THEOLOGICAL METHOD: THE SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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In the last few years, considerable discussion has revived in theological circles on the fundamental problematic of method in theology. A very influential catalyst for the debate was provided by Bernard Lonergan's study on method, which had been eagerly awaited for a number of years.[1] More recently, a student of Lonergan's, David Tracy, published his own erudite and comprehensive analysis of the various tasks of theology.[2] And Gregory Baum's latest book had much to contribute concerning method, especially with regard to the relationship of theology and the social sciences.[3]

Within the ambit of the North Atlantic nations, areas of disagreement have emerged. A good example may be found in the reservations recently expressed by Avery Dulles with regard to Tracy's study.[4] It is my own conclusion, however, that even more profound divergences with respect to method are now beginning to surface on a north-south axis, that is, between the North Atlantic centers of theology and those in the Third World, with Latin America in the *avant-garde* position for the latter. In this article I shall review some of these divergences and comment on their implications for theological method in the future.

At the outset, it will be helpful to state frankly my own views concerning Latin American theology, which is now widely known as "liberation theology." I believe it represents the most significant theological development from a Roman Catholic perspective since the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). The rationale for this position will be developed in the course of this article.[5] For the present, it should be emphasized that the movement clearly affords an "antienvironment" for Western theology, that is, it makes possible an outside perspective for a fresh evaluation and critique of both the methods and content of the theology that has developed over centuries in Europe and North

[1] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[2] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

[3] Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist, 1975).

[4] Avery Dulles, "Method in Fundamental Theology: Reflections on David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order*," *TS* 37 (1976) 304–16.

[5] I have also developed this rationale from different perspectives in "The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo," *TS* 38 (1977) 125–35, and "Today's New Task: Geotheology," *America* 132 (1975) 27–29.

America. At the same time, the growing numerical importance of the Latin American Church itself within world Catholicism should be noted. We might well pay careful attention to the recent statement of the Brazilian Leonardo Boff that "the future of the Catholic Church, considering the population decline in Europe, is undeniably in Latin America."[6]

It must also be acknowledged that the Latin American approach has engendered sharp criticism and even outright rejection in Europe and North America. I doubt that liberation theologians will be deterred from their efforts by such opposition, although they have displayed a keen interest in the north-south dialogue. As the Argentine Methodist José Míguez Bonino has pointed out, he and his colleagues "will refuse to be subject to the academic theology of the West as a sort of *norma normans* to which all theology is accountable."[7] Such determination leads to the conclusion that, at the very least, this is a movement Western theologians cannot afford to ignore.

I

The divergences in method alluded to above may first be examined in two influential works in such specialized areas of theology as spirituality and Christology. The articulation of a spirituality that would be congruent with active social and political involvement has for some time been the special interest of the Chilean priest Segundo Galilea. The need for a synthesis in this area is expressed in a recent *Concilium* article, where he maintains that "the commitment to liberation in the Christian must be a place of encounter with God, and therefore a source of inspiration to his theological life and his contem-

[6] Leonardo Boff, *Jesucristo el liberado: Ensayo de cristología crítica para nuestro tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Latinoamérica Libros, 1975) 59. Note also the statements of Virgilio Elizondo that approximately 30% of all U.S. Catholics are Spanish-speaking and that the percentage is increasing rapidly: "A Challenge to Theology: The Situation of Hispanic Americans," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Convention* (New York: Manhattan College, 1975) 163–76. Enrique Dussell goes even further and states flatly that "by the year 2000, 50% of U.S. Catholics will be of Latin American origin": *History and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) 171.

[7] José Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 86. Míguez Bonino is also suspicious of co-optation and observes: "In the time that has elapsed between beginning to write this book and its publication, the theology of liberation tends to be a new 'consumer good' in the European-North American theological market. It is, therefore, with a certain reluctance and uneasiness that I add one more book to the thousands of pages of articles, books, and dissertations already published" (xix). Since then, he has added another book, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

plative life."[8] In another work he clearly delineates the dialectical process involved here, asserting that "in the future one will not be able to be a Christian without being a contemplative," while conversely "one cannot be a Christian without having an experience of Christ and of his reign in history."[9]

In his most extensive attempt to develop a "spirituality of liberation,"[10] Galilea does not use the term "method," but it is implicit in his stress on five "fundamental intuitions" which form the groundwork for such a spirituality and which he believes are applicable in any area of Latin America. He stresses, first, that conversion to God and commitment to Christ take place through conversion to the neighbor and through commitment to the service of those who suffer any form of oppression. A second intuition insists that there exists an intimate relationship between salvation history and the genuine liberation of the poor, so that "to commit oneself to the latter is to work together with Christ and the Redeemer and to enter into his saving work." Thirdly, he holds that liberating tasks must be viewed as an anticipation and advancement of the kingdom of God, a kingdom characterized by justice, equality, fraternity, and solidarity. The fourth basic intuition envisions liberating praxis, that is, the activity which transforms society on behalf of the oppressed, as one of the most important exercises of Christian charity, since Christian love has to be incarnated and made efficacious in history. Lastly, he emphasizes the value of voluntary poverty, which involves a sharing not only in the plight of the poor but also in their struggles for justice, and which implies the acceptance of persecution as a form of poverty and of true identification with Christ. Galilea then develops these central themes from various perspectives in the rest of the book. It appears to me that the common element in all five is that of liberating praxis on behalf of the oppressed, a theme that will be taken up again later.

Moving to the method of Christology, I want to consider the widely-

[8] Segundo Galilea, "Liberation as an Encounter with Politics and Contemplation," in *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith*, ed. Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez (*Concilium* 96; New York: Herder and Herder, 1974) 20.

[9] *Contemplación y apostolado* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1972) 12.

[10] *Espiritualidad de la liberación* (Santiago: Ediciones ISPAJ, 1973). The quotations in the text are found on pp. 7–10 of this work. A major effort of Galilea is to expand the historically conditioned understanding of contemplation: "La contemplación es tener una experiencia de Dios, real aunque oscura, en todas las dimensiones de la vida humana. . . . El primer encuentro es el de la persona misma de Jesús. . . . El segundo encuentro es inseparable y complementario al encuentro con la persona de Cristo. Es la experiencia, contemplativa también, de la presencia de Cristo en el hermano, sobre todo en el *hermano pequeño*" (ibid. 18–20).

known work of Leonardo Boff on Christ the liberator.[11] After surveying various contemporary Christological approaches (the historico-critical, existential, and salvific-historical models), Boff carefully delineates what he considers to be the characteristics of a distinctively Latin American approach to Christology. Like Galilea, he enumerates five.

First, he stresses the primacy of the *anthropological* element over the *ecclesiological;* in other words, the Latin Americans are interested "not so much in the Church as in the person whom the Church must aid, must create, and must humanize." The arrival of this "new man" was impeded in the past by models and structures imported from Europe, with little creativity or adaptation to the new continent, resulting in a certain skepticism regarding the Church.

Next, his approach assigns priority to *utopian* perspectives over *factual* ones; for the important element for Latin Americans is not the past (which was one of European colonization) but the future. With regard to the future, utopian thought does not propose an illusion or escape from reality; rather, basing itself on the "hope principle," it contributes to maintaining the social process in a permanent opening to continuing transformation and thus "constructs and slowly anticipates the definitive world that was promised and shown to be possible by Jesus Christ."

