



# THE DEVELOPMENT ETHIC

*Hope for a Culture of Poverty*

**A Paper by  
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Disciple Nations Alliance

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## HOPE FOR A CULTURE OF POVERTY

Why do some peoples and cultures become "developed," while others continue to struggle for survival? Observation of a wide range of cultures provides insights and answers. A culture's successful development, it seems, is birthed by its religious and philosophic underpinnings. The minds and hearts of its people play a larger role in a nation's development than its circumstances or natural resources. There is an ethic—a set of principles—which creates fertile soil for development. In contrast, there is another set of principles which strands its adherents in a quagmire of underdevelopment.

Two cultural groups in a region of the Dominican Republic illustrate this contrast in principles. The town of Constanza lies in a fertile valley, surrounded by picturesque mountains. Water is plentiful, and the climate is moderate year-round. Yet, the local population suffers from physical poverty. At the end of World War II, a number of Japanese families settled near Constanza. They began with the same natural resources—the soil, sun and rain. They had the same basic opportunities as the local inhabitants, and they had the disadvantage of not knowing the language or culture. Yet, after two generations the Japanese own prosperous farms, while the Dominicans remain in poverty. Why? One factor is the difference in beliefs and values between the two people groups. The Dominicans approached the future fatalistically, while the Japanese viewed it with imagination, hope and persistence.

Different life perspectives yield different levels of development. A similar example is examined by Washington Post columnist William Raspberry. In a 1988 article titled "Values," Raspberry contrasts recently arrived Asian-Americans' expectations of the United States with those of native-born American minorities. He writes:

“There are two intriguing things about this group [the new Asian-Americans]. The first is that they have viewed America the way a youngster views a candy store: with nose pressed to the glass and an attitude that says; If only I could get in there!

“In short, they see America, with its free education, free enterprise and manifest rewards for serious exertion, as a land of unsurpassed opportunity. They take advantage of the opportunity and succeed at a pace that eclipses that of privileged whites.

“Our native-born minorities, on the other hand, tend to see America as the place that has treated them unfairly and shows no sign of changing. As a result, they tend to focus not on opportunity but on their disadvantage. Their conclusion, too often, is: What's the point of trying when the cards are stacked against you?

“The second intriguing thing about the newly arrived minorities is their notion that the key to their success is not in their special intellectual gifts but in hard work. They seem to take as a given that anybody who works hard enough can achieve success.

“How is it that this attitude has escaped our native-born minorities, particularly our low-income black and Hispanic groups? A major part of the answer, I think, is that we have, in the last quarter century, tended to view everything through the prism of civil rights. The assumption is that the absence of the good things of life is proof of discrimination.”<sup>1</sup>

### **External Critique**

There is no denying the deep suffering and vast despair in much of the world. Why are people poor? Why, in a world of increasing food production, are people hungry? Two common responses are based on "**external critique**"—that is, the reasons for hunger and poverty are found "outside" of people and their cultures. People are hungry, external critique says, because of circumstances beyond their control.

One form of external critique blames a region's poverty on inadequate natural resources or devastation of resources by acts of nature, such as drought or flood. Somalia, in the horn of Africa, is deemed "undevelopable" by some authorities because it severely lacks natural resources. Ethiopia, with seemingly more natural resources per capita than Somalia, experienced severe drought conditions in 1988 which destroyed the nation's food supply and left seven million people at risk of starvation. The three "Z's"—Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Zaire—have abundant resources per capita; they have the agricultural potential to feed the entire continent of Africa, yet they languish in poverty. In contrast, Japan—with limited natural resources per capita—prosperes. A deficiency of natural resources, by itself, is an inadequate explanation of poverty.

Another form of external critique says that some people are poor because others are wealthy and some are hungry because others are well fed. Poverty is not "nature's problem," but a human problem. For example, one hears that 6 percent of the world's population (those who reside in the United States) consumes 40 percent of the world's resources each year. The culprit, says the critique, is a colonialism or neocolonialism (capitalism). However, nations like Ethiopia and Thailand—which were never colonized and are proud of their independence—are relatively poor, while former colonies like Canada and the United States have prospered.

It must be admitted that limited resources and institutionalized human greed can be contributing factors to hunger in our world; but they are not, by any means, the root cause.

