

Liberation of Theology

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minimize but not reject the fact of slavery in the novel light of Christ (e.g., Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 7:21-22; 12:13; Gal. 3:28).

10. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Eng. trans. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), Chapter 11.

11. One reason of utmost importance should be noted. Any liberation process—e.g., political liberation—would have concrete historical limitations of its very nature. That fact would have seriously diminished the universality of Christ's message about total liberation, applicable to all human beings and all phases of human existence. To be sure, it is impossible to *talk* about liberation without implementing some concrete forms of liberation if one wants to be credible to others. Jesus submitted to this basic law. But the obligation of summoning human beings to a universal liberation while bearing real witness to some concrete liberation is what explains the curious dialectic in Jesus' life. He first points up the concrete liberations he is effecting, only to try to draw people's attention away from them later in order to emphasize a broader and more profound message. That, in my opinion, is the proper explanation of the so-called "messianic secret" in Mark. The explanation of liberal exegesis is incorrect.

12. The most profound and scholarly effort in this direction is, in my opinion, that of Severino Croatto, *Liberación y libertad. Pautas hermenéuticas* (Buenos Aires: Nuevo Mundo, 1973).

13. See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Eng. trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), II, Part II.

14. See Chapter I, p. 26.

15. See Chapter I, p. 32.

16. On this process of *deutero-learning* on different scientific levels, see Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), especially Parts II, V, and VI.

Ideologies—Church—Eschatology

As is often the case, the problems one thinks have been tamed at one point suddenly rear their heads and turn against one at a later point. Presumably the previous chapter has made clear a seemingly paradoxical situation: on the one hand it is impossible for human beings to get beyond the level of ideologies, all ideologies being partial and provisional; on the other hand faith, as a second-level learning process, clearly transcends particular and specific ideologies.

In my opinion it is most important that this basic tension be maintained in all that follows here. With faith or without it, we are all faced with new and unforeseen situations to which we must respond. Our potential responses are limited by our situation and our historical potentialities, and so they will always be partial in one way or another. In short, they will be ideologies. By the same token, however, human beings are capable of facing up to concrete historical situations without letting themselves be borne along by a chaotic flood of relativistic impressions. Learning to learn in and through historical experience is characteristic of man. A series of privileged historical experiences, such as those which go to make up our Scriptures,¹ only accentuate this deutero-learning process in man. Man does possess an objective capacity to formulate and confront ever new questions without being disoriented and dragged down by the novelty of the situation or being driven to retreat to the security of past beliefs and the status quo.

On the secular level it is obvious that this deutero-learning process requires some sort of community. This is even more true of the faith. The use of a specific tradition of faith, which is bound up with the interpretation of a privileged nucleus of historical experiences, requires a community. We call this community of faith "the Church." So the next question is: How capable is the Church of permanently living out the tension between the dynamic unity of faith on the one hand and the historical plurality of the ideologies to which faith gives rise on the other hand? Can the Church keep this revelatory process going without burst-

ing into pieces, since it will take countless ideologies to make the faith a reality within history?

We can see readily enough that every ideology seems to go through a similar process in history. It begins as a protest against the limitations and ineffectiveness of a prior ideology and it ends up as a crusty refusal to give way to some newer ideology that is on the rise. It is difficult for ideologies to operate in history at all without giving rise to excessive hopes. And precisely because they are excessive, those hopes eventually harden into stubbornness and historical oppression.

Consider the Christian notion of *eschatology*, for example, which points to a transcendence of anything and everything in history. It would seem that this notion, linked up with the function of the Church, would be destined to keep de-ideologizing the human mind, to keep it open and flexible, to liberate it from its ahistorical pretensions. Yet there is reason to believe that this continuing function of de-ideologizing may in fact oppress our ideological creativity. Why? Because it wields the sword of criticism even before ideologies have time to be effective and to arouse real enthusiasm.

That this is a serious problem for liberation theology is evident from the fact that most of the attacks against it stem from a specific conception of the Church and its function as well as from a specific conception of eschatology, that is, of what God is fashioning above and beyond the reaches of history. These are the issues that we shall consider in detail in this chapter.