Boff's third characteristic entails an emphasis on the *critical* element over the *dogmatic*. A critical stance is seen as an absolute prerequisite for maintaining permanent openness to the future, since ecclesiastical traditions and institutions often become anachronistic, obsolete, and a center of conservatism. Thus they impede rather than further a fruitful dialogue between Church and society.

The primacy of the *social* over the *personal* is the fourth emphasis. A call to personal conversion does not suffice, since sinful social structures contribute to Latin America's most serious problem: the marginalization of immense masses of people throughout the continent. In such a context, Boff feels, the Church must take part critically in the struggle for liberation, with special concern for those without names and without voices, so that the coming kingdom will be "not for a few of the privileged, but for all."

The fifth characteristic is that of *orthopraxis* over *orthodoxy*. Boff criticizes classical Christology for oversystematization and losing sight of the fundamental theme of the Synoptic Gospels: the actual following of Christ. His approach intends to follow the practice of the early Church, where "the essential element was not to reduce the message of Christ to systematic categories, but to create new ways of living and

[11] See n. 6 above. All quotations from Boff are from pp. 59–61 of this work.

acting in the world." In the remaining chapters, Boff incorporates these five priorities with many nuances into the discussion of central Christological themes.[12]

It is clear from the above that Boff, in the same manner as Galilea, includes liberating praxis on behalf of the oppressed as a crucial component of his methodology. This can be seen most clearly in his fourth priority, that of the social over the personal. Moreover, his first three principles, the anthropological, utopian, and critical emphases, all appear to be concerned with furthering the development of the future kingdom. At the same time, these three priorities in his method attempt to overcome an ecclesiocentric and conservative understanding of the Church's role in history, which may impede rather than advance the coming kingdom. This concentration on the Church did not preoccupy Galilea, who appears to have taken it for granted.

From both a methodological and Christological viewpoint, however, Boff's fifth emphasis on orthopraxis over orthodoxy appears to me to be his most important contribution; for here he points out that both methodology and Christology must manifest the same central core and focus: the actual following of Christ. Again, the elaboration of this crucial concept will have to be postponed until later.

II

At this point I shall move beyond the methodologies of specific areas of theology and consider some analyses of method which are related to the whole of theology. Because of their influence and also their explicit articulations, the three authors selected for discussion are Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Jon Sobrino. In my judgment, Sobrino's analysis is the most profound, and so it will be discussed in greater detail than the others.

Gutiérrez' *A Theology of Liberation*[13] was the first encounter with this new movement for many in the English-speaking world. Its first part is devoted to the clarification of his methodology, which he believes is both traditional and new. An important point Gutiérrez makes at the beginning of this attempt is that theology is an activity common to all believers, even though it may consist in "a rough outline of a theology" or a "pre-understanding of that faith which is manifested in

[12] For a further elaboration of Boff's views on method, see "Salvation in Jesus Christ and the Process of Liberation," *Concilium* 96, pp. 78–91, and "¿Qué es hacer teología desde América Latina?" in *Liberación y cautiverio: Debates en torno al método de la teología en América Latina* (Mexico City: Comité Organizador, 1975) 129–54.

[13] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973).

life, action, and concrete attitude."[14] Clearly, then, his method is not intended merely for academics or professional theologians, but also for all who try to lead a Christian life.

In clarifying his approach, Gutiérrez first considers two classical expressions of theological method: theology as wisdom and theology as rational knowledge. The former was intended to serve for growth in the spiritual life and was basically a reflection on Scripture. Because of monastic and Greek philosophical influences, however, it tended to be removed from any worldly concerns. Gutiérrez perceives a dichotomy opening up between this approach and that of a more rationalistic theology around the fourteenth century, with *The Imitation of Christ* serving as a paradigm of the split.

Theology as rational knowledge, he continues, began in the twelfth century and reached its zenith in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. In this transition, theology became "an intellectual discipline, born of the meeting of faith and reason."[15] It should be strongly stressed that Gutiérrez regards both of these classicial expressions as valid and as permanent tasks for theology. At the same time, he asserts emphatically that "both functions must be salvaged, at least partially, from the division and deformations they have suffered throughout history."[16]

Gutiérrez next defines his own method as "critical reflection on praxis," and stresses that this does not involve a new content but a *new way* of doing theology.[17] The following points appear to me to be central to his approach. First, he begins with the fact that the Christian and the Christian community are called to a definite praxis, that is, to "real charity, action, and commitment to the service of men."[18] In the

[14] Ibid. 3. In this respect, Peter Hebblethwaite presents the view of Pierre Jossua, a professor at Le Saulchoir, who held that theology was not a specialized activity confined to those who possess scientific competence, "but simply the activity of any true Christian who reflects on his faith and is qualified by the fact that he belongs to the People of God through baptism." Jossua is reported to have gone so far as to say that the idea of a professional theologian, a specialist in God, is blasphemous. The citation is from *The Runaway Church: Post-Conciliar Growth or Decline* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 110.

[15] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 5.

[16] Ibid. 6.

[17] Ibid. It is important to note that while he calls his method "new," Gutiérrez insists that it "has its roots in the first centuries of the Church's life," a clear example being Augustine's *City of God*.

[18] Ibid. 11. On the previous page Gutiérrez has an interesting supporting quotation from the distinguished Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx: "And this, it seems to me, has been the greatest transformation which has taken place in the Christian conception of existence. It is evident that thought is also necessary for action. But the Church has for centuries devoted her attention to formulating truths and meanwhile

Latin American context, the most striking sign of the times is clearly that of massive human suffering, and so the praxis is further qualified as the attempt to eliminate such suffering. For Gutiérrez, theology is a reflection on this definite praxis. It is a second step or—in the off-quoted phrase of Hegel—"it rises only at sundown."

Moreover, theology must be critical, both of society and of the Church in the light of the Bible. Thus it serves the purpose of freeing both these institutions from various forms of ideology, idolatry, and alienation, while at the same time preventing pastoral practice from degenerating into mindless activism. Clearly, such an approach qualifies as prophetic, since it seeks to discover the profound meaning of historical events "with the purpose of making the Christians' commitment within them more radical and clear."[19] Consequently, critical theology is open to the world and to all of human history, with the result that it will always be changing and constantly be in a process of renewal.

Lastly, Gutiérrez places great stress on the element of hope in his method. Instead of being "the caboose of the present," theology will continue to be reflection "in the light of the future which is believed in and hoped for" and thus "part of the process by which the world is transformed."[20]

Gutiérrez devotes his second chapter to a detailed analysis of the term "liberation" in his theology, but this lies beyond my purview here. If a brief comparison may be made at this point with the analyses of Galilea and Boff, the similarities are striking. All three manifest the same emphasis on the importance of liberating praxis on behalf of the oppressed, although Boff and Gutiérrez place more explicit emphasis on the critical reflection that must accompany such praxis in a dialectical process. All three are determinedly future-oriented, although they utilize different symbols, such as "anticipated kingdom," "utopia," and "hope" to designate this necessary orientation. Although Gutiérrez does not emphasize poverty in his formal exposition of his method (as Galilea did), it is clearly a central concern: a discussion of poverty

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did almost nothing to better the world. In other words, the Church focused on orthodoxy and left orthopraxis in the hands of nonmembers and nonbelievers." The only reference given for this text is Schillebeeckx' article "La teología" in *Los católicos holandeses* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970).

[19] Gutiérrrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 13.

[20] Ibid. 15. For further exemplifications of Gutiérrez' method, see his more recent books, *Cristianismo y tercer mundo* (Madrid: ZYX, 1973) and *Praxis de liberación y fe cristiana* (Madrid: ZYX, 1974), and the article "Evangelio y praxis de liberación," in *Fe cristiana y cambio social en América Latina: Encuentro de El Escorial, 1972* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1973) 231–45.

forms the concluding chapter of his book, where he affirms that only through voluntary poverty "will the Church be able to fulfill authentically—and with any possibility of being listened to—its prophetic function of denouncing every injustice to man."[21]

Juan Luis Segundo's views on method are expressed with greatest clarity in his most recent work, *The Liberation of Theology*, although it appears to me that he has been utilizing the method ever since his first published theological works.[22] In the book Segundo is forthright in adopting a conflictive stance and stating the differences which characterize a "liberating" theology as opposed to what he calls "academic" or "classical" theology, that is, theology as he sees it practiced in the centers of learning of the West.

To express his liberating methodology, Segundo utilizes the concept of the "hermeneutic circle." The same term was previously applied to the exegetical approach of Rudolf Bultmann, but Segundo believes that his method corresponds better to the strict sense of the circle. On its most fundamental level, the method involves "the continuous change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal."[23] If present reality is to change, one must be to some extent dissatisfied with it and thus raise questions concerning it that are "rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary perceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general."[24] Once these new and more profound questions are posed to the scriptural texts, it is essential that our interpretation of the texts change also; otherwise the new questions would either receive no answer or else answers that are conservative and useless.

This preliminary description of the method is further clarified by the delineation of four steps that are essential to its proper exercise:

Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. *Secondly* there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. *Thirdly* there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads

[21] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 302. The chapter "Poverty: Solidarity and Protest" includes pp. 287–306. Gutiérrez' emphasis on praxis is evident in his statement that "the absence of a sufficient commitment to the poor, the marginated, and the exploited is perhaps the fundamental reason why we have no solid contemporary reflection on the witness of poverty" (ibid.).

[22] Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976). Perhaps the best early example of the method may be found in *Concepción cristiana del hombre* (Montevideo: Mimeográfica "Luz," 1964), where he utilizes existentialist and Marxist insights for a reinterpretation of Christian anthropology.

[23] *The Liberation of Theology* 8.

[24] Ibid.

us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. *Fourthly* we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal.[25]

The concept of "suspicion" here is derived from Paul Ricoeur and is based on Segundo's hypothesis that ideologies connected with current social conditions and vested interests may be unconsciously ruling our present theological ideas and pastoral practice.

It is important to note that the first stage of the circle always involves the experience of a definite problem, and an act of will or commitment on the part of the subject to find a solution to the problem. Segundo concludes from this that "a hermeneutic circle in theology always presupposes a profound human commitment, a *partiality* that is consciously accepted—not on the basis of theological criteria of course, but on the basis of human criteria."[26]

At this point it is obvious that the hermeneutical circle is in need of considerable clarification, so that its procedures may be understood more precisely. To accomplish this, Segundo considers in some detail the works of four writers: Harvey Cox, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and James Cone. His objective is to determine whether they have succeeded in completing the four steps in the circle and, if not, to point out precisely at what point they have failed.

The true meaning of the circle can perhaps be best illustrated by considering the treatment of Cone, since he is adjudged to be the only writer who has completed all four stages. As regards the first stage, there can be no doubt that Cone is partial, that is, totally committed to the black community and its struggle for freedom. Clearly, Cone has experienced the problem of racism and is determined to find a solution and to attempt to change the reality of racism.

When he reaches the second point of the circle, Cone manages to achieve a high level of suspicion with regard to the whole American superstructure, including the dominant theology. This appears clearly in his charge that American white theology "has been basically a theology of the white oppressor, *giving religious sanction* to the genocide of Indians and the enslavement of black people."[27] The central ideological weapon that Cone uncovers is white theology's pretense of

[25] Ibid. 9.

[26] Ibid. 13. A key element in Segundo's quarrel with academic theology is that it "may well be unaware of its unconscious partiality, but the very fact that it poses as something impartial is a sign of its conservative partiality from the very start" (ibid.).

[27] Ibid. 28. The reference given is to Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) 22.

"color blindness,"[28] an approach which effectively disguises the racial roots of oppression.

Cone then moves to the third point in the circle, by committing himself to uprooting the mechanisms of ideology in white theology and thus to fashioning a theology that corresponds to the perspective and aspirations of the black community. This leads directly into the fourth point, as he presents a new interpretation of Scripture based on the richer and more profound questions that have been raised.

Segundo's entire book is actually a nuanced attempt to perform the same task as Cone. Instead of Cone's "white theology," he deideologizes the "classical" or "academic" theology of the West; and instead of speaking for the black community, he speaks for the suffering masses of the Third World in Latin America. In my view, the key to his method is what may be called an ideological dialectic, that is, an exposure of unconscious or conscious ideologies that sacralize the *status quo,* while at the same time clearing the ground for the creation of new and more efficacious ideologies that will be open to change. A great deal of attention has been given in Segundo's published work to the implications of these principles for ecclesiology, but that is beyond the scope of this survey.[29]

III

As I see it, the most detailed and profound elaboration of a theological method from the perspective of Latin America has been advanced by Jon Sobrino, a Spanish Jesuit who has worked for many years in Central America. This background appears to have provided him with a perspective that allows a penetrating analysis of both European and Latin theology, and his primary effort is to contrast the two approaches as clearly as possible.

The basic principles of Sobrino's approach are to be found in his recent presentation at a meeting in Mexico City,[30] while their actual

[28] Ibid. Segundo describes this technique more in detail, "In other words, the oppressor constructs an ideological edifice in which the *cause* of the oppressed people's suffering is not even mentioned, much less studied. In this way law, philosophy, and religion join with the mechanism of oppression and become its witting or unwitting accomplices."

[29] For a good recent survey, see T. Howland Sanks and Brian H. Smith, "Liberation Ecclesiology: Praxis, Theory, Praxis," *TS* 38 (1977) 3-38.

[30] Jon Sobrino, "El conocimiento teológico en la teología europea y latinoamericana," *Liberación y cautiverio* (n. 12 above) 177-207. The author's caution on this division should be kept in mind throughout, namely, "al hablar de teología 'europea' y 'latinoamericana' estamos dando una definición nominal de dos diversos modos de concebir el quehacer teológico. Evidentemente no se puede encasillar todo lo que se hace en Europa y en América Latina en esa división" (205). Sobrino is comparing basic tendencies or directions in "progressive" European theology with those of the Latin American "theology of liberation."

utilization in theologizing is evident throughout his recent book on Christology.[31] Two questions are considered of crucial importance by Sobrino in the Mexico City address. First, what is the interest of the theologian? Why does one do theology in the first place? Also, for whom is one theologizing and from whose perspective? Obviously, this presupposes that theological activity is never neutral; it always has a practical and ethical dimension, whether this is explicit or implicit. Sobrino concludes that in Europe the predominant interest has been to recover the meaning of a faith that was threatened, and that this was liberating for certain intellectual elites. In Latin America the basic problem was to recover the meaning of a real situation that was not only threatened but in actual misery. The interest, therefore, was to "aid in transforming the reality of sin. The adversary in theology has been not so much the 'atheist' as the 'non-person.' "[32]

A second basic question concerns the influence of the Christian reality on theological understanding. This presupposes that the Christian reality is always in the process of realizing itself in history. The question then becomes: What different effects does this Christian reality have on the actual concrete functioning of theological understanding in Latin America and Europe?

