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THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE

A Retrospective and Prospective Roundtable on the 50th Anniversary of *Horizons*

Editor's Introduction

As all of us at *Horizons* continue the celebration of the journal's golden jubilee, we turn to the spring of 1975. I imagine that at that time many members of the College Theology Society would have been actively teaching, debating, and writing about three groundbreaking volumes that emerged in the first half of the seventies. For some, these books fundamentally changed their approach to doing theology. The books posed critical moral challenges. They are, of course: James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1971); Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (1971 Spanish original, 1973 English edition); and Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* (1973).

It is in this exciting milieu that editors Prusak and Van Allen curated the second issue of *Horizons*. Among an article on Hindu temples, two articles in a creative teaching section, and several editorial essays ranging from the topic of directors of religious education to "Cinema and Morality," and a healthy complement of book reviews, the spring issue of volume 2 featured an article by Gustavo Gutiérrez as well as a book review symposium on *Beyond God the Father*. The review symposium included June O'Connor, Wilma Gundersdorf von Jess, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and John E. Burkhart; and Mary Daly responded. James P. Mackey, Anne E. Carr, and others who would become "household theological names" for a certain generation also wrote for this issue. In just its second issue, *Horizons* had its finger on the pulse of exciting developments in the field and was setting standards for innovation and excellence.

The editors have selected Gustavo Gutiérrez's article "Faith as Freedom" for this second anniversary theological roundtable. Roberto Goizueta and Neomi De Anda guide us through important nuances, distinctions, and developments as Gutiérrez's work developed after *A Theology of Liberation*.

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Each respondent brings the discussion to the present with probing challenges for theologians and the church today.

Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future[*]

ABSTRACT

An introductory discussion of Christian perspectives on freedom is followed by a consideration of the developments that preceded the genesis of Liberation Theology. That leads into the issues: Given the complexity of contemporary structures in a technological society where the number of those marginated by the system has become acute, who is my neighbor and how do I concretely love him or her? Transformation of history requires action flowing from faith and a willingness to live conflict. But how does one announce God as Father in a non-human world? What are the implications when we tell a non-person that he or she is a son or daughter of God? Believers must develop a critical consciousness and a praxis which confronts the actual conditions of life. To be a Church is to be in solidarity with all who suffer but we must remember that the gospel message is not ideological since it does not identify with any social form. It hopes against hope.

Introduction

The Christian conscience is always being challenged by the question of human freedom.

In the first centuries this challenge was expressed in the request for freedom on religious matters. For Tertullian, Lactantius, and other Christian writers from this time, that freedom is a human and natural right and, therefore, the necessary condition for an authentic encounter with God. After the fourth century, the situation of the Christian community changed and these first intuitions became dim, but *at least the idea of freedom of the act of faith* was maintained; that is, that *faith cannot be imposed*. That is a minimal demand. It was not always observed, and gave way later to what was called religious tolerance (and to its byproduct: the thesis and hypothesis doctrine). In recent years this question, brought out of a Christian and ecclesiocentric framework, is recapturing the true meaning of freedom in religious matters, and also in its social and political scopes.

[*] This article is a somewhat abridged and edited version of a paper presented at the Theology Institute of Villanova University on June 18, 1974. The complete version will be published in *Living with Change, Experience, Faith*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A. (Villanova, Pa.: Villanova University Press, Summer 1975).

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On the other hand, God's love that we receive in faith was considered from olden times as the fullness of human freedom. To Augustine of Hippo, to be authentically free is to live in God's love. The idea is profound and always valid, in spite of the persistence of many Christians in the course. of history to will—and paradoxically—to impose this fullness of human freedom. Thomas Aquinas helps us to understand precisely the Augustinian intuition; Thomas distinguishes (inspired by St. Paul) between a *freedom from* all that impedes the person from being really free, and a *freedom to* love; that is the human fullness. "For freedom Christ has set us free," but it is a freedom to "let love make you serve one another" (Gal. 5:1 and 13).

At present we are more and more sensitive to social and political implications of freedom. Great sectors of humanity live in a situation of misery and exploitation. The struggles for the *freedom from* become more urgent daily. A broad and deep aspiration for liberation inflames the history of mankind in our day. That is the case of Latin America. This aspiration is lived with distinctive characteristics by exploited classes, oppressed cultures and discriminated races in Latin America. This peculiarity does not limit this question only to the political field. On the contrary, it permits us to see from a concrete viewpoint all human dimensions which are involved in the process of liberation, and also the Christian dimension. In one word: all exigencies of *freedom to* love. Theology, a permanent task, puts on different forms in function of the Christian experience and of the demands of proclaiming the gospel to men in a given moment of their historical becoming.

Hence, we cannot separate the theological task from the Christian community and from the world in which it is found. Theology is an expression of the consciousness which a Christian community has of its faith in a given moment of history. The diverse modes that the presence of the Church takes before the demands of the historical becoming of humanity are a theological locus of primary importance.

I. From the Praxis of Liberation

1. The First Steps of a Long Itinerary

For a long time—which has lasted into the present—many Latin American Christians showed a great disinterest in temporal tasks. A religious formation which considered the "beyond" as the place of true life made of life here-and-now simply a stage on which a "test" was carried out to decide our eternal destiny. That life to come was lived in a religious world which seemed like the real one, solid in itself and tangential to people's daily lives. It was a self-sufficient world with its own standards, behavior, and cultic activities. Outside it, or, more correctly, below it, was the profane and perhaps the

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political world, a passing and thus somewhat unreal world. This unreality did not keep those who said they lived only for the world of here and now. This installation was apparently necessary as a platform from which to admonish others that they should not be attracted by that which is only brief and perishable. Eternal life was viewed exclusively as future life, and not as already lived out actively and creatively in response to our commitment. It was a truncated vision of human existence, with a religious and spiritual appearance, due to a careful shrinking of the gospel. The goodwill of those who were seeking, through such deficient means, to save the absolute essence of the Kingdom of God does not change the objective results. From a gospel thus converted into something as inoffensive as a small lap dog the powerful of this world had nothing to fear and much to gain. Their backing was immediate.

In this period, Christian categories and values were assumed or reinterpreted by the ideology of the existing social order, thus reinforcing the domination of one social class over another. Today, the backing of the dominant groups is still offered—and often accepted—to defend "western Christian civilization." But a series of events in the Latin American Churches has caused this offer, which was always on condition, to be accompanied by a threat: if it is rejected, hostility and repression are soon to come.

These events had modest beginnings. A few decades ago certain Christian sectors opened up to what was called the "social problem." This led to the transference to Latin America of the Christian-social movement, which played—and still plays in some countries—a role in awakening the social consciousness of certain Christian groups. The situation of misery in which the immense majority of Latin American people lived was no longer viewed as a kind of fate of history, and the people who lived in that situation were no longer viewed as mere objects of charity. Social injustice was recognized as the basic cause of that misery. How can anyone be Christian without committing himself to remedy that state? Everyone felt summoned by this hard reality, but it was less clearly seen that the whole of society and its system of values were being questioned at the roots. So, too, was every Christian being questioned, but in a more global and demanding way. In that perspective, to create a more just and Christian society was to transform that same society into something better, to integrate the marginated and take care of the most blatant injustices. Sometimes the project went further, but the socio-economic analysis, for lack of scientific method, did not give place in the final instance, despite intentions, to anything more than a vague general defense of the dignity of the human person.

With the appearance of a more scientific understanding of the situation, language became more aggressive and action somewhat more efficient, but the point of departure stayed the same: statements of principles which were

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doctrinal and ahistorical. Because of all of this, as political experience has shown and continues to verify, these developments, which the establishment initially accused of being subversive, maintain a certain ambiguity. Thereby they are open to possibly being co-opted by the social order which they were trying to modify, and even, in some countries, to being converted into political allies and ideological supporters of the most conservative and reactionary sectors. That was the role of Christian Democracy in Chile during Allende's popular government. Today some sectors of this political party seem distant from General Pinochet, but before they gave a strong support for this fascist coup. In this context, theological reflection was tinged with social concern but continued as before.

The Christian-social perspective did not have the same weight in all Latin American countries. In many of them—in circles closely related to lay apostolic groups—it was quickly aware of the insufficiencies and ambiguities of Christian etiquette in the political arena. Insertion in partisan politics was then made through several organizations in which Christians and people of other spiritual families openly participated. Christians got together, as such, on another plane, that of a frank profession of faith-forming communities in which they shared the experiences of their Christian life starting from different political commitments. Viewed with suspicion by those who preferred to make—although in a context different from the traditional conservative one—of Christians a religious-political bloc with a "Christian humanism" facade channeled into political parties of Christian inspiration, those Christians gradually grew stronger in some Latin American countries. They, thus, made battle to hinder the obligatory channeling of Christian sectors into only one political perspective. They were open to other points of view and more than a decade ago began a struggle against certain ideological uses of the Christian faith.