1. THE ANTI-IDEOLOGICAL STANCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

It can be said that the Catholic Church in Latin America was the first Catholic community to set out resolutely on the new pathway opened up by Vatican II. The new pathway was based on the assumption that faith has as its function the task of guiding the human mind towards more fully human solutions in history; that the Church does not possess those solutions in advance but does possess elements that have been revealed by God; that these revealed elements do not preserve the Church from ideologies; that instead the Church must take advantage of those elements to go out in search of (ideological) solutions to the problems posed by the historical process; and that such solutions will always remain provisional. The Medellín Conference was the first result of the new pathway opened up by Vatican II, embodying the enthusiasm of the early postconciliar days.

It might seem curious that a church community which had little to do with the preparations for Vatican II should be the first to draw radical consequences from the proceedings of the ecumenical council. Indeed

one can detect more than a little ecclesiastical "imprudence" in the documents of the Medellín Conference. To phrase it in terms of Rahner's remark in an earlier chapter, at the Medellín Conference the Latin American Church took the risk of being proved wrong and refuted by experts. For it got down to sociological descriptions that specialists might well challenge as extreme, ill-founded, or even erroneous. How could any Church presume to lead all Christians on one pathway, a pathway not based entirely on faith, when some Christians are specialists in the very matters under discussion and other Christians can readily look to them for support or for refutation of the proposed position?

It would be difficult to explain the "imprudence" of Medellín if one did not keep an important and perhaps decisive sociological datum in mind. As opposed to the more or less competitive situation of the Church on other continents, the Latin American Church is supremely sure of its membership. Despite dire problems and predictions, and in a society that is urban for the most part, more than ninety percent of all Latin Americans still call themselves "Catholics." This fact can prompt imprudent calculations based on euphoria.

Needless to say, the "imprudence" to which I am alluding here does not consist in intermingling faith and ideologies. That the Church has always done. Indeed it cannot do anything else, if our analysis so far is correct. The difference lies in the position of the Medellín Conference vis-à-vis the status quo. In the past the Church adopted ideologies that were immersed in the status quo, and so they passed for just plain common sense instead of ideologies. At Medellín the bishops adopted ideologies that went counter to the status quo. This enabled a large number of Christians to perceive the intermingling of faith and ideology for the first time; and since they did not agree with the mix, they denounced it.

At the same time, however, it must be remembered that for some time back pastoral forecasts and evaluations had been growing more prudent and even pessimistic in certain Latin American circles. It had been growing clearer to many that the religious situation of the continent was changing at an accelerating pace, and sociologists brought forth convincing arguments to that effect. At least half of the Latin American population was now living in a modern urban civilization, and that clearly undermined the main tool that had been used for centuries to transmit the faith: i.e., the pressure of closed, wholly Christian communities. With the disappearance of such communities in an increasingly urban society, the Church could no longer entrust to society the task of transmitting Christianity from one generation to the next. One could hardly continue to talk about a "Christian milieu," since it certainly

was not "Christian" any longer and probably was no longer a "milieu" in the strict sense.

If it is a matter of transmitting an authentic conception of life from one generation to the next, rather than just some vague sentiments, then a milieu must possess a certain homogeneity and a certain persuasive power. It can only do this if it remains closed to outside influences. That is no longer possible for any "milieu" in Latin America today. For they are all subject to the impact of mass migrations, the mass communications media, and a pluralistic hodgepodge of ideologies and values. In such a situation the Christianity handed down to people is totally different from the Christianity handed down in a closed milieu. In the latter, Christianity signifies a coherent picture of the world, of ultimate values and social roles, of personal conduct and the guiding rules. In open milieus, on the other hand, Christianity comes down to a vague sense of membership.

