development, independently from either Communism or Capitalism.

This could be the major historical event of our age, as a follow-up of the Bandoung Conference in Asia in 1955, when for the first time the countries of the Third World were united in a collective protest against impositive economic and political systems.

Of course, there are no doubts as to the value and necessity of technical cooperation and of all other kinds of foreign aid in an inter-dependent world.

But, I have my doubts as to whether the salvation for the Man of the Third World is a simple question of "imports," no matter how they are called: Capital goods, technology, human resources, or know-how-either to succeed in business or to make a guerrilla or a revolution.

What I question here of foreign aid in general and of technical assistance or cooperation in particular is, so often, its lack of humanism, its political ambiguities, its imperialistic drives, the biased cultural approach or the inarticulated strategy, resulting in isolated and ineffective measures.

The major frustrations of technical cooperation derives then from this lack of true humanism which prevents technicians and experts from really becoming incarnated in the underdeveloped areas of the world where they go, and from acting in solidarity and authenticity, looking for truth and justice in their commitment to modernization.

The challenges they have to face come from the necessity of radical changes so urgent in all underdeveloped countries, without which their cooperation is a farce or a reinforcement of obsolete structures and therefore, a hinder rather than a contribution toward modernization and progress.

Technical "assistance" is not a magic device, and becomes sometimes an alienating factor when deprived of humanism.

The fact is that the countries of the underdeveloped world, so rightly called now the underpaid world, are becoming progressively, poorer, getting less and less for their products and becoming increasingly dependent of financial foreign aid and technical "assistance," when the need is for trade.

In 1966, at the midpoint of the 'decade of development,' imports represented only one tenth of what the underdeveloped countries were able to do at the beginning of the decade. And they were losing 2,5000 million dollars a year in their buying power.

Since the Conference of Argel last year, there is an increasing awareness among underdeveloped countries of the World that they can no longer wait and rely on "assistance"; that they can also get together in an Union and go on strike, without being satisfied with simply presenting their list of grievances and expecting answers.

This is the up-to-date cultural issue which has deep relations to technical "assistance". It will soon be brought up for discussion at the forthcoming meeting in New Delhi. (Let us hope it does not become another "wealthy men's Club" as it happened with the Geneva Trade Conference a few years ago.)

To sum up, the central cultural issue of technical cooperation, is, to my understanding, a problem of true humanism. What finally accounts for us is MAN. Man as an ACTOR and MASTER of his own destiny, not a passive receiver from somebody or a simple object of a political or economic system.

That explains why we insisted from the beginning in referring ourselves to "cooperation" instead of "assistance", as an operation of interchange in which both parties are enriched. Thus, the process of modernization, through technical "assistance", can be accomplished without the loss of values of the recipient culture, and without a subordination of human and social values to technical aims. Instead, this process would favor the progress of social man towards even greater "interdependence and cohesion"

Only then, the growth of technology and mechanization will be one of the constructive axes of human development as conceived by Teilhard de

Chardin, and nobody, nor any political or economic system could prevent Mankind from achieving planetary dimensions in this continuous rise of social unification.

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