In responding to both questions, Sobrino utilizes a tripartite framework, which is based on the actual history of Jesus. I note in passing that the actual "following of the historical Jesus" (i.e., Christian praxis) is the crucial *locus theologicus* throughout his book on Christology. Each of the three aspects of the history of Jesus is also related to the method of theological understanding.

The first area of discussion concerns the liberating character of the history of Jesus, which leads to the question of the *liberating character* of theological understanding (as opposed to a possible *alienating* character). The next element concentrates on the dialectic between the present and the future of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, which brings us to the problem of the relation between *theory and praxis*. The third element concerns the dialectic of cross and resurrec-

[31] *Cristología desde America Latina: Esbozo a partir del seguimiento del Jesús histórico* (Mexico City: Ediciones CRT, 1976). A further clarification of method with specific regard to Christology may be found in pp. 38–43 of this work, "Sobre una cristología latinoamericana." In my opinion, this radical and very original book has not received the attention of specialists in Christology that it deserves. And those interested in spirituality cannot afford to overlook his analysis of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola in a final chapter, "El Cristo de los ejercicios espirituales de san Ignacio" (321–46). It may be noted that Sobrino has already complied with the important observation made by David Tracy: "*The* problem of the contemporary systematic theologian . . . is actually *to do* systematic theology" (*Blessed Rage* 238).

[32] Sobrino, "El conocimiento teológico" 206.

tion in the life of Jesus, which leads to the problem of the *epistemological break* within theological understanding.

With regard to the liberating character of theology, Sobrino utilizes for his comparison the two "moments" of the Enlightenment. He believes that the major emphasis in European theology has been a response to the challenge of the first moment, symbolized by Kant, where liberation is seen as the freeing of reason from all authoritarianism and where its basic interest is *rationality*. The Latin Americans, by contrast, orient themselves to the second moment of the Enlightenment, symbolized by Marx, where liberation is seen as the freeing of reality from suffering and where the basic interest is not rationality but *transformation*. Clearly, the latter involves not only a new way of thinking but also a new way of acting.

Such a bifurcation of interests, Sobrino continues, has important repercussions; for European theology tends to harmonize the reality of massive suffering, for example, with the demands of reason, in order to demonstrate that it is meaningful to believe in God in a world of suffering. But such an approach can, in fact, have an alienating rather than liberating function; for often it leaves the reality untouched and in that sense justified or justifiable. On the other hand, the Latin Americans focus rather on the need to transform the sinful situation and thus to confront it in a manner that is as real and free of ideology as possible. In summary form, "the first viewpoint can lead to seeking the reconciliation of meaninglessness only within the subject himself or herself; the second viewpoint sees reconciliation as possible only in the solution of the crisis of reality itself, or at least in the attempt at a solution."[33] This diversity of perspectives explains also why the Latin Americans seek aid in finding solutions not primarily from philosophy but from the social sciences, since these analyze the reality and mechanisms of human suffering and provide possible concrete models of liberation from that suffering. It also explains their greater awareness of the status of theology precisely as knowledge. Because of possible ideologization, they stress the real effects that a certain kind of theology has on society, and not merely the intention that the theologian has in doing theology.

Sobrino devotes the second major part of his essay to a problematic mentioned above, the relationship between theory and praxis in the advancement of the kingdom. European theology is seen as primarily interested in transmitting a body of truths or meanings, that is, it is fundamentally theory or a history of theory, even when it is reflecting on theory and praxis. The Latins, however, stress the need first for a

[33] Ibid. 187.

contact with reality before reflecting on the theology implied in that contact. Furthermore, for them "it is not only a question of thinking beginning with experience, but of thinking beginning with a definite experience, beginning with a praxis that not only is influenced by the suffering in the world . . . but which starts with the transformation of that suffering."[34]

Sobrino admits that European theology has also stressed the need of orthopraxis flowing from orthodoxy, but believes that it still concentrates on thinking rather than action and that it has replaced an orthodoxy of affirmations by an orthodoxy of method. Also, in Europe the "following of Jesus" is usually relegated to spiritual theology; its role as a means of "knowing" Jesus has been largely ignored in contemporary systematic Christologies. For Latin Americans, however, it is the real following of Jesus (i.e., praxis) which permits knowledge of the reality of Jesus: "method in its most profound sense is understood as the unity of knowledge as activity and knowledge as content."[35] In summary, the method is not to think about but actually to follow the way of Jesus, that is, Christ is "truth" insofar as he is "way."

At this point the question arises: What "way" is to be followed that permits an understanding that is distinctively Christian? In other words, what "way" moves from the present to the future of the kingdom of God? This introduces the third major division of Sobrino's exposition, the integration of the "epistemological break" into theological understanding; for the way from the present world to the kingdom of God can be understood either as a progressive development of the present order or as a contradiction and transformation of the present. For Sobrino, it is clear that theological understanding has to be contrary to natural understanding. This epistemological break is found in Scripture in its affirmation of the transcendence of a crucified God.[36] Another

[34] Ibid. 192. Charles Davis underlines the same important point in discussing Marx's understanding of praxis: "The common characteristic constituting human activities as *praxis* is their power to transform reality and society and make them more human. Only those activities contributing to the humanization of man are *praxis* in the strict sense" ("Theology and Praxis," *Cross Currents* 23 [1973] 158).

[35] "El conocimiento teológico" 193. Again, a full development and analysis of this idea may be found in Sobrino's Christology, e.g., in "El Jesús histórico como punto de partida de la cristología" (9–22). Note that several Western theologians have objected to the term "orthopraxis" and have suggested instead "Christopraxis" or "Christopraxy." See Frederick Herzog in his introduction to Hugo Assmann's *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) 18, and Gerald O'Collins, *The Case against Dogma* (New York: Paulist, 1975) 99.

[36] Sobrino refers approvingly to Jürgen Moltmann's influential book *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), noting that the book "marca el momento más importante de la incorporación de la ruptura epistemológica en el conocimiento teológico europeo"

way of stating this fact is that theological understanding must undergo "conversion" in its own functioning. Without this, it will seek to develop universal standards of interpretation within which it tries to verify the truth of faith, "but it does not suspect that the first thing faith does is put these universal standards in question."[37]

Sobrino then delineates a number of consequences of the epistemological break which have influenced Latin American theology. In a continent where love, reconciliation, and justice are not apparent, but where the situation of vast masses of people is catastrophic, theology is much more dialectical than analogical: like is not known by like, but by the dissimilar. "Liberation" can only be understood dialectically, in opposition to lived oppression, and it is in the situation of sin and oppression that one seeks to find God.

Furthermore, Greek thought had assumed that wonder and the positive structure of reality were what moved man to know. For Latin Americans, the primary motivation is rather that of sorrow, since present history is understood as the continued history of the passion of God; thus the groans of the oppressed occupy a privileged position as the motive for theological thinking. And instead of a system which coherently integrates the data of revelation and the data of history, this theology seeks to respond to a situation of widespread sorrow by striving to eliminate the causes of sorrow.