The census figures and other sociological data bear witness to the change that has taken place in Latin America. Mass attendance and reception of the sacraments no longer reflect a Christian orientation in people's lives. Various motives, tied up with the human search for security to a greater or lesser extent, continue to bring people to Mass and the sacraments. But their conception of life may have little or nothing to do with the Mass. Instead it may be fashioned to a large extent by such factors as television and social roles. Almost without anyone noticing it, a rapid change has taken place in the various milieus of Latin America. They have ceased to transmit Christianity from one generation to the next.

What is more, one cannot possibly envision reconstructing the pressure that was once exerted by a Christian milieu. For such pressure does not depend on a more or less strict morality but on socio-economic factors that are impervious to preaching. One cannot expect parents and educators to provide something which they obviously cannot provide. In such a situation we can detect a note of phoniness and desperation when we hear remarks such as those of the Filipino bishops: "The religious fervor of the Filipino people is a rich treasure. *Even though the underlying motivations are not always clear*, (religious) practice suggests that our people are open to God."

Once we manage to work our way out of a trap like that, we must recognize that the Church, even in Latin America, is faced with a tremendous challenge. It must stop relying on the surrounding milieu and start transmitting the gospel message to *each individual person*. As the Belgian sociologist, Kerkhof, puts it: we are faced with "voluntary con-

sumers of religion." We can no longer convince persons through their milieu, we must reach the person themselves.

Now the main pastoral discovery in connection with these changing concerns and milieus is that the potential consumers of religion are much more interested in viable ideologies than in the faith. Indeed it could almost be said that it is only when ideologies systematically fail that people begin to show an interest in something that transcends ideologies and might offer better guidance: i.e., something like faith. So long as the ideologies function well, the allure of faith on the individual is extremely weak. So must we hope for an *ideological crisis*, so that the *faith* can take on meaningfulness and we can carry out the task of evangelization in the new terms posed by the new sociological situation?

This question brings us very close to the heart of the central problem pondered by Bonhoeffer in prison. Indeed the terms in which we have presented the problem here may be more accurate than those employed by Bonhoeffer himself, and more faithful to his underlying thought. If, as Bonhoeffer thought, we must refuse to take advantage of human frailty, crises, illnesses, and death in order to make people religious, then we must become capable of proclaiming the faith to people who are in the very midst of the process of creation. But that does not mean we delude people by disguising the language of faith under a secular idiom, as many current interpretations of Bonhoeffer's thought would have it.

The solution proposed here is that we let the faith be fleshed out in human, provisional ideologies. In this way it will not be a "cheap faith" that has been devalued by the existing crisis. When all is said and done, we encounter one fact in the Gospels to which current exegesis and biblical theology have not paid sufficient attention. The fact is that Jesus began to preach his message by uttering the magic word "kingdom." For us that word can only have a "metaphorical" and hence purely "religious" import; and so we forget that it was an ideologically explosive term in Jesus' day.

Jesus was well aware of that fact. He was conscious of the ambiguity that the ideology of the kingdom would confer on his message, and he may well have been aware of the danger such ambiguity held for himself. But he also realized that he could never demand faith from people if he addressed them in neutral, antiseptic terms: that he could not demand faith from people independently of the ideologies conveyed by faith—which is what we so often have tried to do.

If we want to gauge the difference between Jesus' attitude and that of the present-day Church, Chile will again serve as a fine example. When the coalition of socialist groups known as the Popular Unity Front came

to power, that did not clear up the political scene in Chile. On the one hand there could be no legitimate doubt about their accession to executive power, even though they had received only a little more than one-third of the vote. Since the other two parties had not formed a united front against the Popular Unity Front, they were implicitly saying that they did not consider it of *primary importance* to block the implementation of the goals spelled out in Allende's platform. So it is definitely false to say that the minority nature of Allende's government, as opposed to the supposed majority of the other two parties, represented a political distortion. On the other hand, another fact must be kept in mind. While it is certainly true that the Popular Unity Front had committed itself to leading Chile towards socialism by legal means, the fact is that the structures of Chile continued to remain capitalist and that the executive branch could not effect the envisioned changes by itself. It would have to get absolute majorities in parliament. That could happen, at least in the initial stages, if the Christian Democratic Party (which was composed of Catholics for the most part) came to feel that it had more affinities with the construction of a socialist society than with the extreme right. Hence the political judgment made by Christians would prove to be decisive in spelling out Chile's future.