This mental hygiene endeavor is accompanied by a theology which accentuates the sphere of faith and distinguishes it from the plane of worldly action. This contribution was of capital importance and led to a step forward, but its context continues to be very much within the Church. The "worldly," the historical, the political, seem to raise no real questions about how to live faith and be intelligent about it. Even so, this effort will have its consequences later when the process of political radicalization is initiated, not only because it will be in countries in which this distinction of planes was lived with some intensity where radicalization will occur earlier, but also because the entrance into a new political posture will not first be made in a polemic with the immediate past of worldly institutions of Christian inspiration. That will indeed leave a mark, and with reason, on other processes. The most typical case is that of Chile.

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Whichever of these two roads was taken, it is certain that ever broader sectors (at the beginning especially of youth) abandoned positions which went no further than a developmentalist policy assumed by a more or less explicit reformism. The socialist revolution in Cuba opened new political perspectives. The year 1965 marked a high point in the armed struggle in the continent and accelerated the political radicalization even of those who believed other routes for revolutionary action should be taken.

The figures of Camilo Torres and "Che" Guevara have put an irrevocable seal on the Latin American process and decisively influenced certain Christian sectors. In most Latin American countries the repressive nature of the present system is being accentuated. To what Medellín accurately labeled "institutionalized violence" there is being added the indiscriminate use of force (prison, massacres, torture, etc.) to keep "order" in popular movements. What is happening in Chile since the fascist coup of General Pinochet is a typical example of this and attests with all clarity who are truly the men of violence in Latin America. The case of Brazil deserves special mention; to a particularly dramatic internal situation of repression there is added an effort to exercise hegemony over neighboring countries. Brazil serves as an effective agent of imperialist capitalism and exports a model of economic growth based on the coldest and most refined exploitation of the common people of the least favored regions—a practice valiantly denounced by the Brazilian bishops. To do this, it reinforces or puts back into power, in some of those countries, the most conservative sectors of the dominant groups. Some other possibilities are also open, although slightly, which, under the pressure of popular movements, seek to implement a more independent policy against imperialism, to overcome the most blatant injustices and to be oriented toward important social reforms. These ambiguous and reversible efforts are capable of mobilizing, at times in spite of themselves, political strength in the exploited classes, an indispensable condition for a real revolutionary transformation.

The political radicalization of the continent led growing numbers of Christian groups to a revolutionary stance. At first faith appeared as the motivation and justification for a revolutionary commitment, stripping it of every ideological element which falsifies a cruel and conflictual social reality; the gospel for these Christians was not at variance with but demanding revolution. In this perspective the revolution is more radical and challenging of the whole established order, and the political analysis is more penetrating than in its earlier position. For some there even seems to be a perception of the fact of class struggle; but before continuing with this process and what derives from it, let us examine more closely the theological efforts that tried to accompany this radicalization of political commitments of these Christian groups.

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Theology and Politics

The relation between Christian faith and political action is an ancient theme, but always an actual one. It arose ever since the gospel was first announced to the world and it maintains its actuality. Its treatment has varied throughout the historical becoming of the Christian community. Some major points began being emphasized, and they constitute the necessary inheritance which a reflection over this matter receives today. As every problem which is complex and full of implications, its focal point renews itself constantly through continuity and ruptures with the past, but also new horizons and new roads are being opened. We have reached an important milestone in the examination of the relation between the gospel message and the political world because recent reflections have not hesitated to challenge previously unquestioned assumptions and have thereby had a deeper influence on the social practice of Christians.

Along this line certain efforts occurred in rapid succession in Europe which had varying influence in Latin America and in other parts of the Third World. These are: the theology of development, characterized by an initial and still weak opening to the questioning; the theology of liberation, which knew moments of harsh polemics; and political theology, which wants to situate itself in a line of fundamental theology. In the Theology of Revolution (and equally in the Theology of Development) the mode of theological reflection has not changed. The revolutionary action (and more clearly it is also the case in the effort of development) is the field of application to ascertain some aspects of the political world. It is not a questioning of a type of intelligence of faith; it is not theological reflection in the context of the liberation process; it is not a critical reflection from and on the historical praxis of liberation, from and on faith as liberating praxis. To theologize thus will require a change of perspective.

The New Political Theology

Following the line of thought proposed by Bloch and Moltmann (and also of Pannenberg), political theology attempts to show the implications of eschatology and hope for political life.[1] It does not mean to suggest the creation of "a new theological discipline"; its intention is "to lay bare. . .a basic

[1] See J. B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (New York, 1969); See also "Politische Theologie in der Diskussion," in Helmut Peukert, ed., *Diskussion zur "Politische Theologie"* (Munich-Mainz, 1969). See M. Xhaufflaire, *La "Thèologie Politique"* (Paris, 1972).

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feature within theological awareness at large."[2] The approach is, therefore, that of fundamental theology.[3]

Political theology situates itself in a profoundly critical perspective which has its roots in the problematic posed by the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) of the political as the proper place of liberty. Hence, we begin to speak of a new political theology in opposition to previous views which, appearing weak when faced with the critique of religion which has been made since the Enlightenment (and Marxism), seek refuge in a faith which is lived in privacy. From this comes the necessity of *deprivatization* which allows for the criticism of "the understanding of the datum of our theology,"[4] and brings out once again the question of the consequence of faith in the historical becoming.

Metz perceptively indicates what is really at play in today's theology when he writes: "The so-called fundamental hermeneutic problem of theology is not the problem of how systematic theology stands in relation to historical theology, how dogma stands in relation to history, but what is the relation between theory and practice, between understanding the faith and social practice."[5]

Possibly one of the most interesting lines opened by political theology is the one of the critique of ecclesial institutions themselves in relation to their task in contemporary society.

Political theology brought out problems which have led us to become more precise and accurate in our positions and to pose some basic questions of theology which are urgent for humanity and the contemporary believer.

2. The World of the Other

Who Was the Neighbor of that Person?

Love for one's neighbor is an essential component of Christian living. But as long as I consider my neighbor to be someone "nearby," the person I meet on *my* road, the one who comes to me seeking help, my world remains the same. All individual welfare aid, all social reformism, is a love which never leaves the backyard ("If you love those who love you, what reward have you?"). If, on the contrary, I consider as my neighbor the person in whose way I

[2] See "The Church's Social Function in the Light of a 'Political Theology,'" *Faith and the World of Politics*, ed. Johannes B. Metz, in *Concilium* 36 (New York: Paulist Press, 1968), p. 9.

[3] Claude Geffré has pointed this out very well, putting political theology in the context of fundamental theology in "Recent Developments in Fundamental Theology: An Interpretation," *The Development of Fundamental Theology*, ed. Johannes B. Metz, in *Concilium* 46 (New York: Paulist Press, 1969), pp. 5-28.

[4] Metz, *Theology of the World*, p. 110.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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put myself, the "distant" person to whom I draw near ("Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"); if I see my neighbor as the one whom I go out to seek in the streets and market places, in the factories and marginal neighborhoods, in the farms and mines, my world changes. This is what happens with the "option for the poor," because the poor person for the gospel is the neighbor par excellence. This option is the axis of a new way of being a person and a Christian in Latin America today.[6]

The "poor person" is not the result of an act of fate. One's existence is not politically neutral nor ethically innocent. The poor person is the byproduct of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. He is on the margin of our social and cultural world. Even more, the poor person is the oppressed, the exploited, the proletarian, the one deprived of the fruit of his labor and despoiled of being a person. For that reason, the poverty of the poor person is not a call for a generous act which will alleviate his misery, but rather a demand for building a different social order.

But it is necessary to quicken the pace and sift the question more carefully. The option in favor of the poor in a liberating commitment made it plain that the point was not to isolate the oppressed person from the social group to which he belongs; this would only lead us to "feel sorry for him in his situation." The poor, oppressed person belongs to non-respected cultures, to discriminated races, to a social class which is exploited, subtly or openly, by another social class. To make a choice in favor of the poor person is to opt for one social class and against another. It is to become aware of the fact of class confrontation and to take the side of the dispossessed. To make a choice in favor of the poor person is to enter the world of exploited men and women, with its values and cultural categories. It is to become one of them in their interests and their struggles.

Different Christian groups are rapidly entering this world. They come either from popular sectors which are gaining a clearer awareness of their class interests, or from other environments which are joining the popular class interests and the struggle to defend them. That solidarity is expressed in a number of statements issued by a variety of groups, both before and after Medellín, that make up the immediate and exacting context. But the solidarity is expressed above all through commitments which many Christians have taken all over the continent.

We are, above all, face to face with a radical calling into question of the reigning social order. The kinds of poverty and injustice that are lived in Latin

[6] See the texts of different sectors of the Latin American Church in *Between Honesty and Hope* (Maryknoll, 1970); see also *Signos de Liberación* (Lima, 1973).

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America are too deep to think only of stop-gap measures. Hence, some speak of social revolution and not reforms, of liberation and not of developmentism, of socialism and not just of a modernization of the ruling system. To the "realists" these assertions seem romantic and utopian. And this is understandable. These assertions are part and parcel of a rationality which is alien to "realists"—the rationality of a historical project that announces a different society, built in function of the poor and the oppressed, and that denounces a society built for the benefit of a few. The project is in the process of being elaborated by means of rigid and rigorous scientific studies. It flows from the exploitation of the great majority of the masses in Latin America, a continent that is economically, socially, politically and culturally dependent on centers of power outside of Latin America: the rich countries. External dependence and internal domination characterize the social structures of Latin America. This is why only a class analysis will permit us to see what is really at play in the antithesis between oppressed countries and dominating countries. To see just the confrontation between countries obscures and, in the final analysis, waters down the true situation. The theory of dependence would miss the mark and be deceitful if it did not situate its analyses within the framework of the class struggle that is taking place around the whole world. All this will lead us to understand the social formation of Latin America in terms of dependent capitalism and to foresee strategy necessary to get out of that situation.

Only the transcending of a society divided into classes; only a political power at the service of the great popular majorities; only the elimination of private appropriation of wealth produced by human work, can give us the foundations of a society that would be more just. It is for this reason that the elaboration of an historical project for a new society in Latin America takes more and more frequently the path of socialism—a socialism that does not ignore the deficiencies of many of its actual historical undertakings; a socialism that tries to avoid cliches and prearranged schemata, but creatively seeks its own paths.

But that project for a different society includes also the creation of a "new man" who is freer and freer of all kinds of servitude that make it impossible for him to be the agent of his own destiny. This leads one to question the ideologies of the ruling class—which still have some religious elements—which today form man in our society. Nevertheless, the building up of a different society and of a new man will not be authentic if it is not guided by the oppressed peoples themselves. To achieve that, one will have to start from the very values proper to the peoples themselves. The radical questioning of the ruling social order and the abolition of an oppressive culture will operate from inside the people. Only in this way can a true social revolution be carried out.

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A New Understanding of Politics

For a long time politics was viewed as one compartment of life. It was a sector of human existence, alongside family, professional, and recreational life. Thus, political activity was carried on in the free time left over from other occupations. Besides, it was thought that politics belonged to a sector of humanity especially called to that responsibility. But today those who have chosen a liberating commitment find politics to be a dimension which includes and exactingly conditions all of human activity. It is the global environment and the collective arena of human fulfillment. Only by starting from this perception of the universality of politics in a revolutionary perspective can a more restricted sense of the term be understood—one which accurately defines politics as the orientation to political power. Every human situation has then a political dimension. To speak of the political dimension recognizes and does not exclude the multidimensional nature of man, but it does reject all socially sterile compartmentalization of life because it distracts from the real conditions in which human life unfolds. In the political context the person emerges as a free and responsible being, as a person in relation to nature and to other persons, as someone who takes the reins of his destiny and transforms history.

Christians have been generally insensitive and even hostile to a growing scientific rationality in politics due to the ahistorical orientation they have received in "principles." Nevertheless, those who have committed themselves to the struggle for a different society feel the urgency of acquiring the greatest possible knowledge of the private profit mechanisms of capitalist society. Only this knowledge will make their action effective. A vague and lyrical summons to defend human dignity which does not take into account the root causes of the present social order and necessary conditions for the construction of a just society leads nowhere and in the long run is simply a subtle way of deceiving and being deceived. Scientific rationality is nascent—but real, demanding—but necessary. An introduction into the field of history and society enables contemporary persons to become aware of the economic and socio-cultural factors which have shaped them and to begin to see the root causes of the misery and despoliation in which the poor of the poor nations live. It is a difficult step for Christians to acquire this new mentality and it will continue to be difficult. But they are beginning to give up some half truths, such as one which is popular in certain Christian circles: "It is no use to change social structures, if the heart of man is not changed." This is a half truth which ignores the fact that the "heart" of man also changes when social and cultural structures change. That is to say, between human awareness and the structures of society there is a reciprocal dependence and demand based on a radical unity. Those who think that structural transformation will automatically

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produce new persons are no less "mechanistic" than those who believe that a "personal" change assures social transformation. All mechanistic thinking is unreal and ingenuous.

But what is perhaps most difficult for the Christian who openly and devotedly takes the side of the poor and exploited and commits himself to the struggle of the proletariat is the conflictive character which his social praxis acquires in that context. Politics today involves confrontations—in which there are varying degrees of violence—between groups of people and between social classes with opposing interests. To be an "artisan of peace" does not excuse one from being present in those conflicts, but demands that one take part in them in order to overcome their root causes; it requires understanding that there is no peace without justice. This is a difficult and unsettling requirement for those who prefer not to see conflictive situations or who are satisfied with the application of palliatives. It is also hard for those who, with the greatest good will, confuse universal love with fictitious harmony. Nevertheless, the gospel commands us to love our enemies. In the political context of Latin America that means recognizing the fact of class struggle and that class enemies exist and must be combatted. We are not asked to have no enemies but that we not exclude them from our love. However, we are not accustomed in Christian circles to think in historical and conflictive terms. We prefer an ironic conciliation to antagonism and an evasive eternity to the contemporary world. We must learn to live and think peace in the midst of conflict and what is definitive, and we must see the transcendent in the midst of time.

3. Transformation of History and Liberating Love

For the past two centuries man has begun to realize that he is capable of transforming the world where he lives, in an accelerated way. This experience has changed the course of history and has marked our era in a definitive way. Many unthought of possibilities of man's life on earth have been opened, but their appropriation for the profit of a minority of humanity has provoked the frustration and exasperation of dispossessed masses, marginated people who cannot be absorbed by the system.

This is why, if it is true that the industrial revolution gave contemporary man a unique power to transform nature, it is just as true that it rendered more acute the contradictions of society, to the point of creating a situation of international crisis which can no longer be hidden.

The consequences of the industrial revolution allow us to understand better the importance of another historical process that started around the same time, which gives us another dimension of man's transforming work. We refer to the political dimension. The French Revolution meant the experience of

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the possibility of a profound transformation of the existing social order. It proclaims the right of every man to participate in the direction of the society to which he belongs.

Those who experienced the beginning of these events had the sharp consciousness of being at the birth of a new historical era, marked by critical reason and man's transforming freedom.[7] All this prepares, for them, a different man, more a master of himself and of his own destiny in history, a history that, henceforth, will not be understood if one separates nature and society. The industrial revolution and the political revolution will appear, in fact, more and more clearly, not as two processes by chance contemporary and converging, but as two movements one dependent on the other.

As both movements advanced, their mutual implications became clearer and clearer. The transformation of history will necessarily suppose the simultaneous transformation of nature and society. It is this that we call *historical* praxis. In this historical praxis there is more than a new consciousness of the meaning of economic activity and political action; there is also a new way of being man and woman in history. But to speak of transformation of history from the perspective of dominated peoples and exploited humans, from the perspective of the poor of this world, brings us to see it as a *liberating* praxis, that is to say, to see in that transformation something that escapes us when we consider it from the point of view of the minority of humanity that owns the majority of scientific and technical means as well as the political power in today's world. This is why this liberating praxis acquires a subversive perspective. It is subversive of a social order in which the poor man, the "other" of this society, scarcely begins to make himself heard.[8]

What is really at play is not just a greater rationality of economic activity, or a better social organization, but through these, a question of justice and love. The terms are classical and perhaps seldom employed in a strictly political language, but they remind us of all the human density rooted in the affair. They remind us that we talk about persons, of entire nations that suffer misery

[7] See the reflection about the Enlightenment by Kant in his book *Philosophy of History* and by Hegel in his lectures about Philosophy of History. See on this subject the classic work of E. Cassirer, *La Philosophie des Lumières* (Paris, 1970) [German edition: *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1932)]; and the more recent book of W. Oelmuller, *Die unbefriedigte Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, 1969). In a theological perspective, see J.B. Metz, J. Moltmann, and W. Oelmullcr, *Kirche im Prozess der Aufklärung, Aspekte einer neuen "Polilischen Theologie"* (Munich, 1970).

[8] About the concrete political options that this liberating praxis assumes at present, see our work *A Theology of Liberation*, Chapters VI and VIL See also the conclusions from the first meeting of Christians for Socialism (Santiago de Chile, 1972) in *Signos de Liberación*, pp. 238-243.