Another consequence has to do with the question of theodicy, or the reconciliation of God and human suffering. The Latins have historicized and politicized the question, so that it is not merely concerned with natural catastrophes but with human decisions and systems of oppression. Moreover, they view the problem not as a justification of God but as the justification of man in a world of injustice. Consequently, the solution is not to be found in "thinking" about God in a way which reconciles God and suffering, but rather in the task of constructing a world according to God's will and experiencing the reality of God in this attempt. And the question of theodicy is viewed as essentially practical: to the extent that faith in the God of Jesus leads to the real overcoming of suffering, to that extent is God justified, even when there is no theoretical reconciliation of God and suffering. From this perspective the knowledge of God is connatural: whoever tries seriously

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("El conocimiento teológico" 201). Elsewhere, however, he expresses his basic disagreement with Moltmann, as well as with other progressive Europeans such as Metz and Schillebeeckx: "La crítica fundamental desde la teología de la liberación ha sido que esa teología de la praxis sigue siendo abstracta, es decir, pensada más que 'hecha'" (ibid. 194 n. 23). For a sharp rejoinder of Moltmann to his Latin American critics, see his "An Open Letter to José Míguez Bonino," *Christianity and Crisis* 36 (1976) 57–63.

[37] Sobrino, "El conocimiento teológico" 196.

to do justice to men is on the way to God.

The phenomenon of the "death of God" leads to a fourth consequence. In Europe this phenomenon functions as the most radical expression of the crisis of meaning within a theistic culture. It also serves to highlight what is most distinctive in Christian thought; for "the crucified God marks the dividing line between an authentically Christian theology and any religion, philosophy, or ideology whatever, since it is the most radical expression of God's assumption of history, not in the ideal but in the real order."[38]

However, the "death of God" is seen in Latin America in a different concrete mediation than that of Europe, namely, in the "death of man." If the death of God is the expression of a crisis of meaning, then the death of man is the expression of a crisis in reality itself, so that the epistemological break is not so much in the death of God as in the death of the oppressed. Thus the mediation of the absolutely Other is that which functions as really other: the oppressed. Through the latter is discovered what is typical of the God of Jesus: "his availability to become other, to submerge himself in history and thus to make real and credible his last word to mankind, his word of love."[39]

A last consequence concerns the basic aporia or paradox of all serious understanding, such as, in Christian history, the paradox or aporia of creator and creature, liberty and grace, faith and works. In Latin America the basic aporia is between the gratuity of the kingdom of God and its human realization (a modern equivalent of the problem of grace and liberty). Since the realization takes place in a world of suffering, the task is necessarily conflictive, and the most positive element in reality—love which searches efficaciously for justice—appears impotent before the most negative factor—sin and injustice.

Aporia means literally "without a way"; from this perspective there appears to be no way for love to triumph over injustice. The problem is not resolved by thinking but once again by praxis: to know theologically in the presence of an aporia is to open a way. Thus Latin American theology tends to opt for concrete social and political solutions (e.g., socialism). This differs from the European emphasis on "eschatological reserve," which tends to relativize all concrete programs, since they do not constitute the definitive kingdom of God. Latin theology admits this but insists that partial and functional solutions are essential in order to solve the aporia. Christian faith, in this view, is not an ideology, but it provides the *source* of partial and functional ideologies.[40]

[38] Ibid. 201.

[39] Ibid. 202.

[40] In the *Concilium* 96 volume, Leonardo Boff stresses this same important point (90–91). Boff also adopts a dialectical position with regard to various models of

In conclusion, while admitting the positive achievements of European theology (e.g., those which led to Vatican II), Sobrino faults it for its lack of self-criticism. This appears in its historical anachronism, namely, in its assumption that a theological understanding that was liberating in certain historical situations must continue to be such in different historical situations. It is also seen to be guilty of geographical anachronism, that is, it was not aware that it was theologizing from the geopolitical center of the world, ignoring the fact that the world is a totality in tension between center and periphery and that, from a Christian perspective, it is the periphery (the poor) or the repercussions on the periphery that is the privileged place for theological understanding.

Sobrino also alludes to a difference between the two theologies with regard to their relation to the sources of faith. Obviously, for both there is a first moment of acceptance of the Christian faith. But the Europeans tend to clarify reality from the sources; for the Latins, the sources are not seen as sources previous to the analysis of reality and liberating praxis, but rather as sources which illumine reality insofar as they themselves are illuminated by it. In brief, there is a constant dialectical interplay between the sources of revelation and real Christian existence.

Lastly, from Sobrino's perspective, the most fundamental divergence between the different theologies lies in the overcoming of dualisms. In Europe this has often occurred on the level of thinking (e.g., spirit-body, person-society, transcendence-history). But what Latin American theology has attempted is the overcoming of the most radical dualism of all: that between the believing subject and history, between theory and praxis, not on the level of mere thinking, but on the level of real existence. A final sentence sums up the entire article:

> Fundamentally, Latin American theology has tried to recover the meaning of the profound biblical experiences concerning what it means to know theologically: to know the truth is to do the truth, to know Jesus is to follow Jesus, to know sin is to take away sin, to know suffering is to free the world from suffering, to know God is to go to God in justice.[41]

Sobrino's analysis is considerably more nuanced than the above outline indicates. For present purposes, however, it can be seen to pull together into a synthesis the elements of method presented by the

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liberation; for he asserts that the Christian "must embrace them with great zeal, because they constitute the Kingdom which is present in the ambiguities of history, and on the other hand, must die to them because they are not the whole liberation or the whole Kingdom" (ibid. 90).

[41] Sobrino, "El conocimiento teológico" 207.

other theologians noted above. It also has the advantage of uncovering, on a profound level, the basic differences between the Latin American approach and other traditional methods in theology. Before evaluating its possible contribution to world theology, I would now like to consider briefly the work of several North American theologians who have written recently on the problematic of theology and praxis.

IV

Although praxis does not appear to be a major concern in his recent work, Charles Davis has published an important article on the subject.[42] In large part, Davis is expounding the views of others, but the basic thrust of his analysis of praxis is very similar to that of Sobrino. Also, he sees the question as a serious challenge to all of theology, and points to a number of the crucial questions it raises.

In my opinion, however, the article is ultimately disappointing, in that Davis does not really expatiate on the kind of theology that would reply to the questions he has posed. He does insist that a renewed praxis is necessary and that it "must be conscious as united to theory." Moreover, he notes that Christian praxis "demands a critical analysis of present society, intended to uncover the contradictions latent within it" and includes "the actualization of the conflict thus uncovered."[43] However, to cite one example, he does not respond to the problem posed earlier that an acceptance of the mediation of faith by praxis means that "theology loses its boundaries as an independent discipline, because the only appropriate context for the conscious articulation of *praxis* is a theory of the development of society in its total reality."[44]

Matthew Lamb has also published a recent article on the problem, which performs a valuable service in clearly outlining five different methodological approaches to theology.[45] Like Davis, he believes that "theory-praxis goes right to the core of the entire theological enterprise."[46] After an analysis of the four other models in contemporary theology, he discusses a theology based on "critical praxis correlations," which he himself appears to favor. This approach affirms that "praxis is not only the goal but also the foundation of theory" and that "only an authentic religious, moral, intellectual and social praxis can ground an authentic theology."[47] Moreover, the approach calls for "orthopraxy as

[42] Cf. n. 34 above.

[43] Davis, "Theology and Praxis" 167.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Matthew Lamb, "The Theory-Praxis Relationship in Contemporary Christian Theologies," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Convention* (New York: Manhattan College, 1976) 149–78.