This critical judgment could be gradually influenced by another factor. On various occasions, and especially in the early sixties, the bishops of Chile had denounced the profound injustice of the established capitalist system. Using official statistics, they pointed out a host of unpleasant facts: e.g., that ninety percent of the national income was distributed among only ten percent of the population. Whereas the per capita income of the vast majority came to about forty-five dollars a year, the privileged ten percent of the population had an annual per capita income of \$3,500.

Ten years later, then, the bishops of Chile were confronted with the new political situation we have just described. The political judgment of Christians would be a decisive and critical factor. What did the bishops do? During the first year of Allende's presidency, when many of the disturbing factors that would later show up had not yet appeared on the scene, the bishops issued a draft document entitled *Evangelio, política y socialismos* ("The Gospel Message, Politics, and Brands of Socialism"). Here I cannot give a full-length summary of that document, which is a history-making document in the relationship between faith and ideologies in the Latin American Church. But I do want to point up one important and curious fact which seems to have eluded the attention of the document's authors: on the one hand the document asserts that the Church cannot opt or choose sides, on the other hand it says that in

Chile socialism is not a real alternative to the existing capitalist system.² The explanation for this curious contradiction has a great deal to do with the relationship between faith and ideologies.

Why can't the Church choose sides? According to the Chilean bishops, it cannot do that because in practice it would mean excluding from the Church that portion of Christians who had opted for the other side. But in their view the Church belongs to all the people of Chile. In other words, to use our terminology, it means that the one faith must not be put in the service of ideologies, which are many and varied by very definition.

This is a very important point because it contains some critical underlying assumptions. Firstly, it is an admission that ideologies are in fact more appealing than the faith to the Christian people, even though they should not be. Indeed they are so appealing that they would separate a good portion of the faithful from the *practice* of the faith at least. Thus on the one hand the bishops are stating what ought to be: the faith that unites us is more important than the ideologies that divide us. On the other hand they are admitting that this is not the real-life feeling and disposition of Christians. Secondly, it presupposes a theological conception of the faith in which faith itself is the most important thing, quite aside from any and all ideological options one may make out of fidelity to that faith. But we are quite justified in asking: Why is it more important? I do not think any answer to that question can be found in the guidelines laid down by Vatican II, which suggest that the function of faith is to lead the human mind to fully human solutions. The implications of those guidelines are that the importance of the faith lies precisely in its connection with the different and even opposed solutions that are offered for our problems in history. So we have every right to assume that the Chilean bishops, despite the guidelines of Vatican II, continue to picture the faith as a direct means of eternal salvation whereas ideologies are seen as merely human options that can jeopardize that other superior value.

But as I suggested earlier, the most noteworthy and important point seems to be that the bishops, who claim they cannot choose sides, come out and say that socialism cannot be an alternative to the existing capitalist system, as things now stand in Chile. We are perfectly justified in asking: By what curious mental process did the bishops convince themselves that they were not choosing sides when they made that statement?

Remember that the Chilean bishops start out maintaining that it is not possible for the Church to choose between *ideologies*. It does not occur to them to deny that the *faith* is an option. What they say is that the

option of faith should be divested of any and every element which is not the faith itself. In other words, no ideological option should condition the option of faith in any way. But right after they have said that the Church cannot opt for one (ideological) group against another, they go on to say: "The Church opts for the risen Christ." In the context it might sound a little odd, but actually it makes perfect sense in terms of their conception of faith. In their eyes, opting for the risen Christ comes down to making one possible option between the nooks and crannies of any and every ideology.

But how is it that the bishops end up opting for the capitalist ideology as opposed to the socialist ideology? The answer is obvious enough. In saying that socialism is not an acceptable alternative to the existing capitalist system, the bishops are not at all aware of the fact that they are choosing between ideologies. Strange as it may seem to us, they think that they are avoiding an ideological option in saying that.