As long as poverty is blamed solely on external causes, people and cultures will remain imprisoned by it. If its origin is external, then there is nothing the impoverished can do to change it, for nature and other people control their destiny. Individuals, cultural groups and

whole nations are seen as helpless, without responsibility. Because problems are defined in external terms, solutions—by implication—are also viewed as external and are imposed by well intentioned outsiders. Problems are described in impersonal, rather than personal, terms. The result? Dehumanization is reinforced; paternalism is extended. The great Russian novelist and moral philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, summarized the problem clearly: "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself."<sup>2</sup>

### **Internal Critique**

Why are people poor? Why are people hungry? "**Internal critique**" provides an often overlooked answer. Internal critique looks within a person or his culture for an understanding of his problem. It finds poverty "in" man and culture, not outside of him. Internal critique says that poverty is more than material condition or circumstance: it is a way of looking at the world, man and ultimate reality. It stifles life and leads to underdevelopment. This poverty is both personal and, on a wider scale, cultural. Indeed, every person and every culture is faced in some way with internal poverty.

In an internal critique of poverty, it is assumed, as Richard M. Weaver said, "ideas have consequences."<sup>3</sup> There is a logical relationship between an idea or a value and its outworking in life. Ludwig von Mises, the internationally known economist, stated: "Action is always directed by ideas; it realizes what previous thinking has designed."<sup>4</sup> For example, a culture which values human life will function very differently than a culture which does not. What is it that a woman carries in her womb? It is a "baby" or a "product of conception"? The answer given reflects a person's or a culture's ideas concerning life, and those ideas result in distinct patterns of behavior. If a woman carries a "baby" in her womb, it is cared for and nurtured. If it is considered mere "tissue," it may be removed from her body and discarded.

A culture's belief system determines its progress—or lack thereof—in the material world. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis used the term "culture of poverty" to describe a "poverty" way of perceiving and integrating reality, as opposed to "poverty" as an economic condition.<sup>5</sup>

Personal poverty begins to be alleviated when an individual literally changes his mind and his view of reality (many call this **repentance**). Similarly, cultural poverty is alleviated in two ways: first, by a **reformation** of ideas—the gradual replacement of values that produce poverty with a new ethic of development; second, by **reclamation** of structure—the application of a development ethic to create dynamic, life-supporting structures. This process is labeled "development by discipleship"<sup>6</sup> by community-development worker Alan Voelkel. A development ethic affirms that progress is possible for both an individual and a culture.

Before examining the principles of this development ethic, it is important to establish several points.

First, the development ethic is not merely wishful thinking. The strength of the ethic is that it manifests itself historically and pragmatically. The ethic is affirmed by reality.

Second, the development ethic transcends culture. Truth is true, no matter where it is found. The development ethic is based on transcendent principles which have been manifested in cultures around the world. These transcendent principles can be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in any culture, even in "least developed countries" (LDC's). Two examples are seen in the priority of human relationships in many LDC's, and the strong "work ethic" in the rapidly developing Pacific Rim countries. Likewise, a lack of development principles produces underdevelopment, even in "most developed countries" (MDC's). Mother Teresa proclaimed that she had never seen such poverty in all her life as when she visited New York City. She referred to the great moral and spiritual poverty she saw in one of the most materially advanced cities in the world. Crass consumerism—that which the ancients called hedonism—is evidence of underdevelopment of the human spirit and is found in much of the Western world.

Third, the development ethic is an enhancer of culture. It affirms those elements that are eternal and stands in contrast to those which produce death. It will not—must not—destroy a culture in order to introduce modernism or to bring change for its own sake. On the other hand, the development ethic is not value-neutral, idolizing culture or arbitrarily affirming those aspects of a culture which produce death.

The task before us at the end of the twentieth century is to **intentionally** share the values and ideals of this development ethic with those caught in cycles of poverty. The affluent consumer, the subsistence farmer, the drug addict, the university intellectual, the illiterate, the factory worker—all need the hope brought by the development ethic.

What is this ethic that leads to development? It is comprised of twelve principles, the most familiar being what the West calls the "Protestant Work Ethic." (This work ethic has a "functional equivalent," according to Robert Bellah, in the Tokugawa religion of Japan.<sup>7</sup>) The twelve underlying development principles may be loosely categorized into three factors—the creation factor, the human factor and the "other-worldly" factor.

### ***The Creation Factor***

Nature, being the result of creative activity rather than the product of impersonal forces, is an open system, capable of being stewarded—now and in the future—to meet the needs of an expanding human family.

#### **Development Principle #1: Creation is an Open System**

God created a universe composed of material and non-material reality. His creation is populated by angels and men (and who-knows-what other beings). Though governed by natural law, the system is **open** to the intervention of the Creator, angels and men.