[46] Ibid. 178.

[47] Ibid. 171–72.

the foundation of orthodoxy" as well as the relating of theology to other human knowledge and action not by the mediation of philosophy but by "the praxis of a wide-ranging interdisciplinary collaboration."[48] Lamb uses the term "emancipatory" praxis frequently, and this appears to correspond to the Latin American use of "liberating" praxis, at least on a formal level.

Lamb's major contribution to the development of a theology of "critical praxis correlationships" appears to be the distinguishing of different tasks within it as either foundational-methodological, epistemological-organizational, or empirical-communicative. However, aside from the question of the clarity and utility of these distinctions, he does not contribute much detail for the understanding of a praxis-grounded theology. In this respect it should be stressed that the author himself refers to his survey as "only a beginning."[49]

In the much larger framework of his book on method, David Tracy is another author who has turned his attention to the question of a "practical theology."[50] In Tracy's view, fundamental and systematic theology are concerned with the construction of present meaning, while historical theology reconstructs past meaning for the present. From this perspective he envisions practical theology's task as "to project the *future* possibilities of meaning and truth on the basis of present constructive and past historical theological resources."[51] It is doubtful to me that any of the Latin Americans mentioned above would accept this as a *total* description of their task of theologizing.

Tracy also proceeds to a critique of contemporary theologies of praxis from his revisionist perspective. His major objection is that they do not challenge the neo-orthodox model of their predecessors. Thus he asks: "Why cannot that critical commitment so admirably articulated in the critical interpretations of the social and political realities of our common experience, also be employed to interpret critically the possible conceptual incoherencies of traditional Christian symbols?"[52] If we confine ourselves to the Latin American theologians under discussion, the answer to that question is that they have employed and are continuing to employ a critique of the Christian tradition and symbols that is at least as penetrating as *any* that I know in Western theology.[53]

But the charge of neo-orthodoxy does give a clue to the real divergence

[48] Ibid. 175.

[49] Ibid. 178.

[50] Cf. n. 2 above. The chapter is entitled "History, Theory, and *Praxis*" (237–58).

[51] Ibid. 240.

[52] Ibid. 245–46.

[53] An excellent example of such a critique is found in Sobrino's Christology in the chapter "El Jesús histórico y el Cristo de la fe: Tensión entre fe y religión" (221–55).

between Tracy and the Latin Americans. In his description of the neo-orthodox approach, Tracy observes that it insists "upon the theologian's own faith as an existential condition of the possibility of theology."[54] The Latin Americans certainly would insist on this, as is obvious in the authors treated in this article. Since Tracy himself does not, my guess is that the Latin Americans would consider him not as a theologian at all but as an apologete or philosopher of religion. In his critical review of Tracy's book, Avery Dulles acutely points to this key issue in his final question: "Is Christian praxis a constitutive element in the systematic understanding of faith?"[55] Tracy's revisionist stance clearly compels him to say no; for the Latin Americans, the answer is just as clearly a resounding yes.

In general, Tracy's treatment of a theology of praxis is the least developed in his book, reading as it does as a kind of brief appendix to other very erudite and comprehensive chapters. Again, it should be acknowledged that he characterizes his views in this chapter as "merely anticipatory."[56] In my view, a continuation of discussion on this issue will reveal that Tracy's views on theological method and those of the Latin Americans are mutually exclusive; but this does not rule out the possibility of fruitful dialogue.[57]

Another North American, Gregory Baum, appears to have entered into a much more profound conversation with Latin American theologians than any of those mentioned, and also to be closest to them in method. Baum calls his approach "critical theology," noting first that it entails "a sustained dialogue with the critical thought of the late Enlightenment,"[58] which corresponds to Sobrino's "second moment" of

[54] Tracy, *Blessed Rage* 28.

[55] Avery Dulles, "Method in Fundamental Theology" 316. See also the review of Tracy's book by Charles Davis, where he observes: "if actual experience in its social and cultural diversity becomes the point of reference, then theology's concern with *praxis* cannot be left to the last chapter. To see the task of constructing present meaning in fundamental and systematic theology and the task of reconstructing past meaning in historical theology as both preceding the concern with the future in practical theology is to miss the implications of man's becoming in history and the mediation of truth through history" (*Commonweal* 103 [1976] 152).

[56] Tracy, *Blessed Rage* 240.

[57] Also, I am unable to find in Tracy's work any evidence of the "epistemological break" emphasized by Sobrino. Once again, Dulles highlights the key issue: "The method of correlation, as Tracy describes it, seems to be a one-way process, in which the Christian positions are shown to be consonant with the secular vision of life. I doubt whether anyone is likely to become a Christian simply in order to have his secular faith elucidated or expressed by better symbols. Heretofore Christianity has been thought to be capable of offering a new message and of correcting and transforming any vision of reality attainable apart from Christianity itself" ("Method" 310).

[58] Baum, *Religion and Alienation* 194.

the Enlightenment. Further, he states that it is a "reflection on praxis," which is "applicable to every area of theology – moral, dogmatic, ascetical, and so forth." Like the Latin Americans, Baum is very aware of the possible alienating effects of religion, as the title of his book indicates. He, too, is critical of the privatization of Christianity, and sets forth his own intention of regaining the "double dimension of personal-and-social in the gospel."[59]

Baum is careful to point out differences in his method and that of the Latin Americans. For example, he notes the differences in social and class analysis required in North America, as well as the different forms of historically-based symbols and of political commitments (e.g., the "reformist" approach is seen as acceptable as well as the "radical" stance). Nevertheless, the basic methods appear to be the same, and Baum admits as much when he says they are "structurally" identical.[60] This structural identity is defined very clearly when he asserts that both methods "are reflections on faith-conversion, they are grounded in social commitment in favor of the oppressed, they raise consciousness, lead to social involvement, and regard themselves as the reflective or contemplative component of the liberating human action, in which God is redemptively present to the sinful world."[61] Although the term "praxis" is not used in this sentence, it is clearly implied throughout.

Lastly, Baum's two-year effort at producing a "theological reading of sociology," the subtitle of his book, shows that he shares the Latin American predilection for dialogue with the social sciences. Even the divergences he mentions concerning different social analyses, and so forth, are faithful to the Latin American principle of theologizing out of one's own historical and geographical milieu. Thus the further development of Baum's theology will be an important test case for the applicability of the Latin American method in other parts of the world, especially in the developed world.

V

One fact that clearly emerges from this survey is that the question of praxis is surfacing from many different perspectives as a key issue in theological methodology today or even, as Lamb maintains, *the* central issue. It should also be clear that the concept of praxis has provided the

[59] Ibid. 197.

[60] Ibid. 220.

[61] Ibid. Baum was a participant in a week-long conference with Latin American theologians and social scientists in August 1975. He has presented an account of the conference and an elaboration of his own views on different social analysis in "The Christian Left at Detroit," *Ecumenist* 13 (1975) 81–100. I presented my views on the conference in "Who Does Theology in the Americas?" *America* 133 (1975) 137–39.

linchpin in the structure of an original and indigenous Latin American theology during the past fifteen years, that is, during the time when it ceased to be a mirror-reality, merely reflecting the theological views of the developed nations, and began its course as a source-reality, faithful to its own history and culture.[62] Because of their unswerving concentration on praxis, then, it seems entirely probable that the Latins have an important contribution to make to the problematic that is now coming to the fore in Western theology.[63] This contribution may be discerned not only in the important area of method in theology, but also in the actual *doing* of praxis-based theology, as is clear in the Christologies of Boff and Sobrino, the spirituality of Galilea, and the numerous books of Segundo and Gutiérrez, among others. Since many of these works are not yet available in English, the present survey may at least be of some service in widening the parameters and uncovering further nuances in the contemporary debate on praxis.

