

PUBLIC ADDRESSES

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES IN THE
PROCESS OF LIBERATION *

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In the beginning, when God created the world, He entrusted that world to man. Among the tasks He gave to man was that of naming the animals around him. (Gen. 2:19-20) That task of "naming the animals" reflects, in a special way, the uniqueness of man in comparison to the rest of creation. For the task of "naming" presupposes a consciousness, a power — of reflection which gives to man, and him alone, the capacity to take responsibility for his own decisions and actions and, ultimately, to take responsibility for his own destiny. It is precisely the restoration to man — especially to the man and woman of the Third World — of this right and duty to "name" things, to take responsibility for his own life, that is at the heart of the process of liberation which we are concerned with here. For while it is true that all genuine education has as its goal and objective that of contributing to the liberation of man, i.e., to his full humanization, the process has special meaning for the men and women of the Third World whose history has generally been one of dehumanization, alienation, manipulation, exploitation, and oppression at the hands of colonizers from foreign lands like my own.

Our objective here is therefore to take a few moments to reflect on how the Arts and Sciences can contribute to this process of enabling people to achieve authentic liberation, i.e., that degree of power and control over their world, their life, and their destiny which God intended when He made them "in His own image and likeness" (*Gen. 1:26*); when He made them a little less than the angels and put all things under their feet (cf. *Ps. 8:6a, 7b*).

Perhaps we could best begin our reflections by taking a moment or two to clarify our own understanding of a concept radically related to the notion of liberation — freedom. For, as understood here, the process of liberation is one of promoting human freedom without which responsible living is impossible. However, I think that normally, when we think of freedom, we think of it

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primarily in a negative way, i.e., as a matter of freedom *from* rather than of freedom *for*. This might be due to the fact that we are so sensitive to any reality that interferes with our desire to act, to do our own things in our own way. For, as one of the posters so popular nowadays puts it, for many people "Doing what you like is freedom; liking what you do is happiness." Thus, students and children often complain about the strictness of their teachers or parents because they cannot do what they like. Even the teachers themselves and parents who are employed professionals often complain about "oppressive" administrators or bosses who impose demands on them in one form or another so that they also cannot do what they like. In many Third World countries today we continually hear criticism of "dictatorial" governments which do not allow people to say or do what they also would like to.

However, to limit freedom to just "doing what I like" doesn't really hit at the core of what the freedom we are concerned with here really means. For doing that we like, simply because we like it, is often as dehumanizing or even more dehumanizing than anything others may force upon us or hinder us from doing. Ultimately, freedom is a matter of attaining greater and fuller humanity as stated earlier in these reflections. Therefore, if we simply envision freedom as the right to avoid responsibility for our actions, for example, just because we like being lazy, or as the right to act without considering the effects of our actions on others — like smoking in a crowded jeepney and blowing the smoke in other people's faces just because we want to smoke — does not make us more human and therefore does not really qualify as authentic freedom. Thus, the kind of freedom we are concerned with here would be better understood as the capacity to say "yes" to what is *genuinely* and *authentically* good and "no" to what is *authentically* bad or evil, without interference, — either positive or negative — from any internal or external force so that we can take full responsibility for our decisions.

Perhaps, it is here that the Arts make their most significant contribution to the process of liberation in so far as they are concerned with the fostering and promotion of our sensitivity to and capacity for recognizing and appreciating what is genuinely GOOD and BEAUTIFUL and TRUE, i.e., what is really humanizing. This might be oversimplifying the role of the Arts as we normally understand them, but at least for the sake of our present discussion, I would just like to focus on this aspect of what I see as a truly liberating contribution of the Arts to our development as more authentic human beings. For this ability of the Arts to foster in us a greater sensitivity to what is authentically human will not only contribute to our own growth as more "humane" individuals. It will also make us more sensitive and responsive to what will either promote or hinder the humanity of others and this is of vital importance since what humanizes or dehumanizes others cannot help but promote or hinder our own search for a more authentic humanity, especially in so far as they are influenced by our choices and decisions.