The mental process at work here is clear enough. In the eyes of the bishops, the existing reality is not an ideology; it is simply reality. They have no doubt that it should be corrected but, as they see it, reality as such does not splinter the faith. So long as no ideologies about this *reality* arise, faith has nothing to fear from the *fact* that extremely wealthy human beings live alongside extremely poor human beings. The problem arises when an *ideology* challenges this *reality*. The great sin of "Christians for Socialism," in other words, is that there is no party of "Christians for Capitalism." Of course such people exist, but they do not have to join together under a banner to exercise their influence and carry out their program. But any attempt to put through a radical change in the existing structures must present itself as an *ideology*. It must knock on the door of the Christian heart and appeal to its relationship with the authentic values of the faith.

We must understand the language of the Chilean bishops in order to understand and appreciate their mentality and their theology. In saying that socialism is not a proper alternative to capitalism, they are not saying that socialist Christians are heretics. They are perfectly capable of remaining Christians in spite of their mistake, because it is a practical not a dogmatic mistake. But they should admit that the existing reality is sufficient for the faith. If they do not admit that, then they are relativizing the faith by imposing a condition on it: i.e., that the existing structures be changed, that people accept an ideology proposing such change. The episcopal document summons Christians to maintain a certain brand of prudent reserve. They must recognize the fact that the really important and decisive thing, faith, is possible in any and every set

of circumstances. And since it is the decisive thing, it cannot be subordinated to those circumstances and their attendant ideologies.

That this is the great sin of an ideology is evident from the way in which the Chilean bishops analyze the *socialist* ideology. The various steps in their analysis are quite clear. Firstly, in any journey towards socialism Christians will be a minority and the socialist ideology must be given its proper label: i.e., *Marxist*. The second step is to take the feature of Marxism which seems to be most directly connected with the Christian faith—that is, *atheism*—and link it up with all the historical defects and dehumanizing elements that are evident in those societies where Marxism has triumphed so far. It does not seem to strike the bishops that they have often denounced the same dehumanizing elements in capitalist society without making any reference to its atheism or its religiosity. And it is worth noting that the elements overlooked in their analysis are precisely those elements which link up faith with ideologies.

For example, they overlook the obligation of the Christian faith to put through a substantive change in the distribution of the national income—something which they had often stressed in their earlier documents. They also overlook the official doctrine of the Church which was expounded by John XXIII, to the effect that Christian faith should not view ideologies as dogmatic monoliths; that it should evaluate them in terms of their historical embodiments and the changes produced by real-life implementation. Thus they also overlook the fact that Marxism is not an ideology that subordinates society to atheism but rather an ideology that subordinates atheism to the construction of a more just society. In that sense Marxism poses a real challenge to the Christian faith, which claims to have the same commitment: i.e., to subordinate the Sabbath to man, and the faith to the solution of historical problems.

II. THE ANTI-IDEOLOGICAL STANCE IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

From what we have seen in the last section, it seems evident that a vicious circle threatens the whole pastoral function of the Catholic Church in Latin America. There is a growing recognition that opting for the faith must be a free, personal option. It cannot be brought about by the surrounding milieu. But this realization leads to panic when it becomes evident that people are really interested in the ideologies associated with faith. What are we to do? The most typical answer is to attempt to set aside the ideologies that divide people and to stress the importance of the faith that unites them. But that comes down to giving the faith an autonomous value of its own, wholly apart from the ideologies it is capable of generating. The value of such a faith becomes very

hard to recognize. How can one transmit the faith of the gospel message and point up its value when it has lost the cutting edge that Jesus gave to it? When it no longer pierces through the most intimate interpersonal relationships, *dividing* people with the closest ties and making them enemies (Matt. 10:34-36)?

Our analysis of the document produced by the Chilean bishops seems to indicate that it is not easy to pinpoint the ideological mechanisms at work underneath the statