

# LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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*Panama*

I discovered Christianity as a life centered totally on love of neighbor. . . . It was later that I understood that in Colombia you can't bring about this love simply by beneficence. There was needed a whole change of political, economic, and social structures. These changes demanded a revolution. That love was intimately bound up with revolution.<sup>1</sup>

THE WORDS are those of Camilo Torres. His thought includes many elements of a liberation theology *in nuce*: it arises out of a revolutionary praxis; it is centered not on the Church but on society; it involves socioeconomic analysis.<sup>2</sup> When Camilo Torres joined the guerrillas, Vatican II was nearing conclusion. Theologians in Latin America, by and large, were simply following the conciliar discussions. Theology and "social doctrine" were still separate matters. Since that time there has arisen a "theology of liberation." In this article we propose to survey this theology, relating it to its social and ecclesial context.<sup>3</sup>

A word about the situation of the Latin American theologian. He generally returned from his studies in Europe to find that his theology had hardly prepared him for the kind of work he would be assigned. His theology had no relation to the life or religiosity of the popular majorities. As a member of the Catholic elite, he would look to Europe to keep up with pastoral and theological developments. If he should want to continue to work in theology, he would have no theological establishment, no research libraries, no audience for his output.<sup>4</sup>

Vatican II advocated an "opening to the world" which from Europe appeared to be a world of technological progress, though threatened with dangers. From Latin America it appears as a world of oppression. This became more obvious as the first Decade of Development brought

<sup>1</sup> Camilo Torres, *Cristianismo y revolución* (eds. Maldonado, Olivieri, Zabala; Mexico, 1970) p. 407 (interview).

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Berryman, "Camilo Torres, Revolutionary-Theologian," *Commonweal* 96, no. 7 (April 21, 1972) 164-67.

<sup>3</sup> THEOLOGICAL STUDIES has published the most widely read and most influential single essay, Gustavo Gutierrez' "Notes for a Theology of Liberation": *TS* 31 (1970) 243-61.

<sup>4</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, "Una iglesia sin teología," in *De la sociedad a la teología* (Buenos Aires, 1970); orig. IDO-C 68-14, July 4, 1968. Segundo, a Uruguayan Jesuit, is finishing a five-volume work *Teología abierta para el laico adulto*, which is emerging in a process of dialogue with organized lay groups spanning several years. Cf. the first two volumes in English translation: *The Community Called Church* and *Grace and the Human Condition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973).

increased dependence for the poor countries, as Chile's Revolution in Liberty did not solve fundamental problems, as Brazil and other countries were militarized. Latin American economists and sociologists began to reject the conceptual frameworks of the rich world and to look for instruments more adequate to the task.<sup>5</sup> A number of groups of Christians, and in particular priests, began to denounce structural oppression.<sup>6</sup> It became clear that Latin American Christians were moving away from European postconciliar concerns.<sup>7</sup>

#### MEDELLÍN

The Latin American Church consciously expresses its own identity with the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (CELAM), held in the city of Medellín, Colombia, in August-September 1968. Though it was eclipsed by the visit of the Pope to the Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá, this two-week meeting was as important for the continent as the Council was for the Church at large. It was indeed a continental meeting of the episcopate to apply the Council to Latin America. A number of meetings and official declarations prepared the way for Medellín; we may single out *Populorum progressio* and the *Letter of Sixteen Bishops of the Third World*. Of course, its antecedents were not simply intraecclesiastical: one should cite the general atmosphere of 1968, the Paris May, the proliferation of political and revolutionary theologies, the radicalization of Latin American social scientists. During the months preceding Medellín there circulated a base-document in order to gather opinions. In the meeting itself, 150 bishops and

<sup>5</sup> Somewhat at random: Celso Furtado, Osvaldo Sunkel, Theotonio dos Santos, Anibal Pinto, Helio Jaguaribe, Antonio Garcia, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Gino Germani. Cf. the bibliographical article by Gonzalo Arroyo, "Pensamiento latinoamericano sobre subdesarrollo y dependencia," *Mensaje*, October 1968, pp. 516-17. This line of thought corresponds to the "radical analysis" of Baran-Sweezy, Magdoff, and others. Cf. recent CICOP conference proceedings and many Orbis books, e.g., Goulet-Hudson, *The Myth of Aid* (New York, 1971). For a very readable presentation, see Gary MacEoin, *The Revolution Next Door* (New York, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Most notably, "Message of Bishops of the Third World," August 1967. Two collections of these manifestos: *Signos de renovación* (Lima, 1969) and *Iglesia latinoamericana: Protesta o profecía?* (Buenos Aires, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> One of the most lucid expressions: Lucio Gera, Guillermo Rodriguez, "Apuntes para una interpretación de la Iglesia argentina," *Vispera*, no. 15, February 1970, pp. 59-88. It should be noted that "Europe" is the reference point for the Latin American Church's awareness of its own particularity; hence the frequent allusions to "European" theology in this article. Moreover, in general "Church" refers to the Roman Catholic Church, although the Protestant contribution to liberation theology has been extremely significant.

100 *periti* elaborated sixteen documents which were intended as authoritative orientations for the Church.<sup>8</sup>

One notes from the beginning a strong assertion of identity:

As Latin American men, we share the history of our people. The past shapes us definitively as *Latin Americans*, the present places us in a decisive conjuncture, and the future demands a creative task of us in the development process. . . . The Church, as part of the Latin American essence, in spite of its limitations has lived with our peoples the process of colonization, liberation, and organization. . . . As Christians, we believe that this historic stage of Latin America is intimately bound up with salvation history.<sup>9</sup>

The Medellín documents follow a structure which can be expressed as reality—theological principles—pastoral options. This is evident in the documents as a whole<sup>10</sup> and in each particular document. Such a structure seeks to situate the Church and theology in the human reality, specifically the reality of oppression and liberation, and in effect says that pastoral work and Church structures are to be in function of this human reality. Medellín seeks to integrate the perspectives of social sciences, theology, ethics, and pastoral reflection.

There is a consistent striving to overcome dualisms:

Without falling into confusions or simplistic identifications, there ought always to be made manifest the profound unity which exists between the salvific project of God realized in Christ and the aspirations of man; between salvation history and human history; between the Church, People of God, and temporal communities; between God's revealing action and man's experience; between supernatural gifts and charisms and human values.<sup>11</sup>

The bishops set out to interpret the "signs of the times," which are a theological locus and a summons from God. It is well known that the redacting committees for Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* encountered

\* Medellín, *Conclusiones: Presencia de la Iglesia en la actual transformación de América latina*, Segunda Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano. We will be quoting from the sixth edition. Bogotá, 1971, by document and paragraph number (English edition exists).

<sup>8</sup> Message.

<sup>10</sup> Outline of conclusions: Human Promotion (Justice, Peace, Family and Demography, Education, Youth); Evangelization and Growth in Faith (Pastoral, Pastoral of Elites, Catechesis, Liturgy); Visible Church and Its Structures (Lay Movements, Priests, Religious, Formation of the Clergy, Poverty of the Church, *Pastoral de conjunto*, Mass Media). *Pastoral de conjunto* is difficult to translate in a single phrase: it involves planning, team pastoral work, organization, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Catechesis 4.

serious difficulties in determining and interpreting these signs. In effect, they chose only the most general signs—change, transformation, progress—in a framework of apparent ideological neutrality. Medellín declares that in Latin America these signs are expressed above all in the social order.

However, to interpret any social reality one needs an analytic framework. Even apparently “neutral” and “objective” social sciences conceal an ideological option in their choice of categories of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> The bishops, recognizing that one’s viewpoint is conditioned, offer a typology of three attitudes: traditionalist, developmentalist, revolutionary. “Traditionalists . . . show little or no social consciousness, have a bourgeois mentality, and hence do not question social structures.”<sup>13</sup> Developmentalists, with their technological mentality, are concerned about the means of production, put more emphasis on economic than on social progress, and see the solution of marginality as the “integration” of people into society as producers and consumers.<sup>14</sup>

Revolutionaries question the socioeconomic structure. They want it to be radically changed, in objectives as well as in means. For them, the people are or ought to be the subject of this change, so that they participate in decisions for the ordering of the whole social process.<sup>15</sup>

The very use of the term “developmentalist” in an implicitly pejorative sense indicates the sympathies of the bishops. They realize, along with Latin American intellectuals, that the present course of “modernization”-with-stability is leading toward increasing dependence, cultural mimetism, and permanent underdevelopment. Significantly, they define the revolutionaries in terms not of violence but of the people participating in the process of change as subject rather than as object.

Not without inconsistencies, the Medellín documents generally employ “revolutionary” rather than “developmentalistic” categories. The document on peace is noteworthy for what it denounces. It speaks of “dominant” and “oppressed” sectors and exposes the former’s facile use of “anticommunism” to repress legitimate reactions.<sup>16</sup> The bishops are even clearer in their denunciation of the international system of dependence of these countries “on an economic power around which they gravitate. As a consequence our nations frequently are not owners of their

<sup>12</sup> For a trenchant criticism of social sciences, cf. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York, 1959).

<sup>13</sup> Elites 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 8. There follows an interesting correlation of the faith of these types.

<sup>16</sup> Peace 5.

goods nor masters of their economic decisions.”<sup>17</sup> They denounce the distortion of international trade brought about by increasingly unfavorable commercial terms, the drain-off of resources, tax evasion, increasing indebtedness, and “international monopolies and the international imperialism of money.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the clearest examples of the line taken is the reversal of meaning given to the term “violence”:

If the Christian believes in the fecundity of peace in order to arrive at justice, he also believes that justice is an unavoidable condition for peace. He cannot but see that Latin America finds itself in many places in a situation that can be called *institutionalized violence*, whereby for lack of structures in industry and farming, in the national and international economy, in cultural and political life “whole populations lacking basic necessities live in such a dependence that it impedes all initiative and responsibility, as well as all possibility of cultural promotion and participation in social and political life.” Such a situation demands *global, bold, urgent and profoundly renovating transformations*.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the fundamental violence is that of those who maintain their privileges and power at the expense of the majorities. The bishops criticize the liberal capitalist system with its “erroneous conception of the right of ownership of the means of production” and yet feel obliged to condemn Marxism;<sup>20</sup> they seem to exhort to some kind of *via media* without specifying what it could be.

The bishops speak of a “liberating education” as “that which makes the student a subject of his own development.”<sup>21</sup> The rejection of developmentalism appears in the following disjunctive:

The task of the education of these brothers of ours [“marginal” populations] does not consist properly in incorporating them in the cultural structures which exist

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 8–10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 16 (emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> “The Latin American business system, and through it the present economy, respond to an erroneous conception of the right to property, of the means of production, and of the very purpose of the economy. . . .