I would like to return now to another basic element in the working description of freedom which I proposed earlier and to focus on the aspect of freedom as the capacity or as the ability to make authentic human choices and

decisions. For freedom is basically a power given to man, but a power that must be cultivated as well as respected and defended. Although it is a power that is innate in man, not something given to us by others, it is a power that can be stifled, in terms of its exercise, by either internal or external forces. Once again I would like to suggest that often when we think of oppressive forces which interfere with our exercise of freedom we tend to think of external rather than internal forces. While it is true that there are external forces that oppress and dehumanize us by unjustly curtailing our legitimate exercise of authentic freedom, authorities of various kinds, whether at home, in school, in our social or political life, pressures from friends or from the "expectations" of society, it seems to me that the greatest obstacles to genuine freedom come from within us. For is it not true that what we often think of as true freedom (doing what we like) is really a reaction to inner impulses and disorders which are infinitely more enslaving and dehumanizing than any external forces could ever be? Often, our behaviour is conditioned by greed or lust or apathy or fear of what others may think or say. These forces are obviously disordered and often lead to choices and decisions that eventually destroy our own humanity and wound that of our neighbor. In addition to these forces already mentioned as dehumanizing, there are countless other inner realities of both a psychological and physical nature which impinge on the full exercise of our freedom, realities such as ignorance, inability to communicate effectively; defective images of self, or of others, or of God; hunger; malnourishment; and the like.

At the risk of oversimplifying again, I would like to suggest that here is another area where the Arts, and at the same time the Sciences, can contribute much to the process of liberation. For it seems to me that one of the main functions of the Arts and Sciences, each in its own way, is precisely to enable us to overcome many of these negative internal factors that stifle our capacity to choose what is good and reject what is evil, no matter what form this good or evil may take, and at the same time to increase our positive capacities to do the same. For while the Arts tend to liberate us by increasing our sensitivity to and appreciation of what is genuinely GOOD and BEAUTIFUL and TRUE, the Sciences facilitate our capacity to act with greater freedom through the knowledge and skills that they help foster within us. For example, the human sciences enable us to attain a more objective understanding of our humanity and of the forces that influence our growth as healthy, wholesome individuals and as effective, co-responsible members of the various communities to which we belong. They liberate us from excessive subjectivity and from enslaving biases, fears, and misconceptions about ourselves and about others that hinder meaningful human relationships. They teach us concrete ways and means for overcoming negative forces inside of us and outside of us which keep us from becoming more human, inner forces such as fear and depression and external forces such as cultural values, both native and imported, which have such a profound influence on our behavior.

The physical sciences also contribute much to the process of liberation from both internal and external realities that provide obstacles to more authentically human choices and decisions. It is through the scientific method, perfected in

the physical sciences, for example, that we learn to be objective and to accept the reality of laws as a part of the human situation. In these fields we learn the liberating power of discipline and respect for fundamental laws as a necessary condition for any truly human achievement. To cut corners in the realm of physical laws leads sooner or later to all kinds of human tragedy and suffering. To violate the laws of nature in the name of "freedom," i. e. acting in a particular way simply because I like it, eventually brings man face to face with the essentially limited nature of human freedom, even on the moral level.

In a more positive vein, the physical sciences also contribute to the liberation of man in the sense that it is especially through the achievements of science and technology that man has learned to control and utilize the forces of nature to increase his capacity to overcome those external natural forces that tend to be oppressive and to develop those very same forces so that they become instead positive factors in his basic search for a more authentically human existence. Through the sciences man has learned to conquer disease, hunger, many of the negative effects of floods and droughts. He has learned ways and means of producing instruments capable of increasing his access to information about his environment on both the microscopic and macroscopic levels. He has learned to make the earth more fruitful, to make work less dehumanizing, to communicate more extensively and more effectively with his fellow human beings.

Perhaps, it is not out of place to suggest here that there is a special need to reflect on the fact that science and technology have not only made a great contribution to the overall liberation of man but that they have also contributed much to the enslavement of man at a deeper level. For the world of science and technology can be very hard and cold. The stress it puts on objectivity, the ruthless inviolability of the laws of nature which science and technology are constantly engaged with, the lack of human sensitivity so radically inherent in the world of the machine and in the systems and structures which they have created, these and many other aspects of the world of science and technology have created serious problems for contemporary man which it would do well for the people of the Third World to be aware of and reflect upon. The ever increasing reliance and dependence on machines, the devastating exploitation of natural resources, the pollution of the environment, not only physical, but also moral and cultural, thanks to the mass media, the pressures of consumerism which feeds the world of industry and other kindred phenomena have all tended to create a new form of enslavement in the world of today. In Third World societies in particular, the ambiguous promises of a better and more authentic human life which science and technology seem to offer are actually destroying many of the vestiges of authentic humanity that survived the dehumanizing impact of their colonial history.

In the light of these realities it is important to recognize the need to keep the Arts and Sciences together when talking about liberation. For there is a danger of seeing only science and technology as the key to the salvation of the Third World in its efforts to achieve liberation from hunger and ignorance and the other forms of dehumanization flowing from the massive poverty it seeks to

free itself from. Unless we see the ambiguities in the development of science and technology, unless we constantly keep coming back to the ultimate goal and objective of liberation as the restoration and development of man's capacity to become more authentically human, we run the serious danger of creating a new form of slavery and oppression and a subsequent form of dehumanization worse than what we seek to be liberated from.

While it is true that the Arts have a vital role to play in facing up to the challenge of avoiding or minimizing the dehumanizing effects that excessive stress on science and technology can create there arises a need to extend our reflection to the extremely important disciplines of Philosophy and Theology which can provide us with the ultimate basis or framework for integrating the contributions of both the Arts and the Sciences to the task of liberation. The reason is that they provide the basic knowledge and skills we need to formulate the fundamental image of man to which the other disciplines we learn to transcend the limited concerns of the human and physical sciences and of the various arts.

In the field of Philosophy, for example, one develops his capacity for analytical and synthetic thinking at the deepest possible level as he pursues that fundamental search for wisdom which is at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. In this all-important search, questions concerning man and what it means to be truly human take a central place. In the process of exploring the key to the fundamental mystery of man, the philosopher discovers the basic principles and values, flowing from the very nature of man himself, which should govern man's relationship to the world around and within him. As his insight deepens and his vision grows, he is led to the discovery of those dimensions of truth which eventually liberate him from the "bondage of the perishable" which one contemporary Filipino philosopher, Dr. Manuel Dy, Jr., spoke of several years ago in a paper on "Philosophical Formation in Jesuit Liberal Education," a bondage which to varying degrees necessarily limits the contribution of the Arts and Sciences to the overall process of liberation.

At the same time that it leads to a deeper understanding of himself and of his fundamental relationship with the non-human aspects of the world in which he lives, philosophical reflection and investigation eventually lead man to a confrontation with the reality of the Absolute, which or who, in more Theological terms, we call God. He is thus opened up gradually to the need for an even deeper and more extensive exploration into the basic mystery of his humanity, a mystery which finds its ultimate foundation in the light of divine revelation. This leads us finally to the realm of Theological reflection.

In the world of Theological studies, which for our purposes here can be adequately defined in the words of St. Augustine as "faith seeking understanding," one moves into still another dimension of man's basic search for a meaningful answer to such questions as "who am I?" and "what am I doing here?" The deeper one explores the truths revealed to him in his Judaeo-Christian faith the more he discovers to him in his Judaeo-Christian faith the more he discovers the truth of Jesus' words that the truth does set us free. For while it is true

that all authentic insight is liberating it is even more true of religious insight which raises man to the realm of the infinite in a more significant degree than even the most profound philosophical discourse, and in so doing leads him to a higher level of human freedom. This has become especially clear in the light of recent developments in Christian Theology where the extensive experience of human enslavement and oppression have become a major focal point of human consciousness, especially in the Third World. For this awareness of the breadth and depth of human unfreedom has led to the realization of the extent to which the Good News which is at the heart of Christian faith is really a message of liberation for all men and women of all times. The centrality of liberation themes in all strata of Christian revelation and religious tradition has been extensively explored and articulated in what has come to be known today as "Theology of Liberation." While it is true that the history of its evolution has been quite stormy and controversial, it cannot be denied that its basic insights into the reality of salvation as a process of liberation from personal, social, and structural sin have presented us all with a new challenge to struggle in and with Christ for the total liberation of all men from all forms of slavery and oppression.

The reflections embodied in contemporary Christian Theological thought do more than simply provide a conceptual framework for committing oneself to the task of liberating action. They also point the way to recognizing the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ Himself as the radical means of achieving the total liberation we need and which alone will satisfy our longing to be truly free. Thus it is Jesus Himself — the Truth, God's Word made flesh — — Who is the ultimate Liberator of mankind. It is thus, only in Him, whether consciously or unconsciously, that man will discover once again the key to assuming more fully and in a more radical way the means of laying hold once again to his God-given capacity to "name the animals" and thus to fulfill his mission as a truly free and responsible custodian of the created world that has been entrusted to his care by the Lord of History and of all Creation.

I suggested at the beginning of this reflection that our focus would be primarily on the challenge of education for liberation in the context of the realities of the Third World. While it is true that we have made some mention of specific aspects of the process of liberation as it is being fostered in this context, I think there is another important aspect of the matter which at least needs to be touched on, if not developed; is the question of process. For in talking of education we can focus on content or on process, not that these need to be mutually exclusive. Actually, we need to keep both in mind. However, owing to the peculiar challenge of liberating education in the context of the Third World, the *process* by means of which education in the fields of Arts and Sciences is pursued is significantly more important and crucial today than the matter of content.

I am sure that for most, if not for all of you, the truth of this statement is quite obvious. For as has so often been pointed out, one of the most crippling factors in the process of education in the Third World is the fact that this process is often more manipulative and oppressive than liberating. The colonial history of the Third World countries that has created so much cultural and other

forms of alienation and dependency has made the world of education a peculiarly crucial and critical one. For many of the images of man, many of the values and ideals which motivate personal and corporate and institutional decisions and policies, many of the skills and attitudes developed in formal educational programs are imposed from outside by persons and groups more eager to control the majority of Third World citizens than to liberate them. In both content and methodology, education is seen as a way of conditioning people, of disposing them to conform to social, economic, political, and cultural realities that benefit the powerful minority rather than the voiceless and powerless majority. Often, this powerful minority is, in itself, at the mercy of foreign interests. To attain authentic liberation therefore, it is not enough simply to focus on the content of those disciplines included in the fields of Arts and Sciences or any other field, for the matter. There is also a need to be sensitive and critical of both the content and process by means of which the goals and objectives of these disciplines are pursued. Just how much has been done along these lines I must admit, I do not really know. So I am not really qualified to discuss this in any great detail. The only concrete reference I can make at this time would be to the works of a man named Paolo Friere, a Latin American educator, who has addressed himself to this problem at the expense of risking his own personal freedom and even his life. For, as we all know, talk of liberation, when it faces the real issues involved, is a very risky business. But it is an issue that needs to be faced squarely. Once the challenge of liberation is faced squarely, one relinquishes his tendency and desire to control and manipulate others for personal gain. Many forms of privilege and power which enhance the comforts and social status of the elite in control of Third World societies are in the balance. Once the powerful see these realities being threatened, they are not likely to sit back and allow genuine liberation to take place unchallenged. So I would just like to close by pointing out the importance of giving serious thought to *how* we pursue the liberating values inherent in the Arts and Sciences so that their full contribution to the crucial process of liberation can be made.

Perhaps we can summarize the main gist of the foregoing in the form of a basic truth that we have all heard so often but which need to be constantly recalled, namely, that genuine liberating education must be integral and holistic; it must be directed to the development of the whole man. For it is only when we have judiciously combined the major contributions which the Arts and Sciences make in achieving the goal of truly authentic liberation, a more authentic humanity, in the light of the basic insights derived from Philosophy and Theology, that our educational system and programs will be able to make their own unique and indispensable contributions to the task of all liberative activities worthy of the name, i.e., to bring to full flowering the image and likeness of God in man as he seeks day by day to assume more and more control over his own life, his own choices and decisions, in deed, his own eternal destiny.