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and exploitation, who cannot enjoy the most elementary rights of persons, who scarcely know that they are persons. That is why, the liberating praxis, in the measure that it starts from an authentic solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, will be, in short, *a praxis of love*, of real love, efficacious and historical, towards concrete men. It will be a praxis of love of neighbor and, in him, of love of Christ who identifies himself with the least of our brothers and sisters. Any attempt to separate the love of God from love of neighbor gives birth to impoverished attitudes in one sense or the other. It would be easy to oppose a "praxis of Heaven" to a "praxis of the earth" or vice versa. It is easy, but it is not faithful to the gospel of God made man. It is for this reason that it seems to us more authentic and more profound to speak of a praxis of love that takes root in the gratuitous and free love of the Father who made himself a God of history in solidarity with the poor and the dispossessed and through them with all humans.

II. To Believe in Order to Understand

The option for the poor, for the oppressed social groups and for the struggles of the Latin American proletariat, the new way to perceive the political world as well as the demands of the historical praxis of liberation, place us in a different world. All of these lead to a new spiritual experience in the heart of the praxis itself. This experience is the very matrix of the new understanding of the word, God's gratuitous gift, which penetrates human existence and transforms it.

1. God and the Poor

The liberating commitment is the place of a spiritual experience where we find again the great prophetic subject of the Old Testament and of Jesus' preaching: *God and the Poor*. To know God is to do justice. It is to be in solidarity with the poor, with the poor who exist today: the oppressed person who belongs to the exploited class, race, culture, and country. And, at the same time, it is to be in relationship with a God who loves me first and gratuitously, strips me, leaves me naked, universalizes my love for others, and makes it gratuitous. It is because of this that in the Bible there is no authentic worship of God if there is no solidarity with the poor.

To Live According to the Spirit

The liberating involvement leads to an original Christian experience which has not only possibilities and promises but also dead ends and sharp turns in its road. For the life of faith there is not a comfortable or triumphal road. There are Christians, who, while absorbed by the political demands

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of a liberating commitment, experience the tension produced between their solidarity with the exploited and their affiliation with their Church in which many members are linked to the established order. They lose the dynamic of their faith and suffer in anguish a dichotomy between being Christian and acting politically. Even more cruel is the situation of those who see their love for God disappear, while the love for man which motivates them is a love which God himself originates and nourishes. It is, then, a love which, not knowing how to maintain the unity demanded by the gospel, loses the fullness which it should have.

Such cases exist. Fundamental honesty makes us recognize them. To be present in these frontier zones of the Christian community where the revolutionary commitment is most intense is not to be in calm waters. A lucid and many-hued analysis becomes necessary. The factors which intrude upon the subject are multiple. Christians committed to the liberating process are subject to many pressures. And they are not exempt from romanticism, emotional tensions, or ambiguous doctrinal positions, which at times can easily lead them to drop out or become exasperated. There are other Christians who can take refuge in comfortable "orthodoxies" and make themselves secure by not taking any stand on anything. They are content to raise an accusing finger from time to time.

The difficulty then is real. But clues to a solution will come only from the heart of the problem itself. Protective measures veil the situation and delay a fruitful answer. They would also manifest a forgetfulness of the urgency and seriousness of the reasons which lead to a commitment to people who are exploited by a cruel and impersonal system. In short, there is a basic unbelief in the power of the gospel and faith. Hence, where the proclamation of the gospel appears to be submerged in purely historical events, there should spring theological reflection, spirituality, and a new preaching of a Christian message incarnated—not dissolved—in our here-and-now. To evangelize, wrote Chenu, is to incarnate the gospel in time. That time today is confused and obscure only for those who, without hope, do not know, or hesitate to believe, that the Lord is present in time.

The liberating commitment signifies for many Christians an authentic spiritual experience, in the original and biblical sense of the term: a living in the Spirit which makes us recognize ourselves as free and creative children of the Father and brothers of all people ("God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"). Only through genuine signs of love and solidarity will our encounter with the poor and the exploited be effective, and only through the poor and the exploited will we find Christ ("As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"). Our denial of love and solidarity will be a rejection of Christ ("As you did it not to one of the least of these,

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you did it not to me"). The poor, the other, appears as a revealer of the totally Other. That is what is involved in a life lived in the presence of the Lord in the vortex of a political activity which recognizes that such a life leads to conflict and to the demand for scientific rationality. It means trying to be, to paraphrase a renowned expression, contemplative in the midst of political action.

We are not accustomed to this. We think of a spiritual experience as something which ought to be on the margin of human situations as impure as politics. Nevertheless, we are moving in that direction, towards an encounter with the Lord, not in the "isolated and good" poor, but in the oppressed, in the member of a social class, of a race, of a culture which struggles ardently for its most elemental rights and for the construction of a society in which it will be possible to live as persons. History is the place where God reveals the mystery of his person. His word comes to us in the measure to which we are inserted in the historical process. But the history is a conflictual history, with confrontations of interests, of struggles for greater justice, of marginalization and exploitation of people, and of the desire for liberation. In that history, to choose the side of the poor and the exploited classes, to identify oneself with their fate, to share their destiny, is to want to make of the history a history of authentic brotherhood. There is no other way to receive the gratuitous gift of sonship. It is to choose the cross of Christ, in the hope of his resurrection.[9] It is what we celebrate in the Eucharist. In it we express our will to make our own the sense that Jesus gave to his life, and to receive of the Spirit the gift to love as he loved. It is in these concrete conditions that the process of evangelical conversion, the center of all spirituality, takes place. To convert oneself means to get out of oneself and to open up to God and to the other. Conversion implies a break, but especially it means to take a new road.[10] And it is precisely because of this that conversion is not an "intimist" and private attitude, but rather, a process that develops in a socio-economic, political and cultural milieu in which one lives and which has to be transformed. The encounter with Christ in the poor constitutes an authentic spiritual experience. It is to live in the Spirit, the link of the love of the Father and the Son, God and man, between men. Christians committed to an historical praxis of liberation try to live there this deep communion: love of Christ in solidarity with the poor; faith in our condition as sons and daughters of the Father, in the task of forging a society of brothers and sisters; and, lastly, hope of Christ's salvation in our commitment to the liberation of the oppressed.

[9] See the richer commentaries of J. Linskens about the Christian as witness of Christ's Resurrection, "The Paschal Mystery," in *Scripture Today Series* (private publication from Mexican-American Cultural Center, San Antonio, Texas, 1974).

[10] See R. Schnackenburg, *L'existence chrétienne selon le Nouveau Testament*, I (Paris, 1971), p. 35.

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The Magnificat expresses well this spirituality of liberation centered upon God and the poor. A song of thanksgiving for the gifts of God, it expresses humbly the joy of being loved by· him: "Rejoice, my spirit, in God my Savior; so tenderly has he looked upon his servant, humble as she is. . .. So wonderfully has he dealt with me, the Lord, the Mighty One." But at the same time it is one of the New Testament texts which contains great implications both as regards liberation and the political sphere. This thanksgiving and joy are closely linked as God liberates the oppressed and humbles the powerful. "He has put the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the humble. He has satisfied the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands." The future of history belongs to the poor and exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them the Lord saves history. The spirituality of liberation will have as its point of departure the spirituality of the *anawim*.

Poverty and Solidarity

Liberating praxis is becoming more mature and inquisitive. From now on, it will be in the framework of politics thus understood that the Christian who is committed to the poor and to the liberation of the exploited classes will think through his faith and live it out. He will undergo a spontaneous orientation to a fundamental demand of the gospel: poverty. This demand means identification with Christ who came to the world to announce the Good News to the poor and to liberate the oppressed. What the Christian is going to find will surprise him.[11]

Poverty as it is conceived and experienced in the Church is a prisoner of the religious life. It is a prisoner of the one life style of the vow of poverty. Poverty, despite the purity and nobility of intention, has become something exclusive—private property—for certain Christians who sometimes give the impression that they feel rich in their poverty. Ordinary Christians, it is said, are not called to a life of poverty. In small doses, in the form of a certain sobriety of life, it is advisable, but it is not a precept, nor is it something which limitedly defines a Christian. For some Christians it has not been a bad division of labor. Christians who so lived under a vow of poverty were considered to be in a state of spiritual perfection, having renounced the goods and pleasures of this world. Other Christians were not disgusted by these worldly goods and pleasures, but for them they had to pay the price of being on a lower plane, according to the Christian viewpoint. Nevertheless, their place in the world allowed them to support the first group with alms. Thus, there was gain for everyone, but not for the gospel.

[11] We spoke about evangelical poverty more in the *Theology of Liberation*, Chapter XIII.