“The liberal capitalist system and the temptation of the Marxist system would seem to exhaust the possibilities . . . of transforming economic structures. Both systems attack the dignity of the human person: one of them has as its presupposition the primacy of capital, its power, and its discriminatory use in function of profit; the other, though ideologically it holds for a humanism, looks rather toward collective man, and in practice is translated into a totalitarian concentration in the power of the state. We must denounce the fact that Latin America seems closed in between these two options and remains dependent on one or other of the power centers which channel its economy” (Justice 10).

<sup>21</sup> Education 8.

around them and which can also be oppressive, but in something much deeper. It consists in capacitating them so that they themselves, as authors of their own progress, develop a cultural world in a creative and original way, in accordance with their own riches and which may be fruit of their own efforts.<sup>22</sup>

Following this basic thrust, the Medellín documents begin a major reinterpretation of the chief symbols of the Christian faith. Catechesis

today must assume totally the anguish and hopes of today's man in order to offer him the possibilities of a full liberation, the riches of integral salvation in Christ the Lord. Hence it should be faithful to the transmission of the biblical message, not only in its intellectual content, but also in its reality incarnate in the life events of man today.

Historical situations and authentically human aspirations form an indispensable part of catechesis; they ought to be interpreted seriously, within the present context, in the light of the lived experiences of the People of Israel, of Christ, of the ecclesial community in which the Spirit of the risen Christ lives and operates continually.<sup>23</sup>

In various places the bishops give a paschal interpretation of liberation:

As all liberation is already an anticipation of full redemption in Christ, the Church in Latin America feels itself particularly solidary with every educative effort which tends to liberate our peoples. The paschal Christ, "image of the invisible God," is the goal which God's design sets for man's development, so that "we may all attain the stature of the perfect man."<sup>24</sup>

The bishops project their aspirations for the Church:

May there be presented ever more clearly in Latin America the countenance of a Church authentically poor, missionary and paschal, freed from all temporal power and boldly committed to the liberation of the whole man and of all men.<sup>25</sup>

The second part of the conclusions is called "Evangelization and Growth of the Faith." One of the signs of the abandonment of an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe is the recognition of the religiosity of the majorities of the people as a genuine expression of faith, even though it does not follow the norms of the Church. Instead of a pastoral practice of attempting to bring people into conformity with official Catholicism, it urges respect for popular religiosity and a policy of recognizing its values and purifying its defects. The two key words are "evangelization"

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>23</sup> Catechesis 6.

<sup>24</sup> Education 9.

<sup>25</sup> Youth 15.

and "base-community." The need for an "evangelization of the baptized" is recognized.<sup>26</sup> The base-community is conceived of as a homogeneous group small enough to permit brotherly personal relationships. "It is the initial cell of ecclesial structuring, focal point of evangelization, and at present a primordial factor of human promotion and development."<sup>27</sup>

There emerges a more integral concept of pastoral work in the sense that "conscientization" is to be integrated into pastoral plans<sup>28</sup> and one of the pastoral lines laid down by the document on peace is as follows: "To make our preaching, catechesis, and liturgy take into account the social and communitarian dimension of Christianity, forming men committed to the construction and building up of a world of peace."<sup>29</sup> Many of the documents end up with series of recommendations or commitments of the Church: to denounce injustice, awaken a consciousness of injustice, defend the rights of the poor, set up a liberating education, make the family a "domestic Church," give more importance to youth, study popular religiosity, etc. It is insisted that the Church as such cannot take specific political options, the particular case being priests, whose duty it is to form laymen. "But in the economic and social order, and principally in the political order, where different concrete options are presented, neither decision nor leadership nor the structuring of solutions pertains to the priest."<sup>30</sup> In regard to political powers, the bishops delineate the Church's stance as one of dialogue and collaboration as well as of criticism and denunciation where necessary.

The final section treats of lay movements, priests, religious, and Church structures. Particularly noteworthy is the document on the poverty of the Church, which, besides seeing poverty as a lack of material goods and as spiritual poverty, speaks of "poverty as commitment, which assumes, voluntarily and out of love, the condition of the needy of this world in order to give witness to the evil which it represents and spiritual freedom in the face of possessions . . .,"<sup>31</sup> following the example of Christ. The Church is urged to solidarity with the poor in their struggle and their problems, in the denunciation of injustice and oppression.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Medellín, at least for the "liberationist" sectors of the Church, for which it undoubtedly is more meaningful than Vatican II. The Council in its central preoccupations (the Church, liturgy, authority, ecumenism, revelation) and in its ideologically conditioned view of the modern world in terms of "progress"

<sup>26</sup> Catechesis 9.

<sup>27</sup> Pastoral 10.

<sup>28</sup> Justice 17.

<sup>29</sup> Peace 24.

<sup>30</sup> Priests 19.

<sup>31</sup> Poverty 4.

reflects a "developmentalist" mentality in the sense described above. Medellín is concerned with the participation of the Church and of Christians in the liberation of man.

How explain such a progressive stance in ecclesiastical documents? Perhaps we may attribute it to the groundwork done by the CELAM specialists, to the tendency of episcopal conferences to choose their more "intellectual" members as delegates to such a meeting, to the activity of the *periti* at Medellín, and to the general climate of 1968. Certainly many bishops are more ready to sign broad proclamations than to commit themselves to liberation in concrete struggles at the local level.

We must not overlook the limitations of Medellín. Although it adopts the dependence framework of interpretation, it is rather more descriptive than analytical and does not arrive at the mechanisms of oppression, for which it lacks adequate instruments of analysis. It is notably silent on how its ambitious aims are to be realized in society at large and in the Church itself. Its theology will need to be developed. In any case, it has served to give a green light to creative minorities all over the continent whose participation in the liberation struggle has led to a radicalization of the themes presented in Medellín.

#### CHRISTIANS AS PROTAGONISTS: EXPERIENCE OF CONFLICT

Latin American liberation theology arises out of an experience: the discovery of institutionalized violence and the dimensions of oppression. There is often a gradual process of radicalization: one begins at the local level, for example in a co-operative, and enters into conflict with the local power structure; gradually it becomes more evident that the oppressive system is national and international. This growing awareness brings changes in one's options from the strictly pastoral toward the political.

The situation of violence is more or less known by way of the press. One has heard of tortures in Brazil, of rightist paramilitary groups operating in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and other places, of controlled presses and phone-tapping and omnipresent spying, of thousands of political prisoners being kept under arbitrary arrest (to mention some examples). This violence is not something accidental, which could be eliminated with more modern techniques; it is part and parcel of a repressive system. The significant thing here is that Christians in groups and individually have been involved in conflict: priests have been incarcerated; convents and monasteries and bishops' residences have been watched and searched; a group of thirty priests in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, writes a circular protesting the killing of a student in a demonstration, and they are denounced and interrogated;<sup>32</sup> priests of the

<sup>32</sup> *Noticias aliadas* (news service based in Lima, dedicated to Church and liberation in Latin America) 18/8/71-M (henceforth, NA; numbers refer to day, month, year).



Third World Movement in Argentina have been imprisoned for defending the workers' right to strike; in Teoponte, Bolivia, Nestor Paz dies in the guerrilla leaving behind a diary filled with notes to his sweetheart and reflections on the gospel;<sup>33</sup> Santiago, Chile becomes a refuge point for hundreds of Christians exiled from Brazil, Bolivia, and other countries.

This conflictive situation at times affects the Church as institution, as exemplified in the case of Paraguay, where in the absence of other social forces capable of standing up to the dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner, the Church has come to be looked upon as a symbol of resistance. In 1969 the government was persecuting Christian student groups which had protested the torture of political prisoners. This eventually led to the expulsion of Fr. Pedro Oliva and the suspension of the magazine *Comunidad*. In the conflict the hierarchy sided with the students and proceeded from the specific question to a wider denunciation:

Many of the present political leaders have a disincarnate and purely "religious" image of the Church: they identify it with the hierarchy and pretend to exclude it from all participation in the process of change under the pretext that it "ought not to get involved in politics." And they attribute to the Church merely the inoffensive mission of "pacifying without denouncing," of covering with the mantle of "spiritual unity" the profound social differences which divide the country and to dedicate themselves to purely "assistencial" activities which would not affect present sociopolitical structures.<sup>34</sup>

Paraguay is somewhat of an exception in that the Church as institution was clearly defined, at least for a couple of years. In many other cases the hierarchy divides and does not define itself clearly. Sometimes the bishops collaborate with the authorities in expelling troublesome priests. In two cases in recent years the killing of priests has led to confrontation. In mid-1969 Henrique Pereira Neto, a student chaplain in Recife, was taken by the Death Squadron (paramilitary group), tortured, shot, mutilated, and hung. The clergy of Rio de Janeiro wrote:

He died by the violence of the dominant class which has put the country into mourning, with the extermination of students and true leaders of the people. Peace is not reducible just to the absence of war . . . it is the fruit of justice. In Brazil, where a minority controls all political and economic power, there is no peace nor justice. There does not exist the possibility of fulfilling the single law of love for neighbor except by the struggle for the transformation of Brazilian society.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Diario de Nestor Paz*; cf. *Pastoral popular* (Santiago, Chile) no. 125, pp. 1-39.

<sup>34</sup> NA 10/9/69-M, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> NA 4/6/69-M, p. 5.

In spite of police intimidation, seven thousand people arrived for the funeral. Similarly in 1971 Hector Gallego, a Colombian priest working with *campesinos* in the Santa Fe district in Panama, disappeared. He had previously had nonviolent confrontations with the local landowners and authorities. The government's efforts to prevent a serious investigation provoked a confrontation with the Church which lasted several months.

This experience of conflict—at first glance not a theological theme—is a primary datum for liberation theology. Christians have come to see “the world as conflictivity,” in Hugo Assmann’s phrase.<sup>36</sup> This separates them from the North Atlantic postconciliar notion of a reconciliation with the world. Simply to be reconciled to this world is to accept complicity in oppression. When the Church comes to take on the preoccupations of the world, it finds a divided world, a “rich world and a poor world, with opposed interests because the wealth of one and the poverty of the other are correlatives.”<sup>37</sup>

Various Latin American authors have made theirs the views expressed by Giulio Girardi:

To be converted to the poor is to make a choice of some against others, of the oppressed against the oppressors, of the poor against the rich: one cannot sincerely be with the oppressed without enlisting against the oppressors. Now to put yourself against the oppressors is to make a class choice, of one class against another. And it is a choice which divides the Church and brings the struggle into its own life, because many of the rich, the great majority of them, are Christians.<sup>38</sup>

This kind of language is foreign to Christians. The bulk of hierarchy and clergy continue to maintain a supraclass line. To many Christians, nevertheless, the situation is increasingly obvious. Says Gustavo Gutierrez: “It is undeniable that class struggle plants problems for the universality of Christian love and Church unity . . . . But every consideration on this matter ought to begin with two elemental attestations: class

<sup>36</sup> *Opresión-liberación: Desafío a los cristianos* (Montevideo, 1971) p. 69. Hugo Assmann, exiled from Brazil, forced to leave Bolivia, at present in Chile, writes an aggressive and complicated prose. A doctor in theology, he has claimed that his most theological work is his reporting on the guerrilla action in Teoponte, Bolivia.

<sup>37</sup> Noel Olaya, “Unidad cristiana y lucha de clases,” *Cristianismo y sociedad*, nos. 24–25 (1970) 63. Olaya, a Colombian, has been left without assignment by the Archbishop of Bogotá for several years, though he collaborates with CELAM institutes. At present he is working on anthropological investigations with Indians.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p. 65.

struggle is a fact and neutrality in this matter is impossible.”<sup>39</sup> Actually the vocabulary of Medellín itself implicitly leads to an acceptance of the reality of class struggle, at least in terms of international mechanisms of oppression: imperialism, colonialism, international monopolies, oppression-liberation. Fear is expressed that acceptance of class struggle will divide the Church. But, replies Gutierrez, “In a world radically split apart, the function of the ecclesial community is to struggle against the deep causes of division among men.”<sup>40</sup>

Though detractors of liberation theology like to portray it as a “theology of violence,” little theological writing treats of the theme *ex professo*. Common positions can be summarized under four headings.

1) *Institutionalized violence*. Medellín here introduces a profound change in perspective—indeed, the first development since the just-war theory. The “first violence,” that practiced routinely by the power structure, is usually perfectly legal; it takes place in the haciendas and factories, banks and government ministries, the White House or Pentagon (e.g., Nixon’s toast to the President of Brazil: “As Brazil goes, so should Latin America”). It is what gives the upper 5% control over half the wealth, and the lower 35% of the people 5% of the wealth.

2) *Counterviolence*. The “second violence” is revolutionary, that practiced in order to take power and establish a just order. Ethically here the traditional principles of self-defense are invoked. One must observe, however, that for the foreseeable future Cuban-style revolutions are impossible. The possible legitimation of guerrilla tactics, urban or peasant, would seem to be more of the order of (symbolic) “resistance” than of effective take-over.

3) *Repressive violence*. This is the violence used by the system to put down any uprising by the oppressed. As a result of Vietnam it is more technologized and hence another “accident” like Cuba is highly unlikely. As examples of the U.S. involvement we may point out the 40,000 Latin American military men trained in the Panama Canal Zone since the Rio Pact (1947), the maintenance of over 300 U.S. experts in 16 Latin American countries as well as mobile training teams, U.S. participation in the hunting down of Che Guevara and the leaders of the Tupamaro movement.

<sup>39</sup> *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas* (Lima, 1971) p. 341 (henceforth *Teol. lib.*). Gutierrez here quotes a pastoral letter of the French bishops recognizing the existence of class struggle. The most recognized single theologian of liberation in Latin America, Gutierrez works with the University and as consultant to bishops and pastoral teams in Peru.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 347.

4) *Active nonviolence*. It is a fact that nonviolent techniques are used by students, workers, and peasants around the continent. Helder Camara speaks of the "violence of the peaceful" and proposes a continental co-ordinated nonviolent movement. Similar proposals exist in Uruguay. Nonviolence has not reached the ideological level of a Martin Luther King. Theologians favor it, and some such as Morelli integrate it into their theology.<sup>41</sup>

#### A POLITICIZED THEOLOGY

In recent years there has appeared a European political theology which may be described as a corrective to a privatized intimistic Christianity and as a suggestion that the Church should be a critical force in society. Liberation theology accepts in principle the orientation of Metz and others, but it seeks to be more rooted in analysis of concrete situations and has become politicized in practice.

It would be well to survey the kind of praxis out of which this theology arises. The work may be with peasants, workers, or students. It might be pastoral work in a parish, for example, with a liberation orientation which eventually leads to taking a stand in conflictive situations. It might be a local development project, such as a co-operative. In recent years many have worked at "conscientization," inspired by Paulo Freire.<sup>42</sup> Such a line tends to lead toward organization and politicization. Some Christians operate consciously with an ideology and a methodology of nonviolence, though in Latin America it tends to be nondoctrinaire. Admittedly, many are sceptical of the practicality of nonviolent methods, since Latin American countries do not have the Anglo-Saxon tradition of respect for law and the stakes are higher than, for example, the independence of India. Another level of work is direct participation in political parties and movements. This is particularly the case in Chile, as well as in Argentina, where the Third World priests have opted for *peronismo* not as an ideological program but as a practical vehicle for the taking of power by the people. Finally, there must be added the participation of Christians and even a few priests in movements of armed

<sup>41</sup> Alex Morelli, "Un ensayo teológico sobre la violencia," in *Liberación en América latina* (Bogotá, 1971) pp. 165-89, 206-8. Also Alex Morelli, *Libera a mi pueblo* (Buenos Aires, 1971), and special number of *Cristianismo y sociedad*, "Crítica a la violencia en América latina" (four articles), no. 28 (1971).

<sup>42</sup> *Pedagogía del oprimido* (Montevideo, 1970); also *Educación como práctica de la libertad* (Montevideo, 1969). It is impossible to overstate the importance of Freire for the Christian Left, especially from 1965-70. Most of the theologians here presented have close personal associations with Freire. He himself is deeply Christian. For recent positions cf. *La misión educativa de la Iglesia en América latina* (mimeo.; Santiago, 1972).

struggle, which for the moment have a value more symbolic than effective.

Situations vary enormously from country to country. In some countries the society has undertaken a global revolutionary project: most obviously Cuba; Chile for the moment (though the taking of some political power does not establish a socialist state) and Peru in the sense that there is a process of vigorous national affirmation. In these situations Christians have taken a basically positive stand, though in the case of Cuba the participation of Christians has been slight for historical reasons. In many countries the situation is nonrevolutionary and repressive: most notably Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Central America. There is no foreseeable break-through, and the combination of forcible repression, absorption of potential protest through upward mobility, and the manipulation of the masses (e.g., through soccer games, propaganda in Brazil) makes for a fundamentally nonrevolutionary situation. In Brazil the game plan calls for continued economic growth, a growing sphere of influence in the continent, a kind of subimperialism under the tutelage of the U.S., and certainly a further distancing of rich from poor. Unfortunately, the scheme seems viable at least for the foreseeable future. In a number of other countries one can find signs of a prerevolutionary situation: forces at work in society give hope of some kind of break-through, e.g., Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia.

Experience has led Christians to break away from the European conception of the Church-world relationship. Gustavo Gutierrez has traced an evolution of four conceptions with their corresponding types of pastoral approach.<sup>43</sup> In the "Mentality of Christendom," where the secular lacks true autonomy, there will be a kind of Christian politics aimed at maintaining the Church's position in society. Such an approach still prevails where the day-to-day business of the Church is sacramentalization. A first alternative was the "New Christendom," identified with Maritain, which, recognizing the demise of Christendom and the value of liberal reforms and institutions, seeks to establish a society based on Christian principles. Signs of this approach are Christian Democrat parties, Christian unions, and specialized Catholic Action. Here the autonomy of the secular is affirmed over against clericalist pretensions. Subsequently there has appeared a further step which Gutierrez calls the "distinction of planes," typified by Congar and Chenu. The Church has a double mission, evangelization and the animation of the

<sup>43</sup> *Teol. lib.*, pp. 71 ff. Also in *La pastoral de la Iglesia en América latina* (Montevideo, 1968). This latter is a most penetrating analysis of different pastoral approaches, detecting the underlying (implicit) theology of each.

temporal order, but it does not have the mission of building up the world. The pastoral practice associated with this position can be called that aimed at "maturity in the faith;" concretely it may involve Bible groups, formation of base-communities, intimate liturgies, the formation of lay ministers. One of the signs of this mentality is the clear distinction between priest and layman, the former dedicating himself to tasks of the Church's specific mission.

At this point it is clear that we have arrived at the position of Vatican II, which undoubtedly was an advance inasmuch as it liberated the Church, at least in theory, from particular kinds of regimes and opened it to others. From being concretely identified with conservative regimes the Church comes to see itself as apolitical. But experience in Latin America is leading some to question this position. For example, groups of workers and students in Brazil in the early 60's, following the pattern of French Catholic Action's *revisión de vida*, found themselves increasingly impelled to political options as groups, whereas in theory political options, being a contingent question, should be left to each individual. Political radicalization in some cases leads to an abandonment of Christian groups and a crisis of faith. In any case, the image of a church which does not intervene in the temporal order comes to be seen as an idealist abstraction. In the concrete one's options are not infinite, and some of them at least are clearly in favor of an oppressive *status quo*. "Concretely, in Latin America, the distinction of planes serves to mask the real political option of the Church: for the established order." <sup>44</sup> Gutierrez ironically notes that the distinction-of-planes position, battle flag of the progressives some years back, is now in the service of the *status quo*. The pastoral practice characteristic of the position of conscious political commitment he calls "prophetic."

The ILADES crisis<sup>45</sup> illustrates many aspects of the question and is one of the places of origin of liberation theology. The Institute was opened in 1966 under sponsorship of CELAM, the Jesuits, and Cardinal Silva of Santiago, with financing from German Catholics, both to promote the Church's social doctrine and to do research. The founders were quite identified with the Christian Democratic party; President Frei was also involved. At the time there seemed to be a common language among the Christian Democrats, the bishops' pastoral letters, Catholic Action, and ILADES, and undoubtedly this alliance had helped Frei in 1964. Soon, however, ILADES began to polarize into two groups, a

<sup>44</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Instituto Latinoamericano de Doctrina y Estudios Sociales; cf. article by Yves Vaillancourt, originally in *Víspera*, April 1971, reprinted in LADOC 2, 13a, December 1971.

minority headed up by French Jesuit Pierre Bigo and a majority around Chilean Jesuit Gonzalo Arroyo. The Bigo group finally prevailed because of the backing of Church authorities and Adveniat, so that the Arroyo group resigned.

The divergent explanations of the crisis are illustrative of the issues. The Bigo group alleged that from 1966 to 1969 the Institute had shifted from pastoral to political functions, that it was increasingly Marxist-infiltrated, and that accordingly it had lost both scientific objectivity and its original Christian orientation. The Arroyo group saw the conflict as basically between developmentalistic and revolutionary Christians. They defended the use of Marxist categories as more adequate instruments of analysis for the situation of dependence and domination of Latin America. They insisted that any social scientist is ideologically committed; hence they renounced a false neutrality and saw their scientific work as part of the work of liberation, so that their objectivity was that of participants, not of spectators. They vigorously maintained that they had not lost a Christian orientation but had abandoned a certain kind of Christian orientation which really had masked the ideology of Christian Democracy. ILADES had been political from the beginning, but in the mid-60's, when the bulk of the Chilean Church was Christian Democrat, few noticed its partisan character. By 1970 Christians voted left, right, and center, though the image of the Church's affiliation with Christian Democracy remains.

The position of Vatican II (distinction of planes) was reaffirmed at Medellín: the Church has no "technical solutions or infallible remedies."<sup>46</sup> But Medellín speaks of prophetic denunciation and calls for changes that are "global, daring, urgent, and profoundly renovating." How will these revolutionary changes be brought about if not by the organization of the majorities in order to take power? Must not this take place through a political party, movement, or coalition? Moreover, to denounce abuses in the concrete is to take a controversial position. If it is the government that is perpetrating them, the Church will be considered "opposition" if it denounces them. Simply to denounce abuses does not go to the roots of the situation; e.g., in Brazil it is not enough simply to protest tortures. Why are there more than 12,000 political prisoners? What is the whole mechanism of oppression? Criticism must be directed to the global "historical project" of Brazilian society.<sup>47</sup>

Some episcopates seem more willing to accept the political dimension of their actions. The Peruvian bishops in their presynodal document

<sup>46</sup> Message.

<sup>47</sup> Assmann, "Iglesia y proyecto histórico," pp. 167 ff.

state: "The presence and the action of the Church have inevitable political implications, since one cannot evangelize without a commitment in the struggle against the system of domination." They treat of the attempt at liberation and recuperation "of our natural resources, the repatriation of capital, control of currencies, agrarian reform, educational reform, and support for popular mobilization."<sup>48</sup> They propose to denounce in the synod the "pseudo neutrality of banks," to criticize so-called aid and the fomenting of the arms race in Latin America. On other occasions they have made pronouncements on the nationalization of the International Petroleum Company and the thesis of 200-mile jurisdiction over coastal waters. Undoubtedly it is easier for the Peruvian bishops to make these political statements when they are in accord with the nationalistic thrust of the government. In the repressive countries the bishops will at most condemn the worst excesses. In Brazil one notes a fluctuation between criticism and accommodation. Most recently, however, a number of bishops of the northeast have condemned not only the excesses such as torture but the "Brazilian miracle" as such.

The two points of view have reached perhaps their clearest confrontation in Chile. Early in 1971 the bishops released a long working document called "Gospel, Politics, and Socialism."<sup>49</sup> Beginning with some general points on the gospel and the Church, they speak of the Chilean Church in the midst of rapid social changes. But the Church's only official and fundamental option is for the gospel of the risen Christ: the Church cannot opt for any one human group, although it prefers the service of the poor. It is true that Chile is faced with a choice between capitalism and socialism, but there are many kinds of capitalism (more or less socialized) and many kinds of socialism (more or less rigid). All are ambiguous, as are the men who lead them. It is up to technicians to judge them, not the Church. They go on to warn that the specific kind of socialism being presented to Chile is Marxist; they warn against its dangers: statism and atheism. They are insistent that both capitalism and Marxism fall into "economicism." They insist that while all Christians can participate in politics, those responsible for pastoral work should not publicly proclaim their options. They close urging that the gospel concept of man and society should inspire Christians to commitment.

In their reply<sup>50</sup> a priest group actively committed in the transition to

<sup>48</sup> NA 18/8/71-M, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Reprinted in *Gamos*, Boletín de Centro de Investigación y Estudios Familiares, nos. 55 and 56.

<sup>50</sup> "Reflexiones sobre el documento de trabajo 'Evangelio, política y socialismo,' (mimeo.)."



socialism called *Los Ochenta* (the "eighty") recognizes the bishops' letter as an invitation to dialogue. In spite of good intentions, the bishops do not analyze sufficiently either capitalism or socialism. The former they condemn in its excesses, without any penetration into its mechanisms. In regard to the latter, they do not analyze the present project of the Unidad Popular in Chile, nor do they study the evolution of the workers' movement in Chile; hence, for example, they warn against the dangers of anti-Christian Marxism, ignoring the fact that in Chile the working-class movement has not been hostile to the Christian faith.

The bishops postulate the "political independence of the Church" and say that the Church does not incline to any particular option. The priests answer that, as a matter of fact, the Church has always participated in politics, in words and actions. Most recently its position is reformist, favoring "popular promotion." But in Chile the poor means the working class. In spite of what is said, the document does incline toward a specific option, a "Christian humanism" which is a modernized form of the liberal ideology of capitalism.

In ultimate analysis Christians are permitted only to "humanize" socialism, established without their collaboration, since socialism, being dehumanizing, will always need correctives. The political option which the document proposes is, hence, that of reforming any system whatsoever, but not that of making a revolutionary change in a system.<sup>51</sup>

Since capitalism still exists in Chile, the concrete option being offered is that of "humanizing" it: in the concrete, the bishops seem to be arguing for Christian Democracy. This becomes clearer when they present certain values as evangelical: equality of opportunities, creative initiative, opposition, political pluralism, freedom of thought and expression, dignity and freedom, socialization, participation in goods and activities. These expressions are characteristic of bourgeois society, which in practice denies precisely these things to its working classes. The document concludes with remarks on the bishops' understanding of the gospel.

Pablo Richard makes a penetrating criticism of the predominant attitudes of Christians in an article titled "Socialist Rationality and the Historical Verification of Christianity."<sup>52</sup> He notes the present search for an identity in Catholic theology and for a "universal Christian specificity." He makes a distinction between two spheres, a fundamental option

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> José Pablo Richard Guzmán, "Racionalidad socialista y verificación histórica del cristianismo," *Cuadernos de la realidad nacional* (Santiago, Chile) no. 12, April 1972, pp. 144-53.

for Jesus Christ, for gospel values, man, and society on which all Christians are in agreement. These values must be incarnated. However, in the sphere of particular options one must leave room for pluralism. Richard criticizes this position as an "ideological inversion" of social reality and political consciousness. It presents the gospel values as having an autonomous existence, as "subjects" which modify human existence, which appears as "object." Systems of production are relativized; what matters is that evangelical values be present. This has the effect of identifying Christianity with the dominant bourgeois ideology. A socialist rationality, by contrast, is one which interprets social reality in the measure in which it transforms it. Man finds his meaning in social praxis, not in an antecedent model of what "should be." It is not a question of evangelical values giving meaning, but rather that man in his social praxis finds meaning in evangelical values.

It is not the "gospel values" which upon incarnating themselves transform man and society, but it is rather man as historical subject who transforms social reality in the measure in which he struggles to overcome all alienation and oppression. Man is creative subject of his history and not the object of a world of values which "ought to be" incarnated. Only by taking off from praxis and not from the "gospel" will theology be able to overcome this inversion of subject-object, in which the ideological character of Christianity is rooted, and which deeply impedes Christians from taking up the social praxis of liberation.<sup>53</sup>

It has been suggested that liberation theology can be seen as an overcoming of the Marxist critique of religion by way of a new theological praxis.<sup>54</sup> Juan Luís Segundo indicates how Medellín has taken over elements of Marxist analysis which then "by their own right enter to form part of theology."<sup>55</sup> The theologians did not set out to become Marxists; for some it was mediated by contact with Paulo Freire and "conscientization," for others by reading of economists and sociologists or by contact with political activists. In any case, it is the reality itself which impels Christians to go back to Marx. Many Christians have found that Marxism is not only a system of thought but "a synthesis of reasons for living, a mobilizing doctrine." More significantly, Marxism today is not simply the position of the "other," heard out with sympathy, but is becoming the body of categories with which one lives his political commitment. Not so much an "external encounter," it is for many "a

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> James Conway, *The Marxist Critique of Religion: A New Look—Third World Theology in South America* (unpublished thesis, 1972).

<sup>55</sup> "Instrumentos de la teología latinoamericana," in *Liberación en América latina*, p. 38.

way of relating with oneself, a new way of thinking and living one's faith." <sup>56</sup>

Gustavo Gutierrez has traced the different ways in which Marxism and Christianity have been, and are, related.<sup>57</sup> Among the "uncommitted" he finds two types of relationship: "total rejection" and "humanist dialogue." The first considers these as two global ways of life which are incompatible, though this can be attenuated by the recognition that Marxism contains some elements of truth. The "humanist dialogue" relationship typical of Garaudy and the European Christian-Marxist encounter is inspired by the "young Marx" rather than by Marx the economist-political strategist. One can indeed trace theological motifs in the philosopher Marx back through Hegel, Luther, and the Bible. Unfortunately, one ends up with a situation of "tragic lovers," separated by the abyss between theistic and atheistic humanism. Furthermore, in Latin America the tendency is to accept the position of Althusser that Marxism is not a humanism but a science and that strictly speaking even the concept of "alienation" is pre-Marxist! In any case, Gutierrez suggests that something of this position should be retained.

Moving to the types of relationship among those "committed," he first distinguishes the "search for parallels," <sup>58</sup> e.g., between the classless society and "neither Jew nor Greek," between the "New Man" of St. Paul and of Che Guevara, between sin and alienation. The danger of this kind of relationship is that Christianity may be reduced to being a revolutionary doctrine and that Marxism will lose its scientific character to revert to utopian socialism. The most frequent type of relationship today is what Gutierrez calls "dualism": Marxism is science and Christianity is faith. Though this solves a number of problems and facilitates things for Christians, upon examination Marxism seems to be more than a science in view of its capacity to mobilize people.<sup>59</sup>

Gutierrez moves beyond these classifications with his distinction of two levels of political action. One level is that of science, including a science of history; the other is that of utopia, which is a work of the imagination. A merely "scientific" political action would lack mobilizing force. Ideology, by contrast, is the relation lived with the world. It is largely unconscious inasmuch as it is not at the rational and spiritual

<sup>56</sup> Giulio Girardi, "Christianity and Marxism" (mimeo.).

<sup>57</sup> "Cristianismo y marxismo" (Santiago, Chile) April 1971 (mimeo.).

<sup>58</sup> *Búsqueda de coincidencias* (orig.).

<sup>59</sup> Gutierrez observes that Althusser's structuralist version of Marxism is a kind of positivism; correspondingly, the Christian position here resembles fideism. Cf. Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York, 1970).

level.<sup>60</sup> Faith and science meet at the level of utopia; hence in the concrete man they are not simply juxtaposed dualistically. In this fashion Gutierrez believes he saves something of the value of the "humanist dialogue" and the "search for parallels" (both at the level of utopia) while maintaining the Althusserian position that Marxism is a science. Both Christianity and Marxism are still highly ideologized in the sense of being nonrational and not yet lucid, and both need to be less religious. In this sense Marxism is just beginning its secularization crisis.

We have mentioned how class struggle has become increasingly thematic in liberation theology. Ronaldo Muñoz finds that even the social doctrine of the Church is accepting Marxist categories. He makes some significant remarks on ethics:

I think that we Christians can accept in general the Marxist conception that what is ethically good is what is proven efficacious for the proletariat in revolutionary praxis . . . a cause which is definitely identified with the cause of man. Such a conception, it seems to me . . . is a good antidote against the degradation of Christian ethics to an individualistic morality of pure intentions.

Still, he proposes two correctives:

1) the primacy of the human person above any institution or program, religious or political, present or future; because the absolute of God's demand incarnates itself . . . in man, in each concrete human person, above every religious, social, or political barrier; 2) the unpostponable urgency of truth and justice above every convenience of class or opportunism of the moment; because these are characteristics which God's love has shown in historical action. . . .<sup>61</sup>

These warnings are not out of place in view of what has been done in the name of Marxism.

It should be clear that liberation theology does not see in the "social doctrine" of the hierarchy something which must be accepted as binding without question. It is put into historical context and its relationship with real options is revealed (e.g., papal attitude to revolution in Russia and Mexico, acceptance of fascist dictatorships, subsequent tendencies toward Christian democracy). It is further criticized as being a naive mixture of a particular kind of social analysis and a particular understanding of Christianity presented as a teaching of principles above specific political options.<sup>62</sup> Current Church documents (Medellín, Letter

<sup>60</sup> In this sense religion is at the level of ideology and is to be purified (brought to the rational and spiritual level) not only by faith but by science (Freud as well as Marx); see p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Ronaldo Muñoz, "Lucha de clases y evangelio" (Santiago, Chile; mimeo.) p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Joseph Comblin, *Théologie de la révolution* (Paris, 1970) pp. 69-74, 184-205, for criticism of magisterium. Also Arnaldo Centeno, "Liberación y magisterio," in *Liberación*

to Cardinal Roy, Synodal Document on Justice) certainly represent an advance, but even so they continue to manifest an attitude of observers rather than participants in the struggle and are still lacking an adequate analytical instrumentality.

A sign of the radicalization of the "liberation" movement is the meeting of "Christians for Socialism" in Santiago, Chile, in April 1972. Most of the principal thinkers here cited were present, along with 450 delegates from all of Latin America (though repressive conditions limited the delegations of some countries to exiles). There was a general rejection of "third ways" between capitalism and socialism, and an acceptance of Marxism as an analytical and revolutionary method. Particular stress was put on the task of unmasking ideological elements in present Christianity, e.g., the notion that class struggle is incompatible with Christian unity. It is affirmed that we are coming to "a new reading of the Bible and Christian tradition, which presents anew the basic concepts and symbols of Christianity in such a way that they will not hinder Christians in their commitment to the revolutionary process but, on the contrary, will help them to assume it creatively."<sup>63</sup>

#### LIBERATION ECCLESIOLOGY

As in other questions, Camilo Torres' intuition on the Church anticipated later positions:

When we succeed in changing the structure of political power and the Church is poor, that will help us change the structure of the Catholic Church.

In the present age it is necessary to demonstrate that the Church does not depend on the capitalist system and that Christianity has enough vigor to Christianize a socialist society.<sup>64</sup>

Initially Latin Americans simply received the conciliar ecclesiological themes, but there soon dawned the realization that in theology and pastoral reflection the countries of the "periphery" were importing from the (European) "center" just as in all other spheres of culture. Hence there appeared an anti-European reaction and a search for a more indigenous ecclesiology. One highly polemical example is the essay of a Uruguayan layman, Alberto Methol Ferre, "Church and Opulent Society: A Critique of Suenens from Latin America." He sees the effect of

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en América Latina, pp. 131-62. Combán, a Belgian, has worked in Chile and Brazil since the late 50's. His work has a European thoroughness but is rooted in the Latin American reality.

<sup>63</sup> "Cristianos por el socialismo," final document, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 391.

Suenens' modernizing recommendations as a strengthening of the North Atlantic rich churches at the expense of the poor churches of the periphery. He finds evidence of Suenens' neocapitalist mentality in his narrow intrachurch focus and his concern for birth control (just like McNamara!).<sup>65</sup>

Not all Latin American theologians would go along with the argument in detail, but most would subscribe to the central insight: the European progressive church acts as though it were the voice of the universal Church, and not rather the ecclesiastical expression of the dominant North Atlantic nations. Liberation theology is no longer content to repeat conciliar ecclesiology, which, if it has abandoned scholastic abstractions, tends to fall into salvation-history abstractions. We could say that Latin Americans are looking for a functional theology in the sense that, having abandoned an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe, they are examining their own ecclesial situation with a view to ascertaining its own possibilities and options.

Already the Medellín documents are an evidence of this orientation, inasmuch as they situate the Church and its mission in the context of "human promotion." Medellín also speaks of the Church as "happening" in the world, in the human task, in history.<sup>66</sup> Writes Gutierrez:

As sacramental community, the Church ought to signify in its own internal structure the salvation whose realization it announces. Its organization ought to be in function of its task. As sign of the liberation of man and history, it ought to be itself, in its own concrete existence, a place of liberation. A sign should be clear and comprehensible. To conceive of the Church as sacrament of the world's salvation makes more demanding its obligation to make transparent in its visible structures the message of which it is bearer. Since it is not an end in itself, what matters is its capacity to signify the reality in function of which it exists, without which it is nothing, which makes it live beneath the sign of the provisional, and towards whose fulfilment it is oriented: the kingdom of God which begins now in

<sup>65</sup> Alberto Methol Ferre, "Iglesia y sociedad opulenta: Una crítica a Suenens desde América latina," special supplement to *Vespera*, September 1969. The greater part of the article takes up Suenens' proposals relating to collegiality, episcopal conferences, nuncios, the Curia, the pope. Behind the idea of a weakening of Roman centralism and the development of particular churches Methol Ferre sees a "formal egalitarianism in the style of the proclamations of the bourgeoisie" which would conceal "the primacy of the rich, grand, powerful local churches," by analogy with the U.N. Further evidence is Suenens' idea of seeking the advice of "heads of large businesses, management, sociologists, specialists in communications, public relations, and prospective." Citing Küng's fear that "progressive" European bishops might be outweighed by the presidents of African and Asian conferences, he points out that theological progressives can be social reactionaries—meaning Küng himself. He sincerely believes that Rome protects the poor churches of the "periphery" against the rich powerful churches of the (North Atlantic) "center."

<sup>66</sup> Laity 12 (*acontecer*).

history. The breaking with an unjust social order and the search for new ecclesial structures in which the most dynamic sectors of the Christian community are engaged have their basis in this ecclesiological focus. We are moving toward forms of presence and Church structures whose radical newness it is scarcely possible to sketch out on the basis of present experience.<sup>67</sup>

In Latin American the world in which the Christian community must live and *celebrate its eschatological hope is that of the social revolution; it is here that its task will be defined. Its fidelity to the gospel leaves no other alternative: the Church ought to be the visible sign of the presence of the Lord in the aspiration for liberation and in the struggle for a society more human and more just. Only thus will the Church make credible and efficacious the message of love which it bears.*<sup>68</sup>

There is, then, a theological primacy of human liberation over intrachurch reform. This is one of the clearest examples of a break with the European matrix, inasmuch as European theology has maintained an ecclesiocentric focus (as exemplified in *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*). Of course, it is only a minority that has arrived at this position. In regard to the Latin American Church, Assmann states that the greatest discrepancy is not between preconiliar traditionalists and postconiliar reformists: "the really profound discrepancy, which threatens to become an abyss, is that which exists between intrachurch reformers, nourished on North Atlantic theological progressivisms, and Christians impelled by and committed to the fundamental challenges of the liberation process."<sup>69</sup>

Assmann takes liberation theology primarily as that of small groups of radicalized Christians who are actively participating in the struggle (he himself is exiled from Brazil and had to leave Bolivia when the Torres government was overthrown). He speaks of reflection on faith operating on a strategic-tactical level, and goes on to say:

Theologically, these Christians have effectively brought about a shifting of the primary referential axis of their faith, which is no longer a body of doctrine nor the axis of worship (both important but, we would almost say, complementary), but is clearly the pole represented by the historic process of liberation. This evidently involves a new vision of their ecclesiality and submits the most central categories of traditional theology to revision. What is most evident is that the prophetic element of Christianity—prophecy as denunciation and praxis—has acquired for them a prevalence over institutional elements.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 323.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>69</sup> Hugo Assmann, "El aporte cristiano al proceso de liberación de América latina," reprinted in *Contacto* (Mexico) 8, no. 2, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

The Christians to which Assmann refers are only a tiny minority of Latin American Catholics. Their experience is indeed the main reference point of liberation theology. But what of the masses—does this theology have anything to say to them? There is a line of thinking which seeks to relate to the pastoral practice of the Church. In the first place, it accepts the reality of Latin American Catholicism: over against a small minority of revolutionary Christians, and a somewhat larger number of bourgeois Catholics (corresponding to the urban middle classes and to the 5–10% of practicing Catholics with orientations running from Tridentine to postconciliar), the great majority are immersed in popular Catholicism. This traditional religiosity is part of the popular culture: it does not depend on the Church for its transmission and is virtually unaffected by the “changes” except such as touch them, e.g., the Vatican’s eliminating certain saints. These people are occasional clients of the Church but it cannot be said that there exists a dialogue.

The Christian revolutionaries are not in contact with the majorities of these people. And those who opt for a pastoral practice of small communities of faith will of necessity still not be in contact. Segundo Galilea has dedicated a great deal of reflection to reconciling pastoral and liberationist lines of thought. He summarized his viewpoint in an interview:

Evangelization has two great challenges at these moments in Latin America. The first challenge is the problem of the repatriation or reformulation of the faith in a society in rapid change which is taking on a revolutionary consciousness. Preaching, catechesis, and, in general, Christian formation have not been prepared for this. There now springs forth brutally this challenge . . . to succeed in reformulating the faith so that it survives in the atmosphere of social change, even in Marxist atmospheres; not only survive but actually be a valid dialogue partner who will have something of his own to contribute. . . .

The second challenge I see at the level of . . . popular Catholicism. The question is how to recuperate Christian values which are in the depths of popular Catholicism wrapped up in alienating attitudes, feelings, customs, and rites. How to purify what is Christian so that it may come to be a liberating force which will take its place with authenticity in the process of liberation. A grave challenge, because of the difficulty of the task and because of its utter importance for the Latin American Church, given the great proportion of Christians who are in this popular Catholicism.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Segundo Galilea, interview “Crisis y renovación de la fe,” *Misión abierta* (Madrid) no. 89 (Sept.–Oct. 1972) 486–87. In the same issue, “La fe como principio crítico de promoción de la religiosidad popular,” pp. 426–36. Galilea, a Chilean, has specialized in the pastoral side of these questions and has been director of CELAM’s pastoral institute in Quito, recently closed. He has published numerous articles and small collections of articles. This



In the same paragraph in which he called religion the "opium of the people," Marx described it as a "protest" against the conditions of oppression. The intuition of Latin American pastoralists is that this dimension of protest is recuperable.