Again, the survey may help to dissolve some false impressions concerning Latin American theology that occasionally arise in the West. The difficulty may be illustrated by a humorous anecdote related of the late Cardinal Jean Daniélou.[64] On a visit to Buenos Aires, Daniélou was asked for his opinion of the theology of liberation. The Cardinal is reported to have answered that he saw it as a "sub-sub-sub-division" of moral theology. Thus it was a part of theology that studied the moral act, a part of moral which studied the social act, a part of that area which studied the political act, and a part of the latter which studied the problems of underdeveloped nations. I hope it is clear from the whole tenor of this survey that Daniélou was profoundly mistaken; what is at issue is not merely the ethics of development (or of liberation) but the entire structure, method, and content of contemporary theology.

Again, my primary purpose has been to present ideas from the periphery that show promise of advancing the dialogue in world theology with regard to theological method. However, I would like to conclude with some general observations of my own.

[62] Leonardo Boff refers to the whole of Latin American culture, including religion, as a "realidad espejo" and not a "fuente" in *Liberación y cautiverio* 136–37.

[63] Regarding this problematic, Matthew Lamb quotes the interesting observation of Bernard Lonergan that "it is only after the age of innocence has passed that praxis is accorded serious academic attention" (Lamb, "The Theory-Praxis Relationship" 172).

[64] The incident is related by Juan Carlos Scannone in *Fe cristiana* (n. 20 above) 356. Monika Hellwig has recently suggested a perspective similar to mine: "Liberation theology has been taken by some as a new attempt at political ethics, and therefore as a branch of applied theology. The liberation theologians do not accept this, but claim to be working with a perspective, or focus, or framework for the asking of all theological questions" ("Liberation Theology: An Emerging School," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 [1976] 142).

First, the allusion made earlier to an "antienvironment" is worth reiterating. The Latin Americans, in my judgment, have provided a perspective from outside the orbit of the North Atlantic community which provides a unique, perhaps unparalleled, opportunity for a penetrating critique of the Western theological enterprise. Such an optic has not been available for many centuries; indeed, even the quarrels of the Reformation may now be seen as essentially an intramural Western debate.

Quite clearly, this does not mean the overthrow of Western theology or the abandonment of its long and fruitful tradition. But it certainly does offer abundant opportunities for a purification, for a deepened sensitivity, especially on social issues, for the posing of radical questions about the real role and concrete impact of theology and the theologian on Church and society, and thus for progress in the never-ending development of theological understanding. The need for a "view from the outside" may be illustrated from a recent study of the sociologist Joseph P. Fitzpatrick. In a perceptive discussion of the interrelatedness of religion and culture, he especially emphasizes the fact that "we have the tendency, once we are brought up in a culture, to project our moral judgments into the culture of others, to judge them according to the standards which prevail in our own way of life."[65] Theologians, we may suppose, are not exempt from this human tendency to accept our particular social constructions as ultimate reality, as the way things are.

A good concrete example of utilizing the view from outside may be seen in a recent essay of Avery Dulles entitled "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relationship to Justice."[66] Dulles analyzes central elements of the understanding of faith in both Catholic and Protestant tradition, then indicates how the tradition is enriched by recent developments in liberation theology. He honestly states his reservations about aspects of the movement, but Dulles' basically sympathetic

[65] Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, "Justice as a Problem of Culture," *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* 5 (December 1976) 28. Fitzpatrick goes on to note that "this problem became aggravated in the last century and the early part of this century because we tended with our theological and philosophical systems to identify many of our cultural definitions as the natural law" (29). Rosemary Reuther has also pointed out that "for Christians, the contribution of Latin America is unique because it is the only region in the world where a predominantly Christian people are aligned with the revolutionary developments of the Third World" (*Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* [New York: Paulist, 1972] 176).

[66] The article appears in *The Faith that Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*, ed. John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist, 1977) 10–46. Another good example of sympathetic dialogue, from a Protestant perspective, may be found in John C. Bennett's *The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 131–41.

attitude suggests that he is open to further dialogue with regard to his criticisms.[67]

A second observation concerns the neuralgic issue of ideology. Gregory Baum has recently stated flatly that "theologians can no longer stand back from the ideological critique of the Christian religion, to which the sociologists have led them."[68] If this is true, the question of "interest" posed above and the possibility of unconscious ideologies would seem to be urgent issues in the contemporary practice of theology. Thus it appears extremely salutary for theologians to pose for themselves questions such as the following: Who is one writing for in this work, and from whose perspective is one writing? What is the basic reason for selecting a certain topic and developing it in a certain way? What are the actual results that may result from one's work, on the Church or society or both? *Cui bono,* or who benefits from certain directions and emphases?[69]

Clearly, a pedestrian but honest reply might be that one wants to publish rather than perish. Or one could say that one's purpose is to pursue the truth at all costs, wherever it leads and whatever its effects. But this is precisely the attitude that the sociology of knowledge has revealed to be intellectually naive, with its ever-present potentiality for canonizing relative positions as absolute truth. I would judge that a salutary capacity for "ideological suspicion" now appears to be an essential weapon in the intellectual armory of the theologian.

There is, however, another side to the ideological coin. Schillebeeckx has observed that "in contemporary society it is impossible to believe in a Christianity that is not at one with the movement to emancipate mankind."[70] But to effect such emancipation, one has to develop and

[67] E.g., Dulles observes that "the liberationist stress on external activity and social involvement runs the risk of minimizing the dimension of interiority in the life of faith" and that "in the liberation theologians I have read, there is no adequate study of the psychological complexity of the act of faith" ("The Meaning of Faith" 39–40). I believe that this difficulty would be greatly alleviated by a reading of Galilea's *Espiritualidad* (n. 10 above) and Sobrino's *Cristología* (n. 31 above).

[68] Gregory Baum, "The Impact of Sociology on Catholic Theology," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Convention* (New York: Manhattan College, 1975) 23. A classic in introducing theologians to this area is *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman.

[69] E.g., one could wish to contribute to a sincere but in fact overly privatized spiritual theology. This would clearly be amenable to those who profit from an unjust system or practice. Bluntly put, it would keep the natives from getting restless about such matters and suit the interests of those who are profiting.

[70] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," in *Political Commitment and Christian Community* (*Concilium* 84; New York: Herder and Herder, 1974) 50. He notes that the reverse is equally true, that "Christianity has also become incredible to those who, against all Christian reason, persist in maintaining their established positions in society" (ibid.).

implement practical strategies for social transformation, that is, ideologies in a neutral sense. Without these, the commitment to emancipation remains on an abstract, and ultimately alienating, level.

Such ideologies are not to be found in Scripture, although an urgent motivation to find and implement them may be discovered there. Rather, they are obtainable through the discernment and utilization of the best models of analysis available at a given point in history, most probably in a framework of interdisciplinary collaboration. It should be frankly recognized that there is no absolute certainty that the models are correct, and they are open to modification and even rejection as a result of actual praxis.