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The poor and exploited of this world missed out on it, too, because there was something more serious—and more subtle. Poverty was proclaimed the Christian ideal. But affirming this as a generality opened the doors to all kinds of errors. So then, if, as we read the Bible, material poverty is a subhuman situation caused by injustice and sin, the state of poverty cannot be a Christian ideal. It would be to aspire to something considered degrading for mankind. Besides, this would put the demands of the gospel in a current counter to the great desire of humanity to liberate itself from subjection to nature, to eliminate human exploitation, and to create better conditions of life for everyone. And not the last of all, it would also justify, even though involuntarily, the situation of injustice and exploitation which is the fundamental cause of poverty, the real poverty which the great majority of humanity suffer.

But the testimony of poverty and theological reflection on it began to change in recent years. The first pressure for change came from the religious communities who concentrated their spirituality in a life of *poverty and contemplation*. And this double profile was not a total loss, its fruitfulness is still present, although in a different context. The pressure for change spread through other sectors of the religious orders, leading them to examine the origins of the vow of poverty and to enrich its meaning. Soon the pressure for change went beyond the limits of religious orders. The summons to a real and more radical witness of poverty was heard by broad bands of Christians who saw in it a genuine characteristic of life conformed to the gospel. And it became a question to be faced by the whole Church, a critical question, belligerent toward every counter-witness in the matter of poverty.

But it was not dealing with a simple extension of the demand for a poor life, much less a mechanical application of "religious poverty" to other Christian sectors. The whole way of living and conceiving poverty changed, and is still changing. Solidarity with the poor, commitment to the liberation of the exploited classes, and entrance into the political world, all led to a re-reading of the gospel. Indeed, only a critique which springs from liberating praxis allows us to reinterpret the gospel and condemn the ideological function carried out by the ways of understanding poverty. Medellín backed this effort on behalf of the gospel, and it was also supported with the new experiences of numerous Christian groups.

Christian poverty began to be experienced as an act of liberation and love for the poor of this world, as solidarity with them and a protest against the poverty in which they live, as an identification with the interests of the oppressed classes, and as a challenge to the exploitation of which they are victims. If the ultimate cause of the exploitation and alienation of man is selfishness, the basic reason for voluntary poverty is love of one's neighbor. Poverty—the result of social injustice which has in sin its deepest

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roots—is assumed, not in order to make it an ideal life, but to witness against the evil which it represents. In the same way Christ assumed the sinful condition and its consequences, certainly not to idealize it, but to live and identify with men, and to redeem them from sin. He did it to fight against human selfishness and to abolish all injustice and division among men. He did it to suppress those conditions which produce rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. The witness of poverty which is lived as an authentic imitation of Christ does not withdraw us from the world, but places us in the very heart of the situation of pillage and oppression and from there announces liberation and full communion with the Lord. Spiritual poverty as total dispensability for God is announced and lived out.

2. To Understand Faith

A good part of contemporary theology seems to have sprung from the challenge of the *non-believer*. The non-believer questions our *religious world* and demands from it a very deep purification and renewal. Bonhoeffer took this challenge and sharply formulated the question that is at the heart of many theological efforts of our time: how to announce *God* in a world that has come of age or become adult (*Mundig*)?

In a continent like Latin America, the challenge does not come to us primarily from the non-believer, but from the *non-person*, that is to say, from him who is not recognized as such by the existing social order: the poor, the exploited, one who is systematically deprived of being a person, one who scarcely knows that he or she is a person. The non-person questions before anything else, not our religious world, but our *economic, social, political and cultural world*; and thus, a call is made for the revolutionary transformation of the very bases of a dehumanizing society. Our question, therefore, is not how to announce God in an adult world; but rather how to announce him as *Father* in a non-human world. What are the implications when we tell a non-person that he is a son of God? These were already the questions that in the sixteenth century were faced by Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolome de las Casas and many others, after having encountered the indigenous Americans. The discovery of the other, of the exploited, has led to a reflection on the exigencies of faith, in contrast to the reflection that had taken place on the side of the dominator, as for example, Gines de Sepulveda.

Today, the historical frame is different, social analysis is different, but we are witnessing a rediscovery of the poor in Latin America. To become in solidarity with them is to enter consciously into the historical conflict, in the clash between countries, between social classes. It is also to enter into it on the side of the dominated, the oppressed. But one cannot really question the social

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system that creates and justifies this situation unless one participates in the efforts to transform it radically and to forge a different society. To enter into the praxis of liberation means to embrace what we earlier called the complex and pluridimensional character of human knowledge; it means in the last analysis, to enter into a different cultural world.

Liberating Praxis and Understanding of Faith

The commitment to the process of liberation introduces the Christian to a world with which he or she was not very familiar, and challenges one with a qualitative change: radical questioning of a social order and its ideology, a break with the old form of knowing things. All this contributes to the fact that any other theological reflection, started from a different cultural context, will have little meaning. Other theological reflections will give a view of how other Christian generations understood their faith. The ways that faith was expressed can serve as general points of reference, but they will still leave one theologically an orphan, because they do not speak with the strong, clear and pressing language which is demanded by the human and Christian experience in which one committed to liberation lives.

Theory and Praxis

Nevertheless, the roots of a new type of understanding of faith are simultaneously being grounded on those same experiences. Many have learned to link in them, in a different manner, theory and practice. Today we see something which appears as a fundamental trait of contemporary consciousness: knowledge is geared to transformation. History—which indissolubly includes nature and society—is seen as the object of change and transformation as well as an agent for self-transformation. Vicus used to say that a man knows well only the things he does. Modern man likes to *verify* the truth, to give it a consistent reality. A knowledge of a reality which does not lead to changing that reality is an unverified interpretation: it does not have the consistency demanded by truth. In this way, historical reality stands over the field of application of abstract truths and idealist interpretations, and becomes the privileged ground from which man starts and to which he returns in the process of knowledge. The transforming praxis of history is not the moment in which a clear and well-conceived theory takes on a lowly and degraded form, but rather, it becomes the matrix and generating force of an authentic knowledge and then decisively proves its real value. It is the ground on which man creates again his world, builds himself up, knows the reality around him, and knows and finds himself.

The Word of the Lord accepted in faith will be understood and lived today by a person who breathes these cultural categories; this will be a parallel of

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what happened in the past with believers who had been conditioned by Greek philosophy. Conflicts and misunderstandings will easily arise in the process of making use of a system of reasoning, a rationality, in the theological field which is far different from the one which lies at the root of current theology. It has always happened. We could here remember the hostility and the accusations of distortion (and of "humanization") which greeted the adaptation of Aristotelian philosophy to theological thought. In our present case, the attempt—like others in the past—is evidently a modest one, but the virulence of the reactions it has provoked has reached a very high level. This is, possibly, best understood if seen outside the theological perspective: the reaction is part of an attempt to defend a type of social order which does not accept questioning and criticism, and much less, elimination, from the man whom it oppresses, isolates and ruins. As in the past, in spite of their success in provoking groundless alarm and occasional condemnations, these attitudes have no future. The future is in the hands of a faith, an ecclesial communion, which does not fear the progress of human learning nor the challenges of social practices, and which lets itself be questioned by them. It questions them in return, enriching itself, not accepting things indiscriminately, and very well aware of its limitations and exigencies. It is a very complex task which takes into account many lines of specialization, the different aspects of contemporary thought, both philosophical and scientific, without which it is impossible, today, to elaborate a theological process. It takes into account, among others, those sciences which provide us with instruments enabling us to know the natural world of which man is a part, and particularly those which allow us to discover his psychological dimension, as well as the economic and socio-cultural realities which militate against the justice and fraternity desired among persons. It also takes into account philosophical thought which embraces the totality of human life and which maintains a constant dialogue with scientific knowledge. The task of understanding the faith can only be undertaken from the viewpoint of the historical praxis in which persons struggle to be able to live as persons and are inspired by the hope in him who, revealing himself, reveals to man all his fullness. It is inspired by a hope in the Lord of History in whom everything was made and obtained salvation.

The Biblical Truth

It becomes necessary to read again the gospel. In this way persons will rediscover something traditional, authentically traditional, which perhaps for that reason was forgotten by more recent "traditions": the truth of the gospel is acted and enacted. We must act in truth, as St. John tells us, and that truth is Love. A life of love is a true affirmation of God. To believe in God does not consist in a mere affirmation of his existence, but rather it involves a commitment

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of one's life to God and to all men. To have faith is to go out of oneself to give oneself to God and to others. Faith operates through charity, as St. Paul points out. To reflect upon one's faith is to rethink a faith which is given a real consistency through actions and which transcends a simple affirmation or confession. It starts from a Promise which is fulfilled along the course of history and which at the same time is open to something beyond. Truth, in the Bible, includes fidelity, justice, firmness. To believe is to have confidence, to give oneself to God, to be faithful. God is worthy of faith because he is truthful, for, as the prophets often repeat in the Old Testament, his word is firm and he always fulfills what he promises. The fulfillment takes place in history, and thus, God appears truthful through history.