We have presented these two strains of reflection, the revolutionary and the pastoral, as though they were quite separated. In practice there is often a convergence. Often a pastoral team working at evangelization with peasants or barrio dwellers is radicalized by events and reflection, so that what begins as biblical circles evolves toward some kind of confrontation with the power structure. Similarly, any kind of conscientization which touches major points of the culture must eventually get to a conscientization of religiosity. In a number of places there have been Holy Week dramas of the Passion with present-day references; there have been protest Masses; in Nicaragua, where the Somoza dictatorship runs the country like a family business, Christian student groups have occupied churches in protest, with the tacit approval of the hierarchy; in Panama people came in silent procession from different directions, ostensibly to observe the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, but really to celebrate a protest Mass over the government's silencing of the investigation of the disappearance of Fr. Hector Gallego. It must be mentioned that the liberation thrust of pastoral work is easily more verbal than real, and that in any case it has not moved the majority of clergy and hierarchy.<sup>72</sup>

The liberation context affects the ministerial question. To the progressive elements of the Latin American clergy the preoccupations of North Atlantic priests seem narcissistic. Priest groups have become protagonists in the struggle for liberation. It is sometimes charged that this is due to a crisis in the properly priestly dimension of their lives and that they fill up the vacuum with the revolution. They energetically reject this accusation, declaring rather that they are rediscovering their priesthood in new dimensions. In this sense the late Bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano observed:

I understood that the vocation to evangelize the poor contains in itself the duty to denounce the injustices, the hypocrisies, of those who load the rest with heavy

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issue of *Misión abierta* is a symposium on liberation theology and features articles by Gutierrez, Comblin, Dussel, Segundo, etc.

<sup>72</sup> For analysis of pastoral work, see Gutierrez, n. 43. Also, from a sociological point of view, a typology in Ivan Vallier, "Religious Elites: Differentiations and Developments in Roman Catholicism," in *Elites in Latin America*, eds. Lipset-Solari (New York, 1967), further developed in Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970).

burdens and themselves don't touch them with one finger. Thus I understand my priesthood. . . . I don't confuse priesthood and politics; but I know that at this moment which a Christian nation like Colombia is living the priest ought to be by vocation the leaven for the change that we hope for, and that his word and his action, courageously evangelical, have to be light for the marginal and a warning alarm for those in power.<sup>73</sup>

For some, the inclination is undoubtedly to see the Church in a small community of faith (of elite or of popular classes) and largely to prescind from the institutional Church. Still, sociological realism demands that one accept the real political weight of the Church and try to break its relationship with the system of domination. This does not mean that the whole Church will swing to the left; it means rather that there be signs, both symbolic and real, of breaking off from the power structure and that there be created a space for a liberating Christianity.<sup>74</sup> An important task is seen in the *desbloqueo ideológico*, a freeing of Christian symbols from their ideological use and making them available for the liberation struggle.<sup>75</sup>

The Protestant experience is quite different in that it represents a minority in the dominant Catholic culture and hence does not tend to feel the same responsibility toward the whole society. Radicalized Protestants share a common language and viewpoint with their Catholic counterparts, more than with fellow Protestants whether of the traditional churches or the sects. Indeed, Protestant theologians and intellectuals have contributed far out of proportion to their numbers, and ISAL<sup>76</sup> groups, for example, have been one of the major focal points of the Christian left.<sup>77</sup> They agree in general that the primary "ecumenical" task is not the reunion of churches but the liberation of man. The unity of the Church and of the churches is, in a certain sense, subordinate to the unity of mankind. Inasmuch as the class struggle is present in the churches, the true unity of the churches can come only by overcoming the oppression of classes (and indeed, nations).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> NA 3/5/69-S, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Assmann, *Desafío*, p. 134.

<sup>75</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note the very frequent use of Christian symbols in protest music; also "protest Masses."

<sup>76</sup> Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina. In many countries, especially toward the south, ISAL ecumenical reflection (-action) groups exist.

<sup>77</sup> We cite the review *Cristianismo y sociedad* (Montevideo) and at random some of the principal thinkers: Rubem Alves, José Miguez Bonino, Emilio Castro, Julio de Santa Ana, Richard Schaul, Sergio Arce, Christian Lalive, Leopoldo Nilus, Pierre Furter. A recent collection: *De la Iglesia y la sociedad* (Montevideo, 1971).

<sup>78</sup> Noel Olaya, *art. cit.*, p. 68.

## LIBERATION AND THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

In this essay we have dedicated much space to apparently nontheological matters. Our intention has been to situate liberation theology in its context, for its value comes not so much from new "discoveries" in doctrine or ethics as from a new relationship to the social context of oppression-liberation in Latin America. Indeed, it thus makes theological issues out of apparently "profane" realities. But this praxis leads to a kind of radical questioning of the very meaning of Christianity. In this connection Comblin has some incisive comments in an offensively simple article originally directed to a European public. He observes that the first thesis of liberation theology is that Christianity is charity—which means action. It is not what he says that saves a man but what he does. "Now one finds that European theology is interested in what is to be believed, even in what is to be said. Its object is the doctrine of Christ, and it seems to forget his action." <sup>79</sup> The true knowledge of God, however, is in action. But the Bible does not tell us what is to be the concrete content of love today. Biblical theology can establish what the NT documents meant to the communities that produced them; the study of tradition can show what has been the understanding of Christianity and the concrete forms of charity in different periods; but no biblical or historical science can show what they must mean now. This requires a reading of the "signs of the times" and needs the discernment of the Spirit. The intuition in Latin America is that today Christian love demands liberation. This is not to be taken as the total meaning of Christianity for all time. It is, however, the urgent task for our generation.

In our era it is essential to pass from a microcharity to a macrocharity. In the pretechnical era human activity was limited largely to personal relationships or to small groups. But in our technical society a great part of human activity is collective, and indeed, involuntary and unconscious. If charity is limited to the small group, it leaves out the greater part of human activity, especially collective violence and injustice: today you can kill at a distance. This transformation goes to the very essence of Christianity: if charity does not mean anything at these collective levels, Christianity has nothing to say to man today.<sup>80</sup>

In the conflictive Latin American situation, traditional Christian symbols are not neutral. They are part of the culture and folklore (e.g., popular songs make analogies of love with the *pasión* and *Calvario* of

<sup>79</sup> Comblin, "El tema de la liberación en el pensamiento cristiano latinoamericano" (Santiago, Chile; mimeo.) p. 3; originally appeared in special issue "Libération, nouveau nom du salut," *Revue nouvelle*, May-June 1972.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

Christ). Symbols being essentially plastic, they can be employed both in the service of the *status quo* and of liberation. The President of Colombia dedicates his country to the Sacred Heart in 1969 and provokes a protest from the Golconda priests over the "theological thesis of the president."<sup>81</sup> In Santa Cruz, Bolivia, an anticommunist crusade is preached with a procession of 40,000 people. Four days later a well-organized rightist coup originates in Santa Cruz.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, Bishop Enrique Argelelli praises a strike of state employees as a "salvific event," a proof of the gospel that the people has learned from its infancy.<sup>83</sup> Assmann dedicates a whole study to the use being made of religion in the schools; in effect, religion is used as legitimating the dictatorship and its program of dependent capitalist development.<sup>84</sup>

No generation of Christians after the first century can share the original horizon of understanding of the biblical symbols. Each must reinterpret them according to its own horizon of understanding—in our present case, the horizon of oppression-liberation. It is not the theologians, in the first place, who will discover this reinterpretation with their science, but rather Christians themselves, in particular those with greater depth. The original form of liberation theology is often a group reflection or meditation, a sermon, a mimeographed flyer.<sup>85</sup> This theology is not particularly original in terms of what it says about the biblical themes. In most cases it is dependent on European scholarship, at least reductively. Its originality comes from its way of relating these themes to practice—more accurately, its interpretation of praxis in terms of the biblical symbols.

Juan Luis Segundo observes that the Christian moved to political liberation finds himself with the same concepts of God, sin, sacraments, and belonging-to-the-Church which correspond to a theology of ultraterrestrial salvation. Theology is functioning as ideology (in the pejorative sense); he finds European theologians naive when they hold

<sup>81</sup> Words of President Pastrana: "In an era characterized by tremendous pressures and anxieties, men have always looked to God for support, because their faith in Him constitutes, especially for people in misery, their only hope and perhaps their only reason for existence" (NA 30/6/71, p. 11). A similar situation occurred in Argentina in 1969 when President Onganía dedicated Argentina to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (NA 17/12/69-M).

<sup>82</sup> NA 2/10/71-S, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> NA 9/1/71-S.

<sup>84</sup> Assmann, "La función legitimadora de la religión para la dictadura brasileira," *Desafío*, pp. 186-208; originally in *Perspectivas para el diálogo* (Montevideo) 5 (1970) 171-81.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. esp. Antonio Fragoso (Bishop of Crateus, Brazil), *Evangile et révolution sociale* (Paris, 1969), for some of the most outstanding examples of liberation theology *in actu*.

that theology can have no ideologizing function since it is concerned with revelation. He points out that ideology is largely unconscious (Althusser) and that theology has to work with the elements of a given culture.<sup>86</sup>

European theology tends simply to oppose faith and ideology. It will point to the "demonic" qualities of ideology. From its nonconflictive world vision it tends to see ideologies as a series of isms, a somewhat idealist perspective.<sup>87</sup> In Latin America "ideology" has the positive sense of an ideology of struggle in an ethicopolitical sense as well as the negative sense of a legitimation of an oppressive *status quo*. One of the tasks of liberation theology is seen as that of exposing the ideological use of Christian symbols to mask reality, e.g., invoking Christian unity against the reality of class struggle, identifying bourgeois values as Christian, defending "Western Christian civilization," etc. On the other hand, one can say that there is a search for a Christian ideology in the sense of a motivating force for social revolution.<sup>88</sup>

Following Mannheim's terminology, Rubem Alves asks about "The Ideological Function and the Utopian Possibilities of Latin American Protestantism."<sup>89</sup> Protestantism arose as a form of utopia breaking with the medieval world in the name of Christian freedom. Similarly it arrived in Latin America in a utopian form as bearer of the values of modernization: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Catholicism functioned ideologically legitimating and sacralizing domination. With its stress on discipline, Protestantism was a utopian force which affirmed the freedom of man to build his own world and dominate his time. Today this same individualism functions ideologically: the ethic of individual conversion and of self-discipline leaves the world as it is and is not an ethic of transformation of the world. Individualism is understood dualistically and not dialectically. There is, however, a new utopian thought as expressed in Medellín and with which some Protestants, similarly utopian, agree: "There is strong indication that the Latin American crisis is leading some to reinterpret the symbols of their faith but in the utopian or messianic-prophetic direction of the Old Testament."<sup>90</sup> Utopian and ideological interpretations divide Protestants as well as

<sup>86</sup> "Liberación, fe e ideología," *Mensaje*, no. 208, May 1972, p. 249. Also in *Misión abierta*, p. 443.

<sup>87</sup> For a good example, cf. "Die Kirche und die Herrschaft der Ideologien," *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, pp. 109-202.

<sup>88</sup> Comblin, *art. cit.*, p. 6. Assmann, *passim*, esp. very dense article "El cristianismo, su plusvalía ideológica y el costo social de la revolución socialista," *Cuadernos de la realidad nacional*, no. 12, April 1972, pp. 154-79.