Further, a crucial point is that a certain *élan* and perseverance are essential for an effective commitment to social transformation. Here the emphasis in European political theology on "eschatological reserve" becomes problematic; for while it attempts, laudably, to protect the absoluteness and gratuity of the kingdom of God, it tends to cast a relativizing pall on all human efforts to realize that kingdom, thus undercutting the enthusiasm and determination needed for an effective historical project. Ironically, the movement to overcome the alienating "privatization" of Christianity may thus be fostering a more subtle but no less effective form of alienation.

Another general conclusion is that an incorporation of the Latin American emphasis on praxis and social justice into theology, including pastoral theology, could have an enormous impact on the Church and the world it serves, no matter how the praxis-theory debate develops. For a key weakness in the Church at present appears to be the tendency to issue "statements" on social issues without a real plan for the implementation of social teaching at the grass-roots level. But only such orthopraxis (perhaps better, Christopraxis) and continuing reflection on it appears capable of moving toward a primary objective of the contemporary Church: a true synthesis of faith and justice.[71]

As for the praxis-theory debate itself, it seems plausible to assume that both the method of "critical theory correlationship" (as represented by Tracy) and that of "critical praxis correlationship" (as represented by Baum and the Latin Americans) will continue to develop and flourish. Although the approaches are fundamentally divergent in emphasis, there seems to be no compelling reason why they cannot engage in collaboration and fruitful dialogue in the future; for the dialectical relationship of theory (or meaning) and praxis is a funda-

[71] The urgency of the task is seen graphically by a perusal of *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) compiled by Joseph Gremillion.

mental human and theological necessity. In this regard, I would agree with the classic statement of Teilhard de Chardin:

> To the eyes of modern man the finally decisive criterion of the truth of a religion must be the capacity shown by that religion to give a global meaningfulness to the universe that we are discovering around us. The contemporary point of view is that if the "true" religion exists it should be recognizable . . . by this sign: that under its influence and by its light the world as a totality takes on a maximum of coherence and a maximum of interest for our taste for action.[72]

Also, Gregory Baum's statements may be recalled that his "critical theology counters the privatizing of the gospel with an effort to regain its double dimension of personal-and-social" and that "the gospel has meaning for personal life and social history."[73] The point is that the movement to overcome excessive individualism in Christianity should not eliminate the perennial human need for personal identity and meaning, but rather incorporate it into a dialectical unity with social vision and practice. This has been clearly recognized by Moltmann in *The Crucified God*. In describing the five demonic circles that drive men toward death, he first identifies poverty, violence, racial and cultural alienation, the industrial destruction of nature, then ends with the circle of meaninglessness or Godforsakenness.[74] Moltmann emphasizes—rightly, I believe—that "liberation" is needed from the last oppression as well as from the first four.

Finally, the accusation is sometimes heard that the theology of liberation, since it reflects so intensely the reality of Latin America, is rather provincial and should be rejected as a "foreign import." John C. Bennett provides one answer to this objection when he notes that the Latin American "theology has a direct message to the United States and especially to Christians here because of the effect of the power of the United States on the people of Latin America" and that the Latin American situation "belongs to the North American situation because it is so much influenced by decisions made by our Government and by our corporations."[75] In my judgment, Bennett's response is valid, but I would like to conclude by placing it in a more expansive framework.

An occasion for such an expansion has been provided by a conference held last year in Africa which received little publicity but is of

[72] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Introduction à la vie chrétienne" 2; cited in Robert L. Faricy, *Teilhard de Chardin's Theology of the Christian in the World* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 80.

[73] Baum, *Religion and Alienation* 197.

[74] Moltmann, *The Crucified God* 329–32.

[75] Bennett, *The Radical Imperative* 134.

considerable historical importance. The conference was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from August 5–12, and marked the first time that theologians from Asia and Africa met ecumenically with those from Latin America to attempt to articulate a common theological vision from the viewpoint of all the nations of the Third World. A statement issued by the participants after the meeting goes into considerable detail and repays a careful reading; I will select some of the major issues in the context of theological method.[76]

The statement is divided into three main sections. The first concentrates on a description of the "situation" of Third World countries, and stresses the various forms of exploitation of their nations in the past, as well as present forms of cultural and economic domination. In the second part, a trenchant critique of the role of the missionaries and the churches as allies in the process of domination is presented. Although the missionaries were often zealous and devoted, the report concludes that "they rendered a special service to Western imperialism by legitimizing it and accustoming their new adherents to accept compensatory expectations of an eternal reward for terrestrial misfortunes including colonial exploitation."[77] The document is also severe on the role of theology, contending that for centuries it "did not seriously contest the plunder of continents, and even the extermination of whole peoples and civilizations," and that "the meaning of the message of Jesus Christ was so blunted as not to be sensitive to the agony of whole races."[78]

The third part concerns itself with a "theological approach" or method in the Third World. It criticizes European and North American theologies as a form of cultural domination and rejects "an academic type of theology that is divorced from action." The theologians insist on an interpretation of the word of God that reflects their own realities and call for "a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on praxis of the reality of the Third World."[79] They stress the need for an interdisciplinary collaboration and a dialectical relationship between theology and the social, political, and psychological sciences, while recognizing also the sinfulness of socioeconomic structures. An active commitment to the promotion of justice, as well as resistance to all forms of dehumanization, is called for. The individual theologian is summoned to "a lifestyle of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed and involvement in action with them." Lastly, it is asserted that theology is not neutral; it is conditioned by the socioeconomic context in which it is developed; consequently, the theologian has to be critical of his own value system,

[76] *Statement of the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 5-12 August, 1976* (mimeo; New York: Theology in the Americas, 1976).

[77] Ibid. 10.

[78] Ibid. 11.

[79] Ibid. 14.

so that it can be seen "in relation to the need to live and work with those who cannot help themselves, and to be with them in their struggle for liberation."[80]

The document also refers to differences in the three continents, such as the presence of the world religions and the need for humble dialogue with them, the differing aspects of racial discrimination, and the situation of Christian minorities in non-Christian societies. However, the basic "structural identity" with the method surveyed in the first part of this survey should be abundantly evident.

If, then, the document is a true reflection of trends in theological method throughout the Third World, the charge of "provincialism" may be exactly reversed; it could be ourselves in the West who would be guilty of provincialism, while the majority of the nations of the world had moved into the orbit of the new approach. Paradoxically, we could be the ones in grave danger of being "marginalized" within a limited conception of the role and practice of theology.

But I believe that such an outcome is not inevitable. At the very least, Western theologians who decide to reject the approach of the Third World could achieve a better understanding of it and thus be critically aware of its importance for our common future. Others in the West may find that the method is consonant with their own experience and needs, and adapt it to the history and culture of their own developed (or overdeveloped) nations.

At any rate, it is my conviction that a true world-theology is being born in our time and that an era of theological imperialism is rapidly expiring. By speaking of world-theology, I do not intend to advocate a false or premature universalism, nor am I attempting to co-opt or domesticate the challenging voices from the periphery that are now reaching the centers of the West. But it appears evident to me that the process towards an interdependent planetary culture is irreversible, and that at the same time this will be characterized by a diversity never before experienced and a consequent enrichment from areas previously ignored. Indeed, this may be the beginning of the era envisioned by Dietrich Bonhoeffer during his own struggle with oppression,

> when men will once more be called on to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming—as was Jesus' language; it will shock people and yet overcome them with its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom.[81]

[80] Ibid. 15-16.

[81] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 161.