

People of the Question

by

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Thank you for those introductory remarks. I really feel like those famous Japanese pilots who during the Second World War were on those suicide missions. This morning when I woke up, I said to myself, this must be exactly be the way those pilots felt when they went to their planes. And why do I say that? For the simple fact that I got such a response after my talk in Chicago from the Order and others that I really feel very hesitant now.

Now, let me tell you that I am very, very happy to be invited. Indeed, for the record, I am not here as a UN representative. I came because I am pleased if can make some small contribution. Since my Chicago message, I have had the opportunity to talk further with Joe Slicker and some of his colleagues on how some of my points in the Chicago talk could become part of the Order's "research." I will try to tie this up with the issues in front of you this week and then we will have the opportunity to talk. If you agree with this approach, let me begin.

You are called The Institute of Cultural Affairs. That is a name that is very, very vague. But on the other hand it's also very deep, because when you think about culture in the true sense of the word, **you talk about what it is to be "man" rather than animal.** Now, what does it really mean to be man? What does that imply? All the things I'm going to say are my own personal point of view and I am sure many people will differ with me on this.

I believe it is very important to have a very clear picture, or at least some consensus about the word "man" because if you don't, it is almost impossible to talk about questions of development or questions of culture. This is because development is in the end basically focused on becoming "man". And therefore, we cannot walk away from this question although many institutions and organizations are doing this. They are walking away because this issue is very often where the conflict arises.

For example, take my own organization, the United Nations. It is in a very peculiar situation. It is a so-called neutral organization - it does not adhere to any religion, to any sort of economic or political ideology. It does not adhere to any value framework for the simple reason that it does not have any consensus on what it means to be man. And that is one of the reasons why is so extremely difficult, within the UN context, to come to any kind of basic decision in the political or economic field. And that is not only true in the UN but in most development organizations, such as the World Bank. And therefore, they have taken only one very simple aspect, which is economic development.

¹ this address was given by Dr. Van Arendonk at an ICA global gathering in Bilbao, Spain.

In other words, the first and foremost thing is that we must have a concept of what it is to be man. My concept is as follows. Man has four characteristics. (1) He is a complete integration between matter and spirit. And, because of that, he has an absolute need to survive. The need for survival is, on the one hand, (2) a complete respect and concern for the social environment, or social justice - and on the other, (3) a complete respect and concern for the environment, and (4) finally, man is relative.

First, in my opinion, **man is an integration between matter and spirit**. In other words, to be man is to be completely aware that you are to a certain extent the absolute. A German philosopher, Feuerbach, said that the alienation of man is nothing more than that in Western civilization man has put the absolute outside himself. He has created a god; he has created a god-world. He has created a split between himself and the absolute. Therefore, he is alienated because now he doesn't know anymore who he is. Now he has to address the absolute as outside himself, as if it is something else. While, in fact, he himself IS the absolute. And that is the problem why we have alienation because we have made that split, that dualism in ourselves.

I think when you go through history you find that the people who were aware of this - such as Christ, Mohammed, Gandhi - were the people who really put the world forward. We call these people "saints" or people who have an intrinsic view of things. Therefore, the meaning of life is nothing more or less than being aware that we are, in fact, the absolute. That is the whole thing - being aware that you are the Absolute. This is extremely important for what will follow later.

Second, because of this, it becomes quite clear that **man cannot survive without social justice**. Without this, he is committing suicide. There is no way out. He cannot be an individual separate from the rest because when you are the absolute you all belong together. And that's what we express in the word "love." We talk about love; we talk about affection and so on, but it is nothing more or less than being aware of the union of spirit or of the Absolute. Social justice is not something we do because it has good ethical connotations. It's just that it's absolutely necessary. Without social justice, you cannot be man. You can be cat, or you can be dog, but you cannot be man. Impossible.

Third, and you know this as well as I, **respect for environment** is absolutely necessary in order to survive. We know that if there is too much pollution, we cannot breathe. If there is polluted water, we cannot drink. And we can get cancer and even die if the food becomes polluted. We see it around us. We hear about it. We talk about it. We write books about it. We are becoming aware of it. BUT, we just do the opposite. It's suicidal; there's absolutely no doubt about it.

Fourth, **we are also matter**. Here we have a very big problem because while we are absolute we are also just the opposite, relative. Yet we carry with us all the problems which pertain to being absolute. We are bound by time, by space, by our concepts. We know things only partly, not completely. We are completely and totally relative. We are always vulnerable. We belong here, but don't belong here. And that tension is also a very basic element of being man. We are always anxious.

We are relative and in that sense our social and physical environment define us. On the other hand, we give meaning to our environment and in that sense are absolute. In other words, this very strange hybrid is, in my opinion, the definition of man. However, while we may agree to this with perhaps different emphases, our day to day doing is totally opposed to this. It's a contradiction. What is the problem here?

Let me explain what I see happening in development today. Development is identified as getting hold of the **question of demand**, and second, how we can **satisfy that demand**. If you look around the world today, you will see, especially in developing countries, that the focus is on increasing demand with the hope that will increase production. But there is something deeper behind this. That is, that demand is the only thing that keeps modern society from total anarchy. It is, as a matter of fact, the way we are completely controlled.

When, in the morning, I walk from my house to the subway and from the subway to the office, I see some people go here and go there. I always meet the same people each day. We all walk together and we all do it in rhythm. In the evening everyone walks back again - it is like a dance. But why? Who is the conductor?

Why is it that everything functions the same way? If you go back 2,000 years, it was religion which kept people in line. Or a little bit later people were kept in line by their birthright. You knew when you were born if you were master or serf. You knew if you were a nobleman or a pauper - and that was that. You knew from that moment until you died what your function was and how you were to behave in society. It was all arranged before you were born, because that was your birthright. But a bit before the French Revolution all that changed. They abolished the birthright and something new had to be developed in order to keep people in line. And what keeps people in line now is demand. What we tell ourselves, our children, and our neighbors is that they must work very hard so they can have a salary and live a good life. That is, you can buy a car, you can buy five pairs of shoes, ten pairs of shoes, go on vacation and so on.

You tell the person to work in order to satisfy that demand. And then I tell him what his demands are. If you have a house without a swimming pool, you should have a swimming pool. If you have ten shoes, you should have fifteen. If you go on one vacation, you should go twice, and so on. We all know. And always create a little more demand than what you can get so that you are always eager to get a little bit more. Thus, you remain in the system. You follow the track. You can, of course, do that in a so-called "democratic" way, or ye can do it in a "bureaucratic" way. In that case, I say, I'm the leader of the party and I set the demands and I tell you how much you are going to get. But basically it is the same. There is very little difference between what the communists are doing and what the non-communists are doing. It is all the demand system. The whole idea of how to relate to your neighbor is going to be defined from that system. Science becomes subservient to that demand. You see it already happening in the West with the universities and the scientists. Before the scientists have even invented something, they have already sold it off to the companies. The system of demand begins to embrace everything and engross your whole life. And that is basically what we call development. That is what we are selling. That is what we are providing to the so-called third world.

We all know about the debt problem. What do we say? We say, "Well, you have to pay off your debts and therefore you have to produce, third world countries. And then you have to export products so you can gain currency in order to pay off your debts." The first world has to consume their own production, and now they have to work twice as hard in order to consume also all the production of the third world. This means, now, instead of eating three times a day, now you have to continuously eat because you have to eat for the whole world. And you laugh because you say this is a joke, but it is not a joke at all.

This, then, is our concept of development. We keep people in line through an economic role, a consumer role, on an international level. Therefore, the global community is being told to increase the demand and where that cannot be done, too bad. If we cannot do it that way, we

use military pressure, dictatorships, and so on. That is literally what you see around the world - reason we see so much conflict.

Now, let me put this in the context of what I said earlier. What is it to be man and what is it to be involved in development? And how do these two things relate? We all know that poverty is increasing rapidly in the third and also in the first world, that the gap between rich and poor is growing, all for the simple fact that there is this intrinsic conflict which did not really exist four or five hundred years ago. It is unique to this historical time. And think we are reaching a point in time when this kind of thinking, this Western civilization, is coming to an end.

So the first question is **"What then is development?"** How should that be defined? How **can** it be defined? That is where I would like to dwell because I think that is really why I am here today. All that I have said so far is really an introduction and I am sorry I had to bore you with this, but otherwise, what I am going to say would not make much sense.

It is extremely difficult to find an answer to this question for the very simple reason that we all are captured by the same culture which is defined by the kind of development which I just described. And, therefore, it is very difficult to think in different ways. Just try it for yourself. Try to think of different ways to deal with the world that are not linked to what we have just described. It is almost impossible. And whenever you do, you will find you accuse yourself, or others, of being utopians, unrealistic. Even when we talk about the Institute, we know we have to survive, we have to live. What about our finances? It's essential. You cannot say, "Well, someone is going to take care of us." Let's hope. No, we are in a very difficult situation because we don't know how to deal with this, not even at a mental level. We have some basic demands. For example, we have to eat or we will die. We have to be clothed. We have to have a roof over our head. We have to have education. We have to have good health. Or, we don't survive.

The second question is how we are going to take care that every human being, regardless of where or who he is, has the right to the basic needs. The third element, as I explained earlier, is the need to care for our environment. How do we bring this together? What is development? I've met people who are not convinced that everybody should have their basic needs satisfied. You know, it is very easy for a rich man to say, well, I have driven my Mercedes Benz for the last 30 years, and now I can tell you, please don't buy a Mercedes Benz because it's really not the thing. In other words, it is very easy for a rich man to say, well, poverty has a certain value to it though it's very difficult for a poor man to agree with it. How do we all come to a consensus that we are all talking about the same thing?

Very clearly, this all comes out in what is called the leading action research in which the Institute is very involved. How far is that research relevant? Like this dancing which we just saw here. Is that relevant for everybody or, is it just relevant for a particular group of people living in a particular situation because they have that kind of understanding? But, if you were to apply this to another group, to a set of farmers in Holland, they would probably say "Don't be silly." They totally misunderstand because it doesn't link in with their experience. I am very much in favor with this planetary research because I think it is extremely important. What has been discovered in particle physics directly leads to all the things we are talking about here.

You go to a woman with very little food in India and you say, "Hey, come here. Let me tell you about particle physics." She would say, "No, I want to find food for my children." You might say, "No, no, you don't need food." She would say, "What are you talking about? I need food. And I am interested in keeping my husband away because I already have 9 children?" and so on and so forth, and then you can talk about planetary research. It is not part of her experience. In

other words, do we have a consensus? If I go to a Moslem in Iran and I say "We are absolute and relative together." He would probably agree to a certain extent. And he would say, "Yes, and I can tell you that the Absolute is Khomeini." Have we reached a consensus on what it is to be man? Do we agree? No, we do not. We absolutely don't have the same concept of man. And, therefore, we don't have the same concept of development. Consequently, we are all going off in different directions. Everyone is doing his own thing and, therefore, it doesn't work, and, therefore, we have chaos. We have to be honest and say that we simply don't know. We know one thing and that is, it's not working. Yesterday, for example, I was kicked out of the airport in Bilbao because of a bomb scare. The whole of Africa, you know more about it than I do. In Asia, it is not working. Everywhere there are wars. The third world war has already started--we all know it. At least two-thirds of the world is in turmoil and that could be the beginning of the third world war. Why is it not working? Because, we simply don't know. We have been told a story and we have come to the conclusion from our own experience that the story is not working. We are living in a culture that has the wrong story of man. But we are selling that culture and that is where the Institute of Cultural Affairs comes in.

You call yourselves **The Institute of Cultural Affairs**. Which cultural affairs? What are you selling? Are you selling the same culture that doesn't work? At that is where, I think the value of this organization comes in. And that is why I am here, and that's why I was in Chicago. I've been working for 25 years in development under the conditions that I just tried to describe. Maybe I know every day I'm doing something wrong. But I also live under that "demand" role. I also have to send my children to school. A couple of years ago I had a Volkswagen and when I took my daughter to a friend's house, she asked me to please stop at the corner of the street. I asked why I should stop at the corner. Her response was that I only had a Volkswagen. Then my neighbor offered me his Mercedes. When I offered to stop at the corner, her reply was "No, no, let's go with the Mercedes." You see, I am also living with this. I am also selling this demand culture.

But at the same time, I know I don't have an answer. When I go to the office and a government official comes in who says, "Dr. Van Arendonk, we'd like to have this, and this, and this for our country." I say, "That's very interesting, Sir." I talk with him and I say "Yes." If I said to this minister, "Psst, don't take it because it's wrong," he would say I was weird. He might, deep inside, also say, "My God, this fellow is right," but he would officially say this man is weird and, after talking to my director, I would be out. In other words, I cannot go to the UN and say, "Look, ladies and gentlemen, we don't know what we are doing." They would say, "My God, what kind of a fellow is this? We know what we are doing. We have this resolution here and we have this resolution there. We know what we are doing."

You go to the World Bank and you say "But that project doesn't make any sense" and they say, "What? It cost a billion dollars" and you say "It doesn't make sense?" You can go to the Ford Foundation, or to UNICEF, or to the Children's Fund, or Save the Children, or whatever. They all know exactly what they are doing. But I am convinced that nobody knows what they are doing. That is not to blame anybody, because I don't know myself.

My first meeting with your Institute was this. David Lazear, with a beautiful blazer and gray pants, came to my office with Sir James Lindsay. (Now, I get people coming into my office every day to ask for money.) They came to my office and I said, "Please sit down." They said, "We're here from the Institute of Cultural Affairs." I said, "Fine, and thank you very much." They said "We're having this exposition in India about rural development." I said, "Fine, that's very interesting. Who are you?" They said that they were doing rural development over the whole world and so on, and so forth. Then, later my director called and asked me what kind of people

they were. And I said, "They are probably either of two kinds of people. They are either a cover for the CIA or they are some kind of kooks because when I asked them who their director was they said they actually had no director. It was not clear who they are. Anyway, they gave me their list of advisors. There I saw people who were not from the CIA - also Professor Tinbergen and others. So then I began to ask around. "Who are these people?"

One day they invited me to Chicago and I went I listened and looked around, talked with people. I saw something really unique. I saw a group I had been looking for. A group that says (if you ask them long enough), "We don't know." So I went to Joe Slicker and I asked, "Why don't you just say this? Why do you cover it up? Just say, we are an organization of the question. We really don't know what we are or what we or what we are looking for." The UN cannot say it; the Ford Foundation cannot say it; the World Bank certainly cannot say it, nor will USAID, or the government, or the Roman Catholic Church, or Khomeni, or the Buddhists. But that is what you are. You are trying to find this new man which still has to be defined because there still is no consensus.

And now, I want to make one thing absolutely clear. **Development has nothing to do with First, Second, or Third World.** To say so is to be absolutely not true. But, you will say, "It's not a lie at all. Look how we live in New York, and look how we live in India." Yes, I believe that. But, you can't do development in the third world if you don't do it in the first - if you do not do exactly the same thing in a village in Holland or in Kansas as you do in India. By exactly the same, I mean in terms of its content, in terms of its idea. Otherwise you would have one development for one person and another for another person. How can that be if we are all one and the same together? You are the Institute who has the willingness to say, "We don't know. We want to be in this because we don't know. Our whole essence is that we don't know. That's why we are together -- to find an answer -- that is the purpose, the *raison d'être*. And that will be the contribution we are going to make to the world in the field of development." There are many organizations doing local development in rural areas and some might do it better than you and some worse, but you are one of the clan and nothing really special. In other words, your uniqueness does not come from doing development. But it does come from the fact that you have a very special input into development: Namely, the input of trying to search for what development is, and through that, what man is -- or the other way around. That is, I think, the *raison d'être* of this organization.

Now, I want to apologize. I am not going to say what you should do. I am an outsider. I have no money in your organization. You can drop me at the Bilbao airport tonight.

What do you want to be? What is your *raison d'être*? Are you willing to stand before this **question mark**? How are we going to do that? HOW are we going to do that? You think you will do that by marketing your seminars? Your seminars are excellent. I have nothing against them and I hope you make lots of money. But, that will not answer the question. Because that is what you did last year and the year before. You say, "Yes, but our rural development is something special because we ask the people in the village what they want." Let's be realistic.

If you say yes to this question, then the next step is (now I am going to use a word I am absolutely against, but English is not my mother tongue) I am going to use the word "**research**," but let me not be misunderstood. Research is not sitting in a room with a computer and a lot of books. That is not what I mean by research though it's a part of it. Research is what I am doing now. Why? Because while I am talking to you, getting the reaction, hearing the questions, comments, and criticisms, I develop my own thoughts. That's research. I believe it was Jean-Paul Sartre who said, "Research is to fight with stones on the barricades."