In this open system, nature is dynamic rather than static. New resources can be created by man's conceptual activity. New ideas open whole new worlds of opportunity. Oil—that dark gooey ooze—was a nuisance until the need for light and power established its usefulness and purpose. Suddenly, that which lay ignored under men's feet for generations became a resource. Likewise,

two bicycle mechanics in an "emerging nation" dreamed of flying. As their dream become reality, it opened a new world for the human family. Michael Novak, Roman Catholic author and scholar, captured this spirit when he wrote:

“Countless parts of God's creation lay fallow for millennia until human intelligence saw value in it. Many of the things we today describe as resources were not known to be resources a hundred years ago ... The cause of wealth lies more in the human spirit than in matter.”<sup>8</sup>

This open-system principle establishes limitless opportunity for discovering new worlds and creating expanding resources, thus making **positive sum societies**. It stands in sharp contrast to a closed-system view of the universe. The closed system states: "Nature is all there is." There is no Creator; and nature is without design, order or purpose. Man is part of nature, not an intervener in it.

Based on the assumptions of the closed system, wealth and resources are static: "What you see is what there is, and there isn't any more." Thomas Malthus, English economist, articulated this position in the West. Malthusian theory states that, as the world's population increases, the amount of resources available for each person decreases. The size of the pie is fixed, thus creating what Lester Thurow calls the "**zero sum society**.”<sup>9</sup> Using an external critique, the closed system model looks to statistics for answers and concludes that some people are poor because others are rich. Therefore, to resolve the problem of hunger and poverty, scarce resources must be equally distributed.

This same concept is called "limited good" in materially less developed societies. Good things such as wealth, health, time, power and security are fixed. If any man's family or community seeks more than what it already has, that deprives someone else of those same resources.<sup>10</sup> There is no way to increase what is available, no way to develop more wealth. This "**limited good**" perspective generates strategies for the maintenance of the status quo.

Whether explained as a zero-sum or a limited-good society, the closed-system model breeds underdevelopment. The open system model creates a framework for development and opens new worlds of opportunity.

## **Development Principle #2: Man is to Have Dominion Over Nature**

God has created the universe, placed man on earth, and established him as His steward, or vice-regent. Man is to have dominion over nature, rather than be dominated by her. This provides impetus for man to harness nature and fight against such ravages as drought, disease and famine. Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch prime minister and educator, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, wrote eloquently on the subject:

“We with our own human nature are placed in nature around us, not to leave that nature as it is but with an urge and calling within us to work on nature through human art, to enable and perfect it ...

Human art acts on every area of nature, not to destroy the life of nature, much less mechanically to juxtapose another structure, but rather to unlock the power which lies concealed in nature; or again to regulate the will power that springs from it.”<sup>11</sup>

It has been said that God used mathematics—systematic, predictable order—as the language of creation. **Natural law**, therefore, stands behind creation. Man's rational ability can discover the designed behind nature (**science**) and then use those laws to intervene and harness nature for man's own benefit (**applied technology**). But man is also a created part of the universe; he is on the same level as nature; he is nature's "brother." Creation is to be honored, tended, nurtured and stewarded by man.

An illustration of man intervening in nature to create a hospitable environment from an uninhabitable one is the modern city of Phoenix, Arizona. Like many other arid regions, the "Valley of the Sun" is marked by high summer temperature (over 115 degrees Fahrenheit), little rainfall (7 inches per year), and massive flooding when it does rain. By harvesting the water which falls, the people of Phoenix stopped the destructiveness of floods and created the sixth largest agricultural county in the United States. By utilizing insulation and cooling systems, the people were able to create a comfortable environment which attracts tens of thousands of resident and visitors.

In the open-system view of the world, disease, death and natural calamities are aberrations. They are the consequences of man's rebellion against the Creator. Therefore, man must stand against the destructive forces of nature and fight disease, suffering, hunger, poverty and death.

The open-system view of life stands in contrast to naturalism, which perceives man as merely a part of nature, living in harmony with whatever fate it delivers. Animistic cultures are strong examples of naturalism. All of nature is inhabited by spirits and is controlled only by appeasing those spirits. The people of such cultures have no concept of the laws behind nature; for example, the reality of microscopic germs. Diseases, death and hostile environments are normal. The goal is to live in harmony with nature and thus attempt to survive. Such a survival mode usually engenders a sense of resignation or fatalism.

Food for the Hungry, an international relief and development agency, was responsible for the nutrition program at the camp hospital in the Hmong refugee camp located in Ban Vinai, Thailand. One day, in a small back room of the hospital, three young mothers stoically watched their newborn children slowly die from tetanus. What had happened? Someone had cut each of these precious children's umbilical cords with a rusty knife. The knowledge of disease and germ theory, which is so common in the West and painfully missing in many Third World cultures, would have saved the lives of those children.

