

Reviews/Critiques/Reseñas

THE LAB, THE TEMPLE, AND THE MARKET: REFLECTIONS AT THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND DEVELOPMENT

Edited by: Sharon Harper

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The following excerpt from *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market* is a succinct statement of its central issues, about which the four authors find complete agreement:

Science in itself does not have the ability to determine the uses to which its products should be put. Religion, in contrast, is concerned precisely with the spiritual dimension of human existence. Its task is to throw light on the inner life of the individual, to touch the roots of motivation, and to engender a code of ethics and morality to appropriately guide human behaviour. It can set the ethical framework within which technology can be developed and employed. The civilizing process depends on both these systems of knowledge; so long as each remains within the sphere of its own genius, there is no reason for them to come into conflict with each other. (186)

All of the four contributors (two men and two women) to this collection of essays have solid backgrounds in science and the scientific method, are knowledgeable about their own religions (Hindu, Christian, Islam, Bahá'í), and have direct experience in development activities. All are well qualified to comment on the roles of science and religion in shaping the goals and processes of development around the world. Despite their very different backgrounds, they reach remarkable consensus in their critiques of the economic/materialistic mode of development and in their proposals for a global strategy which would combine the economic approach with the religious/spiritual approach. This reconciliation between science and religion would demonstrate the convergence of two modes of knowing the same ineffable reality—science providing knowledge of the physical outer world, and religion providing knowledge of the inner spiritual world. Both would be enriched by this collaboration and interaction and would benefit by comparison of insights, technologies, and methodologies.

The authors lament the domination of the economic, materialistic, and scientific view of the world and its people, and its powerful influence on development strategies, values, and principles. They join a growing chorus of criticism of the largely economic strategies employed, in various guises, since

the success of the Marshall Plan in Europe after the Second World War. It was eventually realized that the values and processes underpinning the Marshall Plan were not to be found in most non-Western cultures. The resulting failures were numerous and extremely costly and forced the development community to reexamine its strongly biased Western premises and methods.

What is emerging and eloquently documented here, are new and radical principles of development which have been derived from the extravagant experiences of the past fifty years, now modified and corrected by the inclusion of a long-neglected element, the spiritual and cultural dimension of change: development activities must be rooted in the desires and values of the people for whom they are intended and must involve the full participation of that society in the design, management, evaluation, and continuation of the activity. The culture must be fully respected and appreciated as a factor in social change, as part of the goal and the means. It can no longer be co-opted and corrupted to legitimize economic and political change. Development must serve to integrate and unite the total society, bringing benefits to all sectors.

Future growth in development theory and practice, as well as the future of the planet, will revolve around our ability and our capacity to accord to religious-spiritual-cultural faculties the role they have played in previous civilizations and that they must now play in creating a global civilization where the human being is perceived as a combination of mind, body, and soul. Donor countries must be involved as partners in all matters, not just as charitable benefactors supplying funds and materials. Sustainability, capacity building, institutional development, environmental issues, gender equity, and cultural awareness—the so-called pillars of development—must be built into the design and operation of the activity, then carefully monitored by both sides. Good governance must be a prerequisite for development programs, along with strict control of corruption, government interference, bribery, patronage, and nepotism. Project management, the key factor in the success of a development program, must deal equally with technical excellence and the equitable management of human resources. The development project should meet high standards of scientific scrutiny and of cultural and spiritual awareness.

The contributors to this book confidently assert that development will succeed only if there is a radical reform of the way that development is defined and perceived. It must begin with a spiritual orientation to provide the direction and purpose and then enlist science and technology to make it happen.

Most significant is the agreement reached here among the teachings in the Sacred Scriptures of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, asserting the nature of the human being as essentially spiritual and in promoting a common morality based on a belief in a higher power. This present book can be seen as a recent manifestation of an ancient and widespread consensus. It is a demonstration of the saying, "Knowledge is a single point which the ignorant

have multiplied.”¹ The authors are converging to that central point and believe that knowledge and wisdom, when shared across cultures, can have a multiplying effect on achieving common goals.

This centuries-old agreement may not appear so remarkable when it is seen in the perspective of modern Western history with its strong disagreements about whether religion or science is the surest path to truth. The contributors in this book have clearly advocated an approach to human enterprise that gives central importance to the spiritual nature of the human being, not in opposition to the scientific approach but in harmony with it. The future of development depends not on who finally wins this debate about the relative virtues of science and religion but on how those two approaches to knowledge can be reconciled in revealing more and more about reality.