<sup>89</sup> "Función ideológica y posibilidades utópicas del protestantismo latinoamericano," in *De la Iglesia y la sociedad*, pp. 1-21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Catholics internally, but by the same token they provide areas of ecumenical unity.

One of the most emphatic emphases of liberation theology is the unitary vision of creation and redemption, of salvation history and human history. Here one notes a reaction against a certain abstract *Heilsgeschichte* theology deriving from Cullmann and mediated to Latin America by Liegè and others. Hernandez asks "what it means that Jesus is Lord of history; it means that the goods of the earth, all the goods of the earth, are a bond of union among men and that these goods do not limit man to a brotherhood here and now but a brotherhood open to a future."<sup>91</sup> He draws the conclusion that the People of God which is to reveal this to the world, before pronouncing its word has to assume a liberating commitment in the world.

In Latin American countries a minority of 5-10% generally controls half the wealth, whereas the lower third of the population may receive only 5% of the wealth. Similarly the United States, with 6% of the world's population, uses 40% of its raw materials. Evidently, in the concrete the goods of the earth are not the bond of union among men. From the developmentalistic point of view the Lordship of Christ is manifest in the triumphs of technology. Liberation theology insists that this Lordship demands the socialization of the means of production in the service of all.

Gutierrez treats at some length the relationship between creation and salvation, noting the lack of a profound and lucid theology of salvation.<sup>92</sup> The Bible sees this relationship in the historical experience of the Exodus. This liberation is a political act and the beginning of the construction of a just and fraternal society. The work of Christ, a new creation, is situated in this line. Gutierrez then takes up the theme of the Promise and its "partial realizations" in history.

At this point he arrives at a problem which, while not peculiar to liberation theology, is of particular importance to it, the apparent "spiritualization" of the OT in the NT: the temporal redemption of Israel points to a spiritual redemption of all men. He quotes Grelot, who says that the object of the promises is the "permanent spiritual drama of mankind, which directly touches the mystery of sin, of suffering, and of salvation"; these texts have only "an accidental relationship with *political* history."<sup>93</sup> But, insists Gutierrez, the "hidden" sense is intrahistoric:

The grace-sin conflict, the coming of the kingdom, the awaiting of the Parousia are . . . necessarily and unavoidably historical, temporal, terrene, social, mate-

<sup>91</sup> Javier Alonso Hernandez, "Esbozo para una teología de la liberación," in *Aportes para la liberación* (Bogotá, 1970) p. 46.

<sup>92</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 183; also Segundo, *De la sociedad . . .*, pp. 77 ff.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

rial. . . Peace, justice, love, liberty are not intimistic realities, not just interior attitudes; they are social realities, bearing a historic liberation. A badly understood spiritualization has frequently made us forget the human moving force and the power to transform unjust social structures which run through the eschatological promises.<sup>94</sup>

Liberation theology emphasizes the collective nature of sin. Medellín speaks of a "situation of sin" and calls for a prophetic denunciation of the sin which makes people poor.<sup>95</sup> Gutierrez points out how this differentiates liberation theology from optimistic theologies of progress, which are somewhat embarrassed by sin. He quotes approvingly José-María González-Ruiz' term, the "hamartiosphere," and continues:

Sin takes place in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin emerges, then, as the fundamental alienation, as the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation—a fundamental alienation which . . . cannot be reached in itself but only takes place in concrete situations, in particular alienations.<sup>96</sup>

As a consequence, we must say that liberation from sin cannot be direct but must be mediated through political and historical liberation. Medellín states that Christ comes "to liberate all men from all the slaveries to which sin has them subject: ignorance, hunger, misery, and oppression—in one word, the injustice and hate which have their origin in human selfishness."<sup>97</sup> How relate these aspects? Is there not a danger of some kind of "concordism" between biblical and political languages? Gutierrez insists repeatedly that liberation is a single process which has different levels of meaning:

economic, social, and political liberation; liberation which leads to the creation of a new man in a solidary society; liberation from sin and entrance into communion with God and will all men.

The first corresponds to the level of scientific rationality, on which a real and effective transforming political action is based; the second is situated on the level of utopia, of the historic project . . . the third on the level of faith.<sup>98</sup>

The key to understanding the relationship between economic-political liberation and liberation from sin is the second level, utopia. A utopian project is to be realized in history. It corresponds to man's progressive taking of his destiny in his hands. More concretely: the revolutionary

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>95</sup> Peace 1; Poverty 1, 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 226. See also "Cristianismo y marxismo," *passim*.

<sup>97</sup> Justice 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 302.

conceives of a society where men can be more brotherly, and truly responsible authors of their own lives. This utopian project demands an economic and political liberation: the taking of power by the people and the socialization of the means of production, the abolition of class privileges, and an organization of the economy in function of the majorities. All this is essential but insufficient: these things alone could lead to other abuses. Needed is the creation of the New Man who lives for others (Che Guevara). This utopian liberation is the object of the cultural revolution. As sin is a historic reality, liberation from sin is mediated through historic utopias. The Christian believes in faith that neither sin nor liberation is merely intrahistoric and awaits the definitive liberation. He is aware that in its depths the kingdom is a gift (not added on after man's efforts but present gratuitously from the beginning). This seemingly speculative framework finds interesting confirmation in an essay of Sergio Arce, who reflects on the situation of the Christian revolutionary from the midst of the Cuban experience.<sup>99</sup>

Two focal points of liberation theology's reflection are the Exodus and Christ. In regard to the Exodus one sees it as a paradigm for the interpretation of the life of the People of God. "The Exodus gives the community the measure of the hopes it can have for the future," says Alves.<sup>100</sup> It is seen as political act, leaving the security of the "happy slave," the pedagogy of the desert, a permanent attitude of noninstallation. Alves sees the symbol "People of God" as giving a pattern of "social organization defined by hope in which life and freedom can be found together."<sup>101</sup> The majority of liberation theologians treat the Exodus at some length, some simply presenting the conclusions of biblical scholars, others making applications of considerable ingenuity. What the present writer finds disconcerting is the lack of a hermeneutical principle which would explain with clarity and vigor in precisely what way the original Exodus relates to the present liberation.

Assmann observes that there is lacking a Latin American Christology. One finds an all-purpose, suprasituational Christology and one that is ideologically functionalized. Vatican II's Christology is either "ecclesiastical" or a vague "Christ-acting-in-the-world" which can be ambiguous.<sup>102</sup> Presumably, he envisions a Christology which would seek to detect where and how Christ is present in the conflictive reality of the world. Comblin protests against the "iconization" of Jesus, that is, the

<sup>99</sup> Sergio Arce Martinez, "Es posible una teología de la revolución?" in *De la Iglesia y la sociedad*, pp. 227-53.

<sup>100</sup> Rubem A. Alves, "El pueblo de Dios y la búsqueda de un nuevo orden social," *Cristianismo y sociedad*, nos. 26-27 (1971) 22.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> *Desafío*, p. 139.



tendency to see in Jesus' life not so much a series of human actions as a series of illustrations of theological themes, and ultimately the tendency to replace the imitation of Christ by worship of Him. He calls for a deiconization and proceeds to some reflections on the actions of Jesus.<sup>103</sup> Certainly there is a strong movement to utilize the revolutionary elements in the life of Jesus, His conflicts with established authorities, His poverty, preaching of brotherhood, of conversion, His self-image as Isaian liberator (Lk 4).

Gutierrez, in his treatment of "Jesus and the political world," surveys recent publications, especially Cullmann. He questions the latter's contention that Jesus is not concerned about structural transformation but only about individual conversion in view of the coming kingdom. Instead of counterposing individual conversion to revolution, Jesus goes deeper and establishes a permanent principle of revolution. "Liberating us from sin, Jesus attacks the root itself of an unjust order. For Jesus, the liberation of the Jewish people was but an aspect of a universal and permanent revolution; far from being uninterested in this liberation, He situated it at a deeper level with more fruitful consequences."<sup>104</sup> Once again, the present writer basically sympathizes but would like to see a more explicit hermeneutics which would take up the differences in our horizon of understanding which permit, and even demand, a political reading of the gospel which in its original form did not treat of social structures.<sup>105</sup>

Participation in the struggle for liberation implies a rethinking of the meaning of Christian life. One example is conversion, which is taken not simply in an individual but in a social sense. Conversion means conversion to "the least of my brothers." Conversion as discovery of the other as person contains the dynamism of human development of persons and of peoples. "The community of the converted, a church, precisely as such, ought to commit itself to the needs of the people as nation,"<sup>106</sup> says Bishop Candido Padim of Brazil, who unites in a reflection on conversion the conversion of the Church and its participation in conscientization, and a criticism of the actual forms of "development" imposed on the peoples of the Third World.

Another theme being rediscovered is that of poverty. It is not simply material poverty, nor simply the poverty of the *anawim* or of spiritual childhood, but a poverty of protest and effective solidarity with the poor.

<sup>103</sup> Comblin, *Théologie de la révolution*, p. 236.

<sup>104</sup> *Teol. lib.*, p. 294.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. the widely-read essay "Pueblo oprimido: Señor de la historia," plus accompanying article "Puede el proletario hacer teología?" in Carlos Welsh, *Pastoral popular*, no. 126, pp. 32-48.

<sup>106</sup> Dom Candido Padim.

## THEOLOGY: IN WHAT SENSE?

Our purpose has been to mediate something of Latin American liberation theology to the North American theological community. Undoubtedly, in some ways it has seemed more journalism than theology, due to our conviction that this theology is best understood in context. We have been quoting and summarizing the thought of some of the principal theologians with little critical comment. In this final section we would like to situate it as theology.

Is this theology? The question may be legitimately asked. It is not a direct study of the Bible or of tradition; it claims no new discovery of what revelation communicated *in illo tempore*. There are many nontheological elements and it becomes impossible to find a dividing line. It is theology inasmuch as it seeks to give a theological reading of the signs of the times and to decipher the concrete content of God's will for us.

In literary form also it is not what we have come to expect from theologians. The most organic work is Gutierrez' *Teología de la liberación*. Alves' *Theology of Human Hope*, while ostensibly a Third World theology, really has twentieth-century Protestant theology as its interlocutor and was written as a thesis in a U.S. university. Assmann's book is a collection of aggressive essays that are rather pointers toward where a theology might be developed than theology proper. The greater part of the material is in the form of magazine articles, mimeographed notes, manifestos, or anthologies of such. There is no Latin American Moltmann. Nor would it make too much sense: Moltmann opens his *Theology of Hope* by situating it in the whole stream of theological debate in Germany; in Latin America there are few academic interlocutors. The properly theological elements here give the impression of a certain eclecticism, and one does not have the feeling that they revolve around a center, as for example in the theology which utilizes transcendental philosophy. Or to the extent that there is a center, it is the common experience of participation in the liberation struggle and a common interpretation from the social sciences. Some may feel that this is more a spirituality than a theology, but there have been periods when the two were inseparable.