Underdevelopment is spawned by the mind-set that nature has dominion over man. Man's goal is merely to survive. But to live in harmony with nature is to live in harmony with death. The development ethic, on the other hand, begins with the assumption that man is to have dominion over nature and that hunger, disease and death are abnormalities that are to be conquered.



### **Development Principle #3: There is Progress in the Material World, or History is Going Somewhere**

History is purposeful because the "Lord of History" has purpose. The development ethic, as spawned by Judeo-Christian theism, introduces a radical, new perspective on the concept of time. Time is lineal. It has a **past**, a **present** and a **future**. Time had a beginning, and it will continue forever into the future. This open-system viewpoint creates an expectancy and introduces the concept of progress in the material world. It provides a place for human activism, ambition and discovery. Things may not only be different in the future—they may be better.

In the development ethic, life is purposeful, progressive and hopeful. Man is the creator of history, not its slave. He is not to be mastered by his environment; rather, he is to master it. He is not a cog in the machinery of the universe; instead, he is the developer, the secondary creator and the dramatist. Michael Novak relates the spirit of adventure and excitement that prevailed in North America during its growth years:

“Making history is an appropriate vocation, DeTocqueville commented on the spirit of the future that seemed to sweep through every family in the new world. Individuals broke out of the ancient sense of imprisonment within eternal cycles and began to work towards, save for, and invest in the future. Migrants poured from the countryside, immigrants crossed frontiers and set sail upon forbidden oceans.”<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, the ethic that spawns underdevelopment assumes that time is one endless cycle, with history going nowhere. In this view, time is defined by nature's cycles. The two most prominent cycles are the **seasons**—spring, summer, fall and winter—and **lifecycles**—birth, life and death.

John Mbiti, Kenyan theologian and educator, studied 270 of the thousand-plus language groups on the continent of Africa. Not one of those 270 language groups contains a world pertaining to the future. Instead, the long-term past and the present are the key realities. The **past** is filled with tradition and ancestral values. The present is the "**now**," almost as if there is no other time—and definitely no long-term future. Mbiti wrote:

“It [time] moves "backward" rather than "forward"; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.

“This time orientation, governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominate African understanding of the individual, the community and the universe...”<sup>13</sup>

Where, in this scheme, is there room for development? Development is, by its very nature, an activity of the future. If there is no future, how does one proceed with development?

This view of time has a profound impact on people's concepts of history. Life is "on the wheel." History simply repeats itself over and over.

The Pakkred Children's Home in Bangkok, Thailand, is a poignant example of life "on the wheel." The home is filled with children who are physically or mentally handicapped. For the most part, they have been abandoned by their families and their culture. After all, as Buddhism teaches, handicapped persons are simply being punished for sins in their previous lives—the bad karma from previous existences. Being handicapped is something they deserve and must suffer through in order to have hope for the next life. There is to be no improvement in this life.

In contrast, the development ethic assumes a world in which there is a past, a present and a future. History is going somewhere, and progress can be made in this material world. In the ethic of underdevelopment, however, history is going nowhere. Time has no future. Progress in the material world does not exist, and there is no time frame in which development can take place.

#### **Development Principle #4: Bounty is to be Created and Stewarded**

Development is practically impacted by ideas and values. This was illustrated by a professor at a school in Israel. As his class sat on a hill overlooking the Judean hills, he stated that the land of Palestine has historically been fought over by two opposite sets of ideals. The Arabs have believed that Allah had put a curse on the land; the Jews have believed that Jehovah had promised that the land would flow with milk and honey. The same geographic location, the same climate, the same land, the same "natural resources"—but conflicting ideals and, thus, vastly different "realities." For centuries under the Arabs, Palestine had lain dormant, resulting in subsistence-level living for its inhabitants. Today, under the vision of the Jews, it is among the most bountiful arid regions in the world.