In the Bible, the act of knowing is not relegated to a purely intellectual level. To know is to love. The prophetic word (*dabar*) is always an event, a happening; the word pronounced in the name of Yahweh becomes history. True orthodoxy is an orthopraxis.

Theology from and on the Praxis

We are not trying to adopt here the contemporary yearning for a mechanical correspondence in the relationship between knowing, transforming, and living a truth which verifies itself in history. Nevertheless, the cultural world in which we live allows us to discover a starting point and a horizon by which we can delineate a theological reflection that must follow a different path which, necessarily, must appeal to its own sources.[12]

Theology, in this context, will be a critical reflection from and on the historical praxis confronted with the Word of the Lord lived and accepted in faith; this faith comes to us through the multiple, and at times ambiguous, historical mediations which we make and discover every day. Theology will be a reflection in and on faith as a liberating praxis. The understanding of the faith will proceed from an option and a commitment. It will start from a real and effective solidarity with discriminated races, despised cultures and exploited classes and from their very world and atmosphere. This reflection flows from a commitment to create a just and fraternal society, and to contribute to making it more meaningful, radical and universal. This theological process becomes truth when it is embodied through a real and fruitful insertion into the process of liberation. Theology, thus, will be liberated from a socio-cultural context which prevents it from establishing its presence where the oppressed and the

[12] In this framework, we must perhaps rethink the reflections of Duns Scotus about *Praxis* (and not only *action*), God as *cognoscibile* and *operabile*, and theology as *practical science*. For a modern perspective, see Frans v.v. Oudenrijn, *Kritische Theologie als Kritik der Theologie* (München-Mainz, 1972).

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discriminated in the world are struggling to be accepted as human persons. Theology becomes a liberating and prophetic force which tends to contribute to the total understanding of the Word, which takes place, in the final analysis, in the actions of real life. This fact, and not simple affirmations or "models of analysis," will free theology from all forms of idealism.

Jesus Christ: Principal Hermeneutic of the Faith

To be Christian is to believe that one man of history loved us by loving his contemporaries to the point of giving his life for them. He loved the poor by preference and for them confronted the great and powerful of his times. He was put to death as a subversive; he is God.

The great principal hermeneutic of the faith and, therefore, the foundation of all theological discourse is Jesus Christ. In Jesus we meet God; in the human word we read the Word of the Lord, in historical events we recognize the fulfillment and the Promise. And this because Jesus is the Christ of God, the One sent by the Father, the Son ("God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son"); because Jesus is the intrusion in history of the Son in whom all things were made and in whom all things were saved.

That is then the fundamental hermeneutical circle: from man to God and from God to man; from history to faith and from faith to history; from the human word to the Word of the Lord and from the Word of the Lord to the human word; from fraternal love to the love of the Father and from the love of the Father to fraternal love; from human justice to the holiness of God and from the holiness of God to human justice; from poor to God and from God to poor.

3. Salvation of History

Liberation of Christ and Political Liberation

This is the manner in which the Theology of Liberation differs from such theologies as those of development, revolution, and violence, to which it is at times linked, and with which it is erroneously confused.

The Theology of Liberation differs from them, not only in a different analysis of reality based on more universal and radical political options, but also, and above all, in the very concept of the task of theology. The Theology of Liberation does not intend to provide Christian justification for positions already taken, and does not aim to be a revolutionary Christian ideology. It is a reflection which starts with the historical praxis of man. It seeks to rethink the faith from the perspective of that historical praxis, and it is based on the experience of faith derived from the liberating commitment. For this reason, liberation theology comes only after involvement, the theology is a

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second act.[13] Its themes are, therefore, the great themes of all true theology, but its perspective and the way of giving them life are different. Its relation to historical praxis is of a different kind.

To state that the Theology of Liberation does not pretend to be a revolutionary Christian ideology does not imply that it disregards the revolutionary process. Precisely, the contrary is true, from its insertion into that process which it attempts to make more self-critical, and, therefore, more radical and global. Such theology places the political commitment to liberation in the perspective of the free gift of total liberation brought by Christ.

Faith, being an acceptance of and response to the Father's love, penetrates to the last root of social injustice: sin, the break in our friendship with God and in our fraternity with humans. This is not accomplished by leaving aside historical mediations or by avoiding socio-political analyses of historical realities. Sin is found in the refusal to accept another as a brother or sister, in oppressive structures built up for the benefit of a few, in the despoliation of peoples, races, cultures, and social classes. Sin is basically an alienation, and as such, it cannot be found floating in the air, but is found in concrete historical situations, in individual and specific alienations. It is impossible to understand one without the other. Sin demands a radical liberation, but this, necessarily, includes a liberation in the political order and in the different dimensions of personhood. It is only by a fighting and efficacious participation in the historical process of liberation that it will be possible to pinpoint the basic fundamental alienation present in all partial alienations. That radical liberation is a gift brought by Christ. Christ, by his death and resurrection, redeems man from sin and all its consequences. As Medellin said, "It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his son in the flesh so that He might come to liberate all men from the forms of slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, or in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness."[14]

As we repeatedly said, political action has its demands and specific laws. To recall the deep meaning it has for a Christian is something very different from going backwards, towards stages in which the person was in no position to know the internal mechanisms of an oppressive society and in which political action had not reached its adulthood. To receive the gift of Sonship, making all persons our brothers and sisters, will be little less than

[13] Cf. G. Gutierrez, "La Pastoral de la Iglesia en América Latina" (Montevideo, 1968*), Notes on a Theology of Liberation* (Lausanne, 1970). This manner of perceiving theology is one of the first intuitions of the Theology of Liberation.

[14] "Justice," No. 3 in *Documents of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Medellin, Colombia, 1968* Bogota, 1970).

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a self-gratifying sentence, unless we make it alive daily in a conflictive history and unless it leads to a real identification with the persons suffering oppression from other persons, with the struggles of the exploited classes. It must creatively and scientifically enrich, from within, the political processes which have a tendency to close themselves and mutilate authentic human dimensions. It must use the instruments provided by human sciences and philosophy to make its action more efficacious.

The Liberation of Christ cannot be equated with political liberation but it takes place in historical and political acts of liberation. It is not possible to avoid those mediations. On the other hand, political liberation is not a political and religious messianism, for it has its autonomy and laws, and presupposes well determined social analyses and political options. However, looking at human history as a history in which the liberation of Christ is operative widens the perspective and gives what is at stake in the political commitment its full depth and true meaning. We are not creating easy and impoverishing equations, or simplistic and distorting reductions, of one to the other, but we are bringing to light the mutual and fruitful demands of both. The Theology of Liberation is a theology of salvation incarnated in the concrete historical and political conditions of today. Those historical and political mediations of today, valued in themselves, change the pattern and experience of life. They also change the reflection on the mystery hidden from of old and now revealed, the love of the Father and human fraternity, which is salvation operating in time and giving a deep unity to human history. We do not have two histories, one of the filiation of men and the other of human fraternity, one by which we become children of God and the other by which we become each other's brothers. This is what the term Theology of Liberation wants to make present and underline.

Maskings and Perspectives

Theological reflection in the context of liberation has as its point of departure the perception that the very context of liberation obliges us to rethink radically our Christian existence and our existence as Church. This reflection upon the Word accepted in Faith will appeal to the various expressions of contemporary human reasoning, the human sciences and philosophy. But above all, it will have reference to historical praxis in a new way. This distinguishes it from every attempt of masking old pastoral ways and theologies with "social preoccupation" or with the vocabulary of "liberation." Easy attitudes and a certain preoccupation with contemporary styles have in effect led some to speak of the same old things while simply adding the adjective "liberating" and thereby sell old merchandise which was beginning to pile up. Another attempt along the same lines is to interpret in a "spiritualistic" (not spiritual)

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way everything which has to do with the liberation of Christ. In this way all the human and historical impact is taken away and it can be accepted by the political and ecclesiastical system to the degree that it questions nothing, to the degree in which the "other" of such a system is not made present, and one remains "within the family."[15] But as we have already stated, what we understand by a Theology of Liberation presupposes a direct and precise relation with historical praxis. And this historical praxis is a liberating and subversive praxis. It is an identification with persons, with races, with the social classes which suffer misery and exploitation, an identification with their concerns and battles. It is an insertion into the revolutionary political process. We do this so that from within this process we can live and proclaim the gratuitous and liberating love of Christ. This love goes to the very root of all exploitation and injustice: the rupture of the friendship with God and with men and women. This love permits persons to recognize themselves as sons of the Father and brothers and sisters with each other.