With broad agreement established about the inadequacy of the economic/materialistic model of development and also about the nature of the remedy that is needed, the authors address some related issues:

(1) If this agreement about the remedy is as widespread and consistent as has been suggested, and if it stretches back over two thousand years, and if it is particularly appropriate for this age, why has it not been incorporated into contemporary theory and practice, let alone into the common view of human nature? Is there an “Aquarian conspiracy” already underway which we have failed to recognize? Will the dissatisfaction expressed by these authors and many others prompt us to adopt this final option by default? What will create the collective will to bring about the reforms needed? Will this change appear as a revolution or a revelation?

(2) These questions are put in a more positive way by the authors: How can the religious/spiritual approach to development be shown to have the elements and dynamics needed to ensure greater success in the processes of social and economic development? If this is the missing dimension in development activities, how can its value be demonstrated?

Each author gives some examples—and more could undoubtedly be identified—but these have not been sufficiently convincing to policy makers, funding agencies, or practitioners to have them regularly included in existing programs, let alone be used as the basis of the program. Awareness of our spiritual nature and its role in guiding our development cannot be achieved by exhortation and sound reasoning, both of which are plentiful in this book, but by demonstrating the force of the spiritual dimension in our lives and hence in development programs. The plea for humankind to recognize its spiritual roots and therefore to reach its true destiny is as old as recorded history. Perhaps the next book to be produced will contain practical illustrations and case studies for analysis.

(3) What is certain is that the change required will not be an incremental, piece-by-piece tampering with the dominant materialistic paradigm. That

paradigm has already been explored, refined, and revised, and is now almost exhausted. There is a call for a redefinition of development based on a redefinition of human nature. To bring a utopian vision of humanity's future into reality will require nothing less than a complete revision of human nature, a challenge faced by all religions. Science has succeeded in advancing our knowledge of the physical universe and has improved our control of the material world, but has added little to our knowledge of ourselves. Our inner world has always been the realm of spiritual exploration. Now our technological marvels have surpassed our moral capacity to manage them for human good and have dulled our spiritual perception. A glamorous, seductive, "heroic materialism" has captured the minds and hearts of humankind.

(4) The authors agree that the accepted values and thought systems in all religions must undergo scientific scrutiny and creative criticism to evince a willingness to change in the light of new knowledge. Science, it is pointed out, has not only survived such scrutiny but has advanced from one major change to another, from Copernicus to Einstein.

(5) Considering the radical and profound nature of the changes suggested, there is a long way to go. This book helps by identifying issues which must be addressed, and by inviting our participation in furthering discourse by sharing ideas and examples. A practical formula for success from this point on was supplied centuries ago by a Moslem philosopher, al-Ghazali, in what he termed "the triad of being": knowledge-belief-action. We have now accumulated the necessary *knowledge* and information regarding development in the last fifty years. That knowledge must be conveyed to the people in terms and contexts meaningful to them, resulting in a *belief* (will, motivation, "ownership") which will then lead to informed *action*.

Though this volume is not intended as a tool for development workers, its main purpose being to advance a new understanding about development rooted in the spiritual nature of the human being, it does contain practical indicators for sound social change. Each author has included principles and guidelines which would ensure attention to the spiritual as well as the economic realities of development. These lists, if combined and slightly expanded, could provide the basis for an excellent handbook.

IDRC is to be heartily congratulated for sponsoring the publication of *The Lab the Temple and the Market*, and Pierre Beemans, the chief force behind it, can be assured that it will be a "useful contribution to the growing international discourse on the relationship between the religious, scientific, and developmental world views on the improvement of the human condition." Many people around the world will be honored to continue this vital discourse.

This is a book remarkably rich in spiritual insights, from the ancient teachings of the Hindu Vedanta and its creative application to current development, to the eloquent and penetrating encyclicals of Pope John Paul II

and Pope Paul VI, to the principles and rigorous use of Qur'anic wisdom, to the relevant and timely references to the Bahá'í Scriptures.

We have been provided with a sound diagnosis for the current troubled state of development theory and practice, but with few proposed remedies, apart from prescribing a good dose of spirituality. Could they be more specific? Perhaps not yet; perhaps they are sending out signals to see if there is a readiness for serious commitment to engage in the kind of “sea change” needed—and this is where we come in.

GLEN A. EYFORD

Note

1. Qtd. in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950) 184.