The development Ethic postulates that bounty—abundance—is found in the cornucopia of personal creativity. The "Primary Creator" has fashioned a universe in which the rational mind and the creative intuition of man—as a "secondary creator"—may operate. New bounty and new horizons wait only to be envisioned by an artist, a scholar, a writer, a poet, a discoverer or an explorer. Michael Novak writes:

“Creation left to itself is incomplete, and humans are called to be co-Creators with God, bringing forth the potentialities the Creator has hidden. Creation is full of secrets waiting to be discovered, riddles which human intelligence is expected by the Creator to unleash. The world did not spring from the hand of God as wealthy as humans might make it.”<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, Daniel J. Boorstin, writing in the introduction to The Discoverers, states:

“My hero is Man the Discoverer. The world we now view from the literate West—the vistas of time, the land and the seas, the heavenly bodies and our own bodies, the plants and animals,

history and human societies past and present—had to be opened for use by countless Columbuses. In the deep recesses of the past, they remained anonymous. As we come closer to the present, they emerge into the light of history, a cast of characters as varied as human nature. Discoveries become episodes of biography, unpredictable as the new worlds the discoverers open to us.”<sup>15</sup>

Human beings are among the greatest of our resources. The next child born may be the Bach, Einstein or Mother Teresa of our future.

In contrast, the ethic of underdevelopment believes that wealth is limited to the physical or natural resources currently observed. These, by definition, are limited. Man is seen as part of nature, and the increasing size of the world's population is viewed as part of the problem. Rather than developing an environment that would stimulate the discoverer, artist or poet in each human being, the ethic of underdevelopment creates structures that stifle the human spirit and arbitrarily limit population growth.

The development ethic affirms that bounty is to be created by human discovery and innovation. The ethic of underdevelopment, by contrast, defines resources strictly in material terms and believes that those resources are limited.

### ***The Human Factor***

Man, bearing the image of God, is the greatest resource for development and, as a rebel against God, is also its prime hindrance of development.

The next four principles may be summarized into two thoughts: man's significance and corruption, and the unity and diversity of the human family.

### **Development Principle #5: Human Life is Sacred**

What is man? What is his purpose in life? In a sophomore sociology class, a professor posed the question, "What is the purpose of the life of a Third-World baby that dies in infancy?" After a pregnant pause which gave his students time to think, the professor responded, "The purpose of the life of a child that dies in infancy is to be fertilizer for a tree." Students were shocked by such callousness. The professor was absolutely correct, if one employs naturalistic premises. In the ethic of underdevelopment, life is cheap. Man came from dust; to dust he returns.

The clash of the ethic of development and the ethic of poverty can be clearly illustrated by a 1985 trip to Ethiopia by Dr. Tetsunao Yamamori, President of Food for the Hungry. Dr. Yamamori found a child who had been left alone and was having difficulty breathing. He picked the child up and carried it to the mother. The mother's response? "Put the child back; it is meant to die." Dr. Yamamori replied, "The child is not meant to die." He took the baby to a clinic for medical care. Death was thwarted for yet another day. The two opposite ethics have very dramatic consequences in terms of life and death.

The development ethic affirms the sanctity of human life. Man, made in the image of God, has a primary identity—pointing "upward," towards his Creator -- not "downward," towards nature. Being thus made, each individual has intrinsic worth and personal dignity. Life is sacred and, therefore, is to be preserved, even in the weakest, most broken, vulnerable or wretched human being. The measure of the development potential in any society is found, not in the way its members treat the greatest in that society, but in the way they treat the least.

The development ethic advances the significance of human life. In the ethic of poverty, life is of much less value.

### **Development Principle #6: Man is a Rebel**

While man is wonderful—the highest of all creatures—he is also in rebellion. He stands autonomously against his Creator; his soul has been corrupted; he is prone to evil and not to be trusted. The development ethic remembers that man is rebellious. It acknowledges that evil is real, personal and abnormal.

This contrasts with the values of underdevelopment expressed in both modern and primitive cultures. Modern underdeveloped society categorically denies evil. Man is basically good, it says. If there is a problem, it is due to a lack of good manifesting itself in ignorance or to an environmental or social condition. Utopian models of society are based upon this thinking. In primitive underdeveloped cultures, however, there is no denying the power and personification of evil. Evil spirits inhabit the world and bring flood, famine, disease and death. Evil is normal. It is not to be fought against, but merely appeased through ritualistic practices and sacrifices.

The development ethic acknowledges that evil is abnormal and, thus, has grounds to oppose it. Knowing that evil is real and personal, the development ethic takes precautions not to give too much authority to one individual because of the human "thirst for power." Michael Novak, in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, articulated a classic historic critique of the development experiments in North and South America. At the time North and South America were settled by Europe, each continent had nearly identical ratios of native populace and European settlers. The wealth in natural resources favored the South. Five centuries later, the North is economically and politically more developed. Why?

Different ideals drove each experiment. The governments of South America were structured similarly to those of Southern European countries and Roman Catholicism. The Catholic church was governed by one man, the Pope, and through a hierarchical political structure. Likewise, the governments of the South were oligarchies headed by a single man or family with highly centralized dictatorships. In contrast, the North American experiment was based on the Northern European and Protestant models which recognized that man is sinful and not to be trusted. These governments did not want power to reside in one individual and created, therefore, democratic governments—with the checks, balances and political pluralism—which produced very different results.