The theological sketch which we propose is but a point of departure, keeping in mind the importance of the theory of knowledge and linking it with the project of a society constructed in function of the poor. The Theology of Liberation assumes certain fundamental positions in the field of theological method: it demands the deepening of questions of biblical hermeneutics since it is conditioned by a greater clarification of its Old and New Testament foundations; it introduces a distinct perspective in order to articulate a mutuality between faith and politics; it underscores the importance of a Christology for a committed Christian in the revolutionary process; it leads to radical questions in ecclesiological matters. However, all this is but the initial planning. An experience of insertion into the liberating praxis is fundamental for this theological perspective. Hence a greater communication is necessary between those who are already determined in a revolutionary commitment but whose attempts are made from diverse situations. To this day, there have been few attempts to relate the theological perspectives which have risen in the committed Christian communities in Asia, Africa, to those of the racial and cultural minorities of the developed countries.[16] Our sketch of the Theology of Liberation would gain much from such a confrontation. Faith comes to

[15] There is, at present, a great effort to domesticate the Theology of Liberation, for example, by using its terms but emptied of their meaning, or by speaking of a noncommitted pluralism.

[16] Cf., for example, James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971), and Virgilio Elizondo, "A Theological Interpretation of the Mexican-American Experience," in *Introduction to Pastoral Theology* (San Antonio, Texas: Mexican-American Cultural Center, 1974), pp. 95-111.

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us through historical mediations. The theological task presupposes a critical examination of the forms in which the living of the faith has been translated throughout history and is being translated today into the political practice of Christians. To do otherwise is to remain at an abstract and ahistorical level and, thus, to betray the fundamental intuition from which the Theology of Liberation arises. Thus we would once again easily fall into new ideological utilizations of Christianity. This last aspect is not avoided simply by "magically" using the term liberation.

Definitively speaking, we will not have an authentic Theology of Liberation until the oppressed are able to express themselves freely and creatively both in society and in the People of God. In effect, this actual problematic arises from the critical reflection upon the liberating praxis by important and growing sectors who are in true solidarity with the interests and struggles of exploited social groups. In these sectors many people belong to popular classes, but if we consider the entire continent and in particular its most dispossessed people, we must say that the popular classes do not yet have a decisive and massive presence in the process of liberation. We are in front of a first impulse. We have made one step in this theological perspective. Gradual perfection is possible, necessary, and even urgent, but always is only an improvement of the first intuitions. For this reason it is necessary to understand that there will not be a real qualitative jump into another theological perspective, until the marginal and exploited persons become more and more the artisans of their own proper liberation, so that their voice will make itself heard directly and without mediation. This will come about when they can share with us their own appreciation and experience of the Lord in their very effort to liberate themselves. New perspectives will materialize when they give reason for hope in the total liberation in Christ of which they are the bearers for all persons. There will not be a distinct theological perspective until it arises from the social practice of the true Latin American people, of the people which has its earthly roots within the geography, the history, the indigenous race, and the culture, of a profound and today silent people.[17]

All this implies a historical process of vast proportions. If what we today call the Theology of Liberation can contribute to it and in this way open up the possibility of a new understanding of the faith, it will have accomplished its task of transition. As all theology, it is nothing more than the assumption of the consciousness which a Christian generation, in ecclesial communion, has of its faith in a given moment of history. This generation has just begun to break with the dominating system and to discover the "other" of the world in

[17] It is clear, for example, that the indigenous people and cultures of Latin America are not sufficiently represented in our efforts at theological reflection.

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which it still lives. In recent times it has begun to discover the presence of the Lord in the very heart of the Latin American people.

III. Towards a Church of the People

The insertion into the liberating process constitutes a profound and decisive spiritual experience in the very heart of the political commitment. That insertion, as we have already brought out, is the very matrix of the new way of doing theology. We are not simply applying old theological notions in new ways, but rather creating a new theology from the challenge and the necessity of living and thinking the faith in distinct socio-cultural categories. This has taken place at other times in the history of the Christian community. It always brings about fears and restlessness. But in our very search we are prompted to speak in our daily words, the word of the Lord.

Thus, we are speaking of a re-reading of the gospel message out of the liberating praxis. Theology operates as the mediator between a new way of living the faith and its communication. In effect, theology is a re-reading of the gospel. It is done in view of proclaiming the message.[18]

1. An Ecclesial Experience of Sonship and Brotherhood

Communication of Joy and Convoking in "Ecclesia"

To know that the Lord loves us, to appreciate the gratuitous gift of his love, is a profound fount of joy for one who lives from the word. To communicate that joy is to evangelize. To evangelize is to communicate the good news of the love of God who has changed our lives. I proclaim the good news in a certain gratuitous way, complementing his gratuitous love from which it originates. The point of departure of the evangelizing task always involves an experience of the Lord: a living out of the love of the Father which makes us sons and daughters and which transforms us, making us more fully men and women and brothers and sisters of other men and women.

To proclaim the gospel is to announce the mystery of filiation and of fraternity, the myste1 hidden from the beginning of time and revealed today in Christ.[19] Hence, to proclaim the gospel is to convoke in "ecclesia," it is to bring together in assembly. Only in community can the faith be lived in love, only in community can it be celebrated and deepened, only in community can it be lived in a unique gesture of fidelity to the Lord and in solidarity with

[18] Y. Congar has frequently underlined this tie between theology and announcement. See *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie* (Paris, 1967).

[19] "Being a child is *the* characteristic of the kingly rule . . .." J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York, 1971), pp. 180·181.

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all humanity. To accept the Word is to convert oneself to the Other in the others, and to live with them this Word. The Faith cannot be lived on a private or intimist level, the faith is the negation of any turning in upon oneself. In the very dynamism of the good news which reveals that we are sons and daughters of the Father and brothers and sisters amongst ourselves, there is the creation of a community which is a sign before humanity of the liberation of Christ.

To Evangelize from within the Solidarity with the Oppressed

This proclamation of the gospel which convokes "ecclesia" is made out of the real and active option of solidarity with the concerns and struggles of the poor, of the exploited classes, races, and cultures. To attempt to place oneself in their "place" signifies a radical rupture with the way of living, thinking, and communicating the faith in the community today. It demands a conversion to another world, a new understanding of the faith position, and brings with it a reformulation of the gospel message.[20]

In this reformulation, what has come to be known as the political dimension of the gospel, emerges with a new face. The fact that it is perceived with greater clarity than before makes clear that it is not simply something added from the outside to the gospel which somehow gives in to the pressures of the time. On the contrary it is a development which necessarily flows from the gospel itself. Hence, this dimension is accepted openly and without reservations. We must now clarify its exact extent and avoid all simplistic ways of looking at it. A *pretended* politicism can no longer obscure the evident reality and weaken a conviction which each day grows more firm.

The gift of sonship is lived in history. Making brothers and sisters of men and women we receive that gift not in word but indeed. ("It is not he who says Lord, Lord, who enters the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father.") To fight against all injustice, robbery, and exploitation, to commit oneself to the creation of a new society which is more fraternal and human, is to live the love of the Father and to give witness to it. The proclamation of a God who loves all men in the same way must be embodied in history, it must make itself history. To proclaim that love in a society which is profoundly unequal, marked by injustice and the exploitation of one social class by another, will convert that "making itself history" into something which will be both interpolating and conflictual. Because of this, we have said that the political dimension is the very dynamism of a Word which seeks to incarnate itself in history. The demands of the gospel are incompatible with the social situation which is lived in Latin America and with the forms in which the relations among men have taken, with the structures in which such relations exist.

[20] See H. Cazelles, *Ecriture, Parole et Esprit* (Paris, 1970), p. 76.

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But it is not a matter of rejecting this or that individual injustice. We find ourselves faced with the demands of a distinctively new social order. Only a certain degree of political maturity will permit a true understanding of the political dimension of the gospel and will keep us from reducing it to a "helping out attitude" (no matter how sophisticated it may be) or to a simple task of "human development." This political maturity will also eliminate any substitution of evangelical activity for political action, which has its own proper laws and demands.

The proclamation of the love of God and the fellowship and radical equality of all men, including the exploited, will make us realize that this situation is contrary to the gospel and will help us to come to a consciousness of the profound injustice of the state of things. The oppressed sectors will not acquire a clear political consciousness except by participation in their particular struggles; but the global and complex political process which breaks with the oppressing social order and leads to a society without classes is also an important struggle. So is the ideological struggle. In contemporary Latin America it must be admitted that: "the Christian" too often holds a place within the dominant ideology which buttresses and affirms a capitalistic society divided into social classes. Frequently, conservative sectors appeal to Christian principles to justify a social order which serves only their own interests and maintains their privileges. This is one of the great lies of our Latin American society. Hence, the communication of the message re-read from the world of the other, the oppressed, will have the task of unmasking any intention of ideologically appropriating the gospel to justify a situation contrary to the most elementary demands of the gospel.