The research must start where we are today, on the 25th of July 1986. It must be done with people in the leading edge field who are making enormous contributions, the people you deal with in what you call planetary research. It must be done with an illiterate, seriously oppressed, dirty, sick, undernourished woman in a small village in Ethiopia. These two types have to sit together around the table and define what is man and development. You have to bring together Reagan with his ideas and, for instance, the president of Ethiopia. You cannot have a **consensus** with only ministers. You cannot have a consensus with only the poor people in the villages. You cannot have a consensus with only the people from the leading edge because there you already have a consensus. You have to bring people together because otherwise you fall into the same dualism. You have a definition of development for the people of the leading edge. You have a definition of development for the people in Ethiopia. You have another one for Reagan. And, you then have exactly the same problem.

You have to start questioning the whole concept of development, of the demand culture. You have to ask what the demands are. Let me give an example. In the UN the new area is "Women in Development". And so we have "Women in Development" projects. What does it mean? You say to a woman in the village, "From now on you will earn your own living. You have the right to decide how many children you have as it's no more decided by the Moslem law or your husband. You can now learn about management. You must educate yourself. You must not be thrown away because you are a woman and therefore don't have to be educated. Now you must go to school." By doing all this, you turn the whole society upside down. You are going to change religious values. You are going to change the relationships between husband and wife. You are going to change extended family relationships. You are going to change economic relationships. You are really going to change the whole culture of that society. This because the woman does not have a role separate from everything else. If you change the woman's role, which is extremely essential, then you change all other roles. Therefore, to what do we develop this woman? And what does it mean if we develop the woman? What will happen then? What will be the reaction? What is it that we are going to change? We are going to **change the whole world**.

Consequently, we have to ask the very basic questions. If you say in a village "What do you need?" and they say, "clean water," that is correct because it is needed for health. But what comes out of this? What does it imply to have a pump? It implies that somebody makes the pump. It implies an engineer. It implies the whole spectrum of the whole economy. In other words, it is not simply a pump; it implies everything. By bringing in the pump, you have brought in the question mark. And therefore, it is much more honest to bring in the question mark at the same time. Even to put the question mark in front.

In other words, it needs to be research that raises these questions at all levels at the same time. That is a task that is simply enormous. You cannot simply just do that by saying, "Joe, why don't you just do that next week and when we come together in Bilbao you can give us the results." It has to be as a real work plan of the Institute. There is absolutely no other way to do it because it has to be done at all levels. You have to work with an institutional form. You have to institutionalize it.

But I come back to one thing that I think is extremely important and something that has intrigued me a lot. I would like to stress this point, and that is **organization**. This Institute, or this Order, looks to me as not being defined. I understand this group here today is your highest legislative body, that you've come together for two weeks, and then you go home and there is nothing left except the Panchayat. There are people who keep communications going, a legal entity in Brussels, but they are not really the boss either. I think there is a historical reason for this.

Second, there's "Look, we have done our thing! We have done development and who the hell should tell us what to do next? We will decide that for ourselves." But is that really true? Can you say, "We have done our thing and did it well." Is that not against the whole concept of social justice? Because you are not alone, that's not possible. The fact you belong to an Order means there are some linkages, some common interests.

But, at the same time, to be a part of the whole means that we have to give up something of our own individuality, something of ourselves. We have to make certain sacrifices. Sometimes you have to say, "Well let's do it anyway for the common good." If, we agree on the common good, if we have a consensus, then you might say we sacrifice to a certain extent (I know it's an awful word but for want of a better metaphor) to a higher authority. Because I think the task you have set for yourself is so enormous that you simply cannot afford the luxury to say, "We are on our own". The task is too big for that luxury. You can do that if you are working with small things, but here you do it on a worldwide basis, so you really need all the efforts of everybody. And I think one has to think very carefully of each structure under which we live. Is the frame under which we live adequate to fulfill what we are and to fulfill the work program that comes out of what we are? Is our structure fit for us? Are we not really egoistic if we don't want a structure? You are like a country where the Parliament sits for 10 days. Now comes the last five days and you have heard that a big army is going to attack your country. You have a severe economic depression in your country, and you also have a guerilla movement in the interior, and the Parliament goes home, and there is no president or king and you say, "Now let's hope to survive....."