

Justice and human

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Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organisation. With ever greater frequency, proposal aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, justice is the best beloved of all things, since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbour or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgements, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant demanding companion in the daily life.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In

such a climate, the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.

The implications for social and economic development are profound. Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind — and even of the planet itself — to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities. In design and planning, it ensures that limited resources are not diverted to the pursuit of projects extraneous to a community's essential social or economic priorities. Above all, only development programmes that are perceived as meeting their needs and as being just and equitable in objective can hope to engage the commitment of the masses of humanity, upon whom implementation depends. The relevant human qualities such as honesty, a willingness to work, and a spirit of cooperation are successfully harnessed to the accomplishment of enormously demanding collective goals when every member of society — indeed every component group within society — can trust that they are protected by standards and assured of benefits that apply equally to all.

At the heart of the discussion of a strategy of social and economic development, therefore, lies the issue of human rights. The shaping of such a strategy calls for the promotion of human rights to be freed from the grip of the false dichotomies that have for so long held it hostage. Concern that each human being should enjoy the freedom of thought and action conducive to his or her personal growth does not justify devotion to the cult of individualism that so deeply corrupts many areas of contemporary life. Nor does concern to ensure the welfare of society as a whole require a deification of the state as the supposed source of

humanity's well-being. Far otherwise, the history of the present century shows all too clearly that such ideologies and the partisan agendas to which they give rise have been themselves the principal enemies of the interests they purport to serve. Only in a consultative framework made possible by the consciousness of the organic unity of humankind can all aspects of the concern for human rights find legitimate and creative expression.

Today, the agency on whom has devolved the task of creating this framework and of liberating the promotion of human rights from those who would exploit it is the system of international institutions born out of the tragedies of two ruinous world wars and the experience of world-wide economic breakdown. Significantly, the term "human rights" has come into general use only since the promulgation of the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. In these history-making documents, formal recognition has been given to respect for social justice as a correlative of the establishment of world peace.

The activity most intimately linked to the consciousness that distinguishes human nature is that individual's exploration of reality for himself or herself.

The freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the endowments of human nature that make it achievable requires protection. Human beings must be free to know. That such freedom is often abused and such abuse grossly encouraged by features of contemporary society.

It is this distinguishing impulse of human consciousness that provides the moral imperative for the enunciation of many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the related covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information and the opportunity to participate in

political life are all aspects of its operation that require explicit guarantee by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights — principally economic and social — which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define.

The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international laws. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilisation. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilisation, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.

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In order to precise and establish the standard of human rights now in the process of formulation by the community of nations as prevailing international norms, a fundamental redefinition of human relationships is called for. Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships — among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions — reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less-mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, of all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people. If justice is to be the ruling principle of social organisation, then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

Movement in this direction has barely begun. It will lead, as it unfolds, to a new understanding of the nature of the family and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of society. Its effect in reordering people's relation to the work they do and their understanding of the place of economic activity in their lives will be sweeping. It will bring about far-reaching changes in the governance of human affairs and in the institutions created to carry it out. Through its influence, the work of society's rapidly proliferating non-governmental organisations will be increasingly rationalised. It will ensure the creation of binding legislation that will protect both the environment and the development needs of all peoples. Ultimately, the restructuring or transformation of the United Nations system that this movement is already bringing about will no doubt lead to the establishment of a world federation of nations with its own legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.

The standard of truth-seeking

this process demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiations and compromise that tend to characterise the present-day discussion of human affairs. It cannot be achieved — indeed, its attainment is severely handicapped — by the culture of protest that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society. Debate, the propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

What the need is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterised by both candour and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavour that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organising principle of every pro-