2. The Evangelical Task

A Liberating Evangelization

Are we in a time of political "reductionism" of the gospel? The answer is yes for those who use the gospel in the service of the powerful; the answer is no for those who are moved by the gospel, experienced as a gratuitous and liberating message, to denounce that type of use. Yes, for those who put it and put themselves in the hands of the great powers of this world; no, for those who identify themselves with the poor Christ seeking solidarity with the dispossessed of the continent. Yes, for the ones who maintain the gospel as a prisoner of an ideology serving the capitalist system; no, for those who are freed by the gospel and in turn try to free it from any slavery. Yes, for those who want to neutralize the liberation of Christ reducing it to a religious state tangential to the concrete world of men; no, for those who believe that the salvation of Christ is so total that nothing escapes it. For these latter the

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evangelization is liberating because it announces a total liberation in Christ which includes a transformation of the historical and political conditions in which humanity lives, but which also leads this same history beyond itself to a fullness which is beyond any predictable expectations and any foreseeable human undertaking.

Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves, if in wanting to escape an ideological utilization of Christianity we do not fall into another such utilization. The danger exists; denying it would be ingenuous and dishonest. It is necessary to be attentive to this risk. The re-reading of the gospel from a stance of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed permits us to denounce the appropriation that the rich and powerful have made of the gospel in service of their own interest. However, we will not have reached the ultimate consequences of such denunciation if we are not conscious of the ever-critical and creative character of the liberating message of the gospel. The gospel message does not identify itself with any social form, no matter how just it might seem to us in a given moment. It always speaks from the stance of the poor and asks of us a very concrete solidarity in our own present situation. It demands that we activate our capacity to analyze our situation, even at the risk of being mistaken. The Word of the Lord interprets every situation and situates it in a wider perspective of the radical liberation by Christ the Lord of History. Our understanding of the Word of the Lord constantly renews itself through the necessary historical praxis of liberation. The danger of again falling into an ideology justifying some determined social situation is inevitable when the gospel is not *lived* as the Word of a Father who loves us in a free and gratuitous manner, with a love which renews the face of the earth and which constantly calls us to a new life in his Son, with a love which impedes our separating the gift of sonship from our solidarity with the poor and with all persons exploited by other persons.

To become aware of the political dimension of the gospel's announcement is not to reduce the gospel only to that, but, on the contrary, to understand better the originality of that task. In spite of deplorable misunderstandings, many people have thereby rediscovered the means of evangelization, and are providing practical expertise in the creation of Christian communities. The evangelical task demands effort and consecration. This work has also its own exigencies and scope. But perhaps we are able to perceive more clearly than to announce the free and gratuitous love of the Lord, changing the present history.

However, if the persons to whom the gospel is proclaimed are not abstract and apolitical beings, but members of a society marked by injustice and by the exploitation of some by others who belong to the Christian community, to which in one way or another the bulk of exploiters belong, the message proclaimed is not an ahistorical reality. The past and present of the gospel

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message are strictly linked to the history of the exploited people. Without an historical perspective it is not possible to understand what evangelization can mean to a people today, a people to whom the gospel has been already announced and forms in one way or another a part of their life.[21] From another standpoint, without taking into account the situation of a Church linked to the existent social order, one cannot perceive what the liberating character of evangelization implies.

Such historical and political conditions need to be analyzed in order to make more concrete the focus of the proclamation of the gospel message in the Latin American situation. We will thereby concretize the living of the faith in political action and mark with greater precision the relationship between a traditional theology and any attempt at understanding the faith through liberating praxis. We thus avoid idealistic plans and false theories that do not *grab hold of* reality.

The incarnation of the gospel in past and present Latin American history already reveals the limits and the possibilities of the present proclamation of the gospel, and permits some foresight of the conflicts that the gospel will confront. Cases such as Henrique Pereira Neto, Nestor Paz, Hector Gallego, to mention only the more recently known names, are examples. Others, still alive, are tortured and maligned in the name of "Christian Western civilization." They and many more try to give testimony of their faith on unmarked roads, beyond the channels acceptable to the powerful of the continent. In the channels of the powerful the gospel is made into a functional support of the oppressive social order and culture that is lived in Latin America. All dissidence is punished by those who hold the power, which is often fervently justified by those who call themselves Christians. We have put our finger on what we said at the beginning, the insertion into the liberating process marks a dividing line, two experiences, two times, two worlds, two languages.

Popular Classes and the People of God

The gospel proclaimed from a stance of identification with the poor brings together a Church in solidarity with the popular classes of the continent. It has solidarity with their aspirations and their struggles by being present in the history of Latin America. It expresses solidarity with the abolition of a society constructed by a few and for a few, and with the building of a distinct social order, more just and more human for all.

[21] See the work of Enrique Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en America Latina* (Barcelona, 1972).

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This leads us to the fact of ruptures and reorientations in today's Church.[22] Such would not be fertile and life-giving if they only expressed personal anguish, crisis of identity, emotional reaction and impatience, even though legitimate, or, as sometimes happens, quests for personal fulfillment which do not take others into account. On that road one finds only defensive attitudes, blind authoritative measures, and gestures inspired by fear and by a desire for security. And thus an interminable spiral of internal ecclesial struggles begins. If the ruptures from real impatience are truly radical they ought to go to the roots, and the root is beyond any strict, narrow, ecclesiastical environment. The root consists in creating the way of being human and being Christian in the present reality of Latin America. It is evidenced by identification with the oppressed classes on this continent of injustice and dispossession, and also in the aspiration of liberation and of hope which is also part of Latin America. This presupposes new experiences and new modes of evangelization in the coming together as "Church." It presupposes new ways of being present in the popular world beyond all institutional rigidity. We must be able to listen to a voice different from the one we are accustomed to hearing in the Church. We must develop a critical perception of the social and cultural categories that imprison our way of living and announcing the gospel. They make it strange to the world of the oppressed masses and even contrary to its profound aspirations of liberation.[23] A truly radical eruption also presupposes an authentic search for the Lord in its encounter with the poor, as well as a lucid explicitation of what that spiritual experience signifies.

In this perspective we are talking about the creation of Christian communities in which the private owners of the goods of this world cease to be the owners of the gospel. Such "rebellious communities" as they were premonitiously called[24] are communities in which the dispossessed can realize a *social appropriation of the gospel*; groups which announce prophetically a creative and critical church entirely at the service of persons who fight to be persons. Many seek to be persons in a way understood only with difficulty by the old world in which the Word has been and still is lived, taught, and announced. Only by taking root in the marginalized and exploited classes and cultures, or rather, by emerging from them, from their aspirations, their interests, their struggles,

[22] See the recent and courageous observations of K. Rahner on the construction of Church from the people *in The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

[23] If the base ecclesial community (CEB) does not place itself in this framework, it risks becoming a form of evasion from conflictual history.

[24] Cf. Gonzalo Arroyo, "Rebeldia cristiana y compromiso communitario," *Mensaje* 167 (1968), pp. 78-83. This article marks the genesis of many experiences and reflections in Latin America.

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and their cultural categories, will a People of God be formed that is a Church of the people, a Church that makes the gospel message heard by all persons and that is a sign of liberation, of the liberation of the Lord of history.

None of this would make sense, nor would we even be able to have a glimpse of it, if it had not already been sketched, even though timidly, in the attempts that we can see in various parts of the continent. These attempts have as their point of departure an insertion of growing numbers of Christians—workers, professionals, farmworkers, bishops, students, priests, into the process of liberation in Latin America. Their initial insertion must deepen itself by recognizing oversimplifications and grappling with further implications. It must become critical of every oversimplifying political process which does not respect all the dimensions of personhood. It must grow in such a way that the voice of popular Christian sectors can always be heard on their own terms. Such a process of insertion is difficult and advances at times through sandy terrain, finding resistance and hostility in those, Christians or not, who are tied to the old order of things. It is real commitment which gradually reveals its fertility for the revolutionary option and for a re-reading of the gospel.

The times do not permit an attitude of euphoria. The system has already proven its tenacity and its capacity to oppress or to domesticate attempts at renewal. In Christian environments there are clear figments of resistance which have to be overcome so that the restless message of the liberation of the gospel can arise. Today, the spirituality of the exile is more important in Latin America than that inspired by the paschal experience of the exodus. The joy of the Resurrection requires in many ways the death on the cross. But the experience which popular movements have accumulated in their struggles, and in their desire to construct a society which is different, begets energies which authorize and sustain vigilance and action. On the other hand, renewed fidelity to the Lord of history spreads in terms of actualized commitment since there are thus always more Christians who by their experience comprehend that the only way to receive the free gift of friendship is by becoming brothers and sisters and thereby making brothers and sisters of all humans. Such fidelity creates itself in the historical and political conditions of the continent from the stance of the world of the other, the poor, the exploited.

Furthermore, the hope is for all time. The situation in which we live today in Latin America perhaps makes us live and understand in a new way what Paul called: "hope against hope."

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