The liberation theologians have themselves been trained in academic theology and have come to break with some of its conventions and viewpoints, somewhat violently, as the following paragraph from Assmann evidences:

A fundamental inclination to idealism in the form in which K. Marx criticized it and ultimately the consequent incapacity of a historic realism would be characteristic defects of the theology of the rich world. Its questions do not take

off from the real in its conflictive density; they idealize reality; certain theologies, as that of the "death of God," are an apolitical accommodation to the pragmatism of man in consumer societies; the theological theme of secularization in Europe and the USA is centered almost exclusively on the desacralization brought by the arrival of technique within the relationship man-nature and minimizes the primordial (political) aspect of the relation man-nature-man, man-domination mechanisms, "powers and dominations." To radicalize the political aspect of the theme of "secularization," illegitimizing the "order" and the subjugating powers of man, would be the situational contribution of a theology of liberation which takes off from the reality of the dominated peoples.<sup>107</sup>

Assmann finds the theologians of the rich world insensitive to oppression and hence reactionary. He asks whether an international meeting of theologians would be able to come to agreement on the ten most serious problems facing mankind—and doubts that they would. "The exegetic and theological progressivisms of the rich world, with few exceptions, revolve around points of no importance in the face of the world's most serious problems."<sup>108</sup>

To work on a theology of liberation, one must be a man of the Third World. Paulo Freire suggests that the Third World, as utopian and prophetic of the world that is emerging, can be an inspiration for theology. The metropolises of the world, whose future is to maintain their status of metropolis, are thereby impeded from being utopian. To be a Third World man is to renounce the power structures and establishments, and to be with the "condemned of the earth" with authentic love.<sup>109</sup> One can wonder whether all theologians should be Third World men.

These theologians would all be in agreement in applying Marx's last thesis on Feuerbach to theology: they want a theology not only to interpret the world but to change it. With his usual aggressivity Assmann says: "The road is cut off to any kind of reflection which represents taking refuge in a verbal world dressed up in ontological density, which reflects man's incapacity to deal with the true problems."<sup>110</sup> The notion of a realm of truth independent of verification in history is abandoned. Assmann speaks of "praxeology"; Alves defines truth as "the name given by a historic community to those historic acts which were, are, and will be efficacious for the liberation of man."<sup>111</sup> More sober and circumspect

<sup>107</sup> Assmann, *Desafío*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>108</sup> "Aporte cristiano . . .," *Contacto*, June 1971, p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Paulo Freire, "Carta a un joven teólogo" y "Tercer mundo y teología," *Perspectivas de diálogo* 5 (1970) 301-5.

<sup>110</sup> *Desafío*, p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Alves, "Apuntes para un programa de reconstrucción en la teología," *Cristianismo y*

is Gutierrez when he sees theology as critical reflection on praxis in society and in the Church, without ceasing to be "wisdom" and rational knowledge, its more classical forms.<sup>112</sup> It is our opinion that while the general intuition of truth-in-praxis is significant, the attempts of these theologians to express it fall easily into verbal overkill.

A praxis-oriented theology needs the analytical tools of the social sciences. Again, we have not come across any truly lucid explanation of the relationship between social sciences and theology.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps it could be along these lines: we are seeking the concrete content of charity for our situation. It is a distinguishing note of the technical age that our world is constituted by many relationships which are beyond immediate contact. The social sciences bring this world into some rational coherence. To begin to be conscious agents of our own destiny, we need the understanding brought by social science. The choice of an analytical instrumentality is already an option, since the social sciences are not neutral. Those forms of sociology which postulate the permanence of the *status quo* with only accidental modifications (cf. Parsons, *The Social System*) are obviously unsuited. We need an instrumentality which interprets oppression and is oriented toward liberation—fundamentally Marxism in some form. We find that Camilo Torres exemplifies much of this. In fact, he can be considered a kind of Teilhard for Latin America, his intuitions being political rather than cosmological.

One of the major responsibilities of Christians is to study more scientifically how (sociological) Christianity as superstructure functions ideologically in maintaining domination. At the same time, Christian symbols must be freed to serve in the liberation of man. This task is of prime importance for theologians.

There is a feeling that liberation theology is a "theology of the event." In this sense the analogy is with prophecy: as the prophets interpreted contemporary events in the light of the founding events of Israel, Exodus, and Covenant, so the theology of the event seeks to interpret present events in the light of Israel, Christ, and the Promises.<sup>114</sup> It is for this reason that many of the documents are occasional documents, reactions

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*sociedad*, p. 21. This essay is suggestive for the question of an epistemological breakaway which liberation theology involves, as evidenced by the crisis of traditional theological languages.

<sup>112</sup> *Teol. lib.*, pp. 12-34.

<sup>113</sup> One widely circulated essay: Pedro Negre, "La significación de los cambios metodológicos de las ciencias sociales para la interpretación teológica" (mimeo.).

<sup>114</sup> Rafael Avila, "Profecía, interpretación y reinterpretación," in *Liberación en América latina*, pp. 115-30. He raises a barrage of suggestive questions. Cf. also the contribution of Luis de Valle in the same collection.

to particular situations. Liberation theology does not seek to be another department of theology, nor to join the various theologies that appeared as regularly as spring fashions during the 60's. While it does have certain characteristic preoccupations, it is at the same time a reflection on the perennial Christian themes from within the experience of participation in liberation struggles.

Perhaps a word is in order to correct possible overly romantic images of theologian-revolutionaries. In the greater part of the continent the climate is not prerevolutionary. There is rather a combination of violent repression, adroit manipulation, absorption of protest, propaganda, and general domestication of mind and spirit. Certainly there are left groups, but in many cases their importance is more that of symbolic resistance. Christians may be sensitized by liberation theology, but in the lack of a revolutionary project it becomes theology more of exile than of exodus.

Although this theological intuition has some official status as a result of Medellín, there is no guarantee that it will not be "corrected." Recent events in CELAM and in the mood of the hierarchy give the impression that liberation theology may be margined out to the left by a more "centrist" type of thinking more in line with the inclinations of the bulk of the hierarchy.<sup>115</sup>

What does all this suggest to practicing theologians in the U.S.? Somewhat at random, we close with some questions and intuitions.

1) *Third World theology*. There would seem to be some affinity with Black theology. Chicano Christian groups are consciously looking into Latin American theology for insights. One can ask: Does not some kind of effective solidarity with the Third World offer a clue to the meaning of Christian poverty today?

2) *Ecclesiocentrism*. Liberation theology is convinced that Church renewal cannot be sought independently of the struggle for liberation.

<sup>115</sup> Two signs of this shift: (1) the appearance of a new review edited by Roger Vekemans, S.J., *Tierra nueva* (Bogotá). Vekemans was intimately associated with the whole Christian Democrat phase in Chile and felt obliged to leave when Allende triumphed. The first two numbers of the magazine (subtitled "Estudios socio-teológicos en América latina") contain articles surveying "liberation theology" and questioning its theses. Vekemans, moreover, wrote a notorious statement distorting liberation theology as a theology of violence and of disrespect for Church authority (December 1971). (2) In the CELAM elections of November 1972, Alfonso Lopez, Auxiliary Bishop of Bogotá and intimate collaborator of Vekemans, was elected secretary general. The foreseeable consequence: the establishment of an intellectually respectable "center" position (developmentalist) and a marginalizing of liberation theology toward a minority left. On the other hand, one can recognize that the prominence given liberation thought in official circles since 1968 does not correspond to the sociological reality of the Church. Liberation vocabulary will continue to be used but in a more abstract biblical-dictionary way.

Does not the charge of ecclesiocentrism ring true for much of postconciliar activity and theology?

3) *Critique of social reality*. Are not the theologians often fiddling while the world burns? What will Christ's judgment be on the theologians of our century? As an example, to what extent has Vietnam influenced the theological problematic (granting that many theologians, like their liberal colleagues, have done their part in marches, etc.)?

4) *Man as agent*. Liberation theology is not so much interested in the Promethean astronaut as in the majorities in the human family: To what extent can men become free agents taking responsible decisions in solidarity with others and "ruling the earth"? Does not this view from below offer some hints for a theological critique of society?

5) *Critique of capitalism*. In a poor world the U.S. is overdeveloped, consumes much more than its share of the world's resources, uses its military might to maintain its privileges, and still is acutely aware that it has not attained the "good life." Radical analysis reveals that these injustices are structural. Is there not room for a theological critique of capitalism? (If the idea puzzles, amuses, or shocks, might not this be an indication of an ideologically immersed consciousness?)

6) *Politicized theology*. Does not the apolitical stance of the Church mask a complicity with an oppressive world system? In what way does the theological profession serve the poor and oppressed, who are the majority of mankind?

7) *Methodology*. Does the common pattern of reflection in liberation theology suggest something: analysis of the reality, theological reflection, commitments? Implicitly the Marxist theory of infra- and superstructure is accepted inasmuch as the economic reality is seen as a kind of base which conditions superstructural elements, including religion and theology. Could a theological critique be made of the U.S. "historic project"—not simply President Nixon's successive "game plans" but including other elements? Could meetings of theological societies center on this type of analysis? It would be entering into the contingent, but so did He whose life theologians have spoken of as a "scandal of particularity."<sup>116</sup>

<sup>116</sup> This article was originally completed in December 1972. At present (May 1973) I note some political and ecclesiastical events which may condition future development of liberation theology. The *peronista* victory in Argentina promises a situation of popular mobilization and a more independent foreign policy. *Peronismo*, while not socialist, is seen as a vehicle of liberation. In general, Latin American governments are becoming more vocal in defending their rights to exploit their own natural resources. It is common to utilize the dependence theory when dealing with macroeconomics in international meetings (e.g., Security Council meeting in Panama in March 1973 and OAS meeting afterward). There is a growing sense of Latin American unity and a desire for normalization of relations with

Cuba. Such international stances, however, are often not accompanied by changing internal class structures.

Christians after their initial enthusiasm with nitty-gritty politics are more aware of its ambiguities. In conversation Assmann recently pointed out how Christians tend to have an "immolationist" attitude and choose the most extreme form of commitment. For example, in Chile only two priests are communist militants (the communists are the most conservative part of the left), whereas they prefer to go to the MIR, a clandestine radical movement.

There continue to appear signs of backlash in the institutional Church: the changing of department heads in CELAM departments, closing of CELAM institutes to open one central institute to be watched over; warnings against liberation theology, e.g., in an unsigned document sent from the Holy See to bishops and nuncios; the apostolic visitor sent to investigate Bishop Leonidas Proano, one of the most committed of bishops, particularly in terms of base work; various expulsions of priests and sisters in a liberation line; the reaction of the Chilean hierarchy to a proposed education reform of the Unidad Popular. Still there are occasional encouraging signs as well.

Latin American liberation theology can perhaps celebrate its fifth birthday in August—five years since Medellín. It is a good first approximation but there is much to be done. It should become more self-critical, critical of its foundations both in social science and in theology, should develop further many things which are at present simple intuition.