The development ethic recognizes man's corruption, and it builds structures based on that reality. The cultures of poverty, however, either produce a utopian idealism or a pessimistic fatalism.

These last two principles—the significance of human life and man's state of rebellion—may be seen as a couplet: significance and corruption. Man is "the wonderful rebel." Both aspects are true of man. To create a framework for development, they must be jointly considered.

### **Development Principle #7: All Men and Nations are Equal**

Recognizing that the image-bearers of God are both male and female produces one of the foundation stones of the development ethic: All people, as they stand before God, are equal in value and worth. This equality may sometimes be acknowledged, as in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." This profound truth counters bigotry, which says, "Because we are different, I am better than you!"

The ethic of underdevelopment establishes **inequality** as a virtue. It endorses one person as better than another. Autocratic caste systems are the result. Examples abound. In Hinduism those in the priestly class (the Brahmans) rule all others, while those in the lowest class (the "Untouchables") are deemed subhuman. Similarly, the apartheid system of South Africa institutionalizes one race of people as superior over another.

While the ethic of development sets men and nations free before the law, the culture of poverty imprisons people and ethnic groups into rigid caste systems.

### **Development Principle #8: All Men and Nations are Unique**

The ethic of development, recognizing diversity of person, function and role within the Godhead, appreciates God's creative diversity and expects individuals and cultures, also, to be unique in character. Diversity is real and is to be celebrated, says the development ethic. It marvels at the variety of creation, and it sets people free to be all they can be. The individual is wonderful!

The ethic of underdevelopment, however, establishes conformity and numerical equality as virtues. Its social order is one of Utopian egalitarianism: People are equal and should be insured of equal outcome or equal results. Coercive structures and raw power are used to implement this uniformity.

The development ethic recognizes human, cultural and national uniqueness; it celebrates diversity. The ethic of underdevelopment spawns uniformity.

The last two development principles—that all men are equal and yet unique—may be seen as a "unity among diversity" couplet. Patterned after the Trinity, unity among diversity is the foundation for human community. Diversity without unity is the libertarian ideal, but unity without diversity is the communal ideal. Understood together, unity and diversity uphold both the social rights and the individual responsibilities of each member of a society.

## **Development Principle #9: Work is Sacred**

The "Protestant Work Ethic" is probably the most familiar of the development ethics. It stems from the representation of God as "the Divine Worker, the Creator and the Great Developer." Man, standing as God's vice-regent over creation, was designed to work. Work is a sacred task. To deny a person's work is to attack his dignity. One's life work is a life calling which affirms our dignity and glorifies the Divine worker. Abraham Kuyper framed this eloquently:

Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of God, he is employed in the service of his God, he has strictly to obey his God and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.<sup>16</sup>

The "religious worker" is not the only person called to the sacred task. So, too, is the farmer, painter, maintenance worker, scientist, educator, homemaker, plumber, writer or carpenter.

This work ethic is defined in an "other-centered" context. It differs from the self-centered escape mechanism of a workaholic or the lust for things of a hedonist. The work ethic is tempered by an internal asceticism and, thus, must also be termed a savings ethic and a giving ethic. In the "Protestant Work Ethic," work is service-oriented, serving God, the future and one's fellow man. The cry of this ethic is: Work as hard as you can (capital development), save as much as you can (capital accumulation) and give as much as you can (capital sharing).

Within the ethic of poverty, only certain types of work are sacred; for example, services performed by a priest, pastor, religious leader, medicine man or "politician." These positions are considered high callings. For all others, work is a curse to be endured. Work is not sacred in modern consumer-oriented cultures, either, where it is merely a means to an end, the price to pay in order to obtain personal pleasure and "toys."

In less affluent societies, people work to put daily food on the table. A peasant may work hard when work is available and resources are needed. However, the spirit of fatalism fosters dependency—first on nature, then on the government and finally on the larger community—for survival. Well intentioned outsiders can reinforce this dependency by acting paternal-istically.

In cultures of poverty, work is conceived merely as a means to an end. In the development ethic, work is a sacred task. Its fruits, while privately owned, are aesthetically stewarded.

### ***The "Other-worldly" Factor***

Perhaps nothing provides a greater contrast between the ethics of underdevelopment and development than the factor known as "other-worldly." The development ethic assumes that man exists in a personal universe, where spiritual, moral and rational forces and absolutes are present. This is starkly contrasted with the ethic of poverty, which posits a uni-dimensional,

"flat-earth", pantheistic or monistic model of the universe. It is important to remember that if one denies the existence of a personal, infinite God, then one must cease being worshipful and must also deny everything that has its existence in Him. Ultimately, love, morals and rationality disappear and underdevelopment of the spirit, the heart and the mind reigns. What does the ethic of development teach about man's spirit, ethics and intellect?

### **Development Principle #10: The Spirit - The Universe is Ultimately Personal**

The development ethic assumes that we live in a personal universe. Man's aspirations of personality, love, communion, creativity and volition are encouraged, not denied. Man's primary identity is found in his relationship with his Creator. This relationship defines the context and the ultimate purpose for both of the major areas discussed previously—the creation and the human factor.

Because ultimate reality is personal, the system is open to opportunities for liberality and an optimistic future. Love—self giving—love, reigns. Man is called to love God and to "love his neighbor as himself." It was said of the early Christians that they were a new breed of man: they not only cared for one another, but they also cared for those outside their ranks. The Emperor Julian (332 - 353 AD) wrote:

“Atheism [i.e. Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galilaeans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, the ethic of underdevelopment leaves man adrift in an impersonal universe, one without love and charity. Human aspirations of significance are denied, creating a climate of insufficiency and a pessimistic future. An English poet, Steve Turner, describes this stark scene in The Conclusion:

My love  
she said  
that when all's  
considered  
we're only  
machines.

I chained  
her to my  
bedroom wall  
for future use  
and she cried.<sup>18</sup>

A classic distinction between the ethics of development and underdevelopment is in their demonstration of charity. As Ethiopia faced massive famine during 1984 and 1985, who was there to help? Those who responded were agencies from the West, where the great reserves of compassion and charity run deep in the culture. The majority of the agencies had their beginnings in Judeo-Christian institutions. Conversely, charity from Buddhist, Hindu, Marxist, Animistic or Muslim cultures was almost completely absent.

The ethic of development is personal, extending compassion and creating a mind for liberality and hope for the future. The ethic of underdevelopment, stemming from impersonal roots, creates a climate of indifference, insufficiency and despair for the future.

### **Development Principle #11: The Ethical—The Universe is Ultimately Moral**

God's character provides the standard for moral absolutes. There are values of right and wrong, good and evil. A culture supports either development or underdevelopment, depending upon which of these values it chooses.

Not only are there moral absolutes, but there is also moral freedom in the development ethic, allowing for man to make significant choices in life and also to be tolerant of the values of others.

A companion to the concept of moral absolutes and moral freedom is the recognition of personal evil in the universe. Both man and angels have rebelled. The ethic of development understands this rebellion and man's resulting need for both a rule of law to govern corporate life and self-discipline to govern personal life.

In contrast, the culture of poverty recognizes no moral absolutes. Cultural or historic determinism replaces personal freedom. Survival of the fittest is the ultimate personal and societal value.

The culture of poverty either denies evil or assumes that evil is normal. The result is usually the same. In modern "value neutral" societies, as in more fatalistic societies, evil imprisons people with poverty and underdevelopment. A classic example of life without morals is the genocide that took place in Cambodia following the rise to power of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. It is estimated that three million of Cambodia's seven million people died during Pol Pot's brief reign. David Aikman, then Time magazine's Eastern European bureau chief wrote:

“In the West today, there is a pervasive consent to the notion of moral relativism, a reluctance to admit that absolute evil can and does exist. This makes it especially difficult for some to accept the fact that the Cambodian experience is something far worse than a revolutionary aberration. Rather, it is the deadly logical consequence of an atheistic, man-centered system of values, enforced by fallible human beings with total power ... By no coincidence the most humane Marxist societies in Europe today are those that, like Poland or Hungary, permit the dilution of their



doctrine by what Solzhenitsyn has called ‘the great reserves of mercy and sacrifice’ from a Christian tradition.”<sup>19</sup>

The culture of development acknowledges moral absolutes and moral freedom, thus providing the foundation for government by law and self-discipline. The culture of poverty denies both moral absolutes and moral freedom, thereby contributing to a cultural death wish.

### **Development Principle #12: The Intellectual—The Universe is Ultimately Rational**

The development ethic believes that the universe is rational. It is orderly, purposeful and governed by natural law. Objective truth exists because there is an Objective Standard for it which is revealed in the created order. It can be known objectively and is open to all who will pursue it.

Frances Bacon, writing in The Advancement of Learning, artfully stated it:

“Nay, this same Solomon the king, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping of navigation, of service and attendance, of fame and renowned, and the like, yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of inquisition of truth; for so he sayeth expressly, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out"; as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide his works, to the end to have them found out; And as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's play-fellows in that game.”<sup>20</sup>

We are the play-fellows of God, included in the grand discovery of the universe.

The principle of the rationality of the universe establishes a foundation for science, discovery and education. Accumulative knowledge may be passed on from generation to generation and from one culture to another. Education prepares people for life and provides tools for solving present and future problems.

This stands in stark contrast to the ethic of underdevelopment, in which the universe is ultimately irrational and unknowable. Objective truth does not exist. The universe and all of life is mystery; it is unfathomable. There is no foundation for science and, consequently, for exploration of the universe. The ethic of poverty stifles man the discoverer, the explorer. It robs him of the tools needed for solving present and future problems. An example of life without rational knowledge is the Zen practice of conceiving the impossible: "Talk without tongue; play your stringless lute; clap with a single hand.”<sup>21</sup>

The ethic of development establishes and affirms the rationality and purposefulness of the universe and man's ability to explore and learn from it. The culture of poverty stifles the spirit of discovery and problem-solving.

**Why are people poor? Why are people hungry?** Some argue that poverty is primarily a state, a condition, a set of circumstances. People are poor, they say, because there are not enough resources in the external world. At first glance this may have some merit; and, in some parts of the world, this is indeed true.

However, there is a much more profound factor: Underdevelopment, and its corresponding hunger and poverty, has its root in the minds and hearts of individuals and in the moral and ethical ideals of cultures. Value-neutral critics imprison people in poverty, as do cultures which embrace values that produce underdevelopment.

Two opposing sets of values exist. One set of values supports development, creating a "life wish" for its people; the other hinders development, producing a cultural "death wish."

The development ethic acknowledges that God of the universe. His supernatural existence provides the ultimate framework for development. Man, bearing the image of God, is both the greatest resource and the greatest obstacle to development. Nature—being the result of God's creative activity rather than the product of impersonal forces—is an open system, capable of being stewarded both now and into the future to meet the needs of an expanded human family.

While elements of the development ethic may be found in many cultures around the world, the ethic has been most clearly articulated and strongly manifested in the Judeo-Christian culture of the West. May we of this culture, at the close of the twentieth century, have the courage to acknowledge the development ethic. And may we have the vision to take its principles to those who hope for freedom from cycles of poverty. We will not create development by paternalistic intervention or mere formal instruction. Rather, true development will occur when its ethic is conveyed through the process of discipleship—as the members of the human family work, live and play alongside one another.

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  - <sup>2</sup> Frank S. Mead, ed. Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations, (London: Peter Davis, Ltd., 1965), p. 400.
  - <sup>3</sup> Richard M. Weaver, Ideas Have Consequences, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).
  - <sup>4</sup> Ludwig von Mises, Human Action: A Treatise on Economics, (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1963), p. 188.
  - <sup>5</sup> David Stravers, "World View, Religious Conversion and Poverty," (Pasadena, California: Fuller Theological Seminary, March 8, 1983), p. 5 - 6.
  - <sup>6</sup> Personal discussion with Alan Voelkel, Development worker, Food for the Hungry, March 12, 1988.
  - <sup>7</sup> Robert Bellah, Tokugawa Religion, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1985), p. XIII.
  - <sup>8</sup> Michael Novak, The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Pub., 1982), p. 103.
  - <sup>9</sup> Lester C. Thurow, The Zero-Sum Society: Distribution and the Possibility of Economic Change, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980), p. 24.
  - <sup>10</sup> Edward Stock and others, The Third World Development: Problems and Perspectives, (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1981), p. 121.
  - <sup>11</sup> Abraham Kuyper, Christianity and the Class Struggle, (Grand Rapids, MI: Piet Heirr Publishers), p. 19.
  - <sup>12</sup> Novak, op. cit., p. 99.
  - <sup>13</sup> John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 23.
  - <sup>14</sup> Novak, op. cit., pg. 39.
  - <sup>15</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, The Discoverers: A History of Man's Search to Know His World and Himself, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1983), p. XV.
  - <sup>16</sup> Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1983), p. 53.
  - <sup>17</sup> Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 42.
  - <sup>18</sup> Steve Turner, Up to Date, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 24.
  - <sup>19</sup> David Aikman, "Cambodia: An Experiment in Genocide," Time magazine, July 31, 1978, p. 39 - 40.
  - <sup>20</sup> Boorstin, op. cit., p. IX.
  - <sup>21</sup> Lit-sen Chang, Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West, (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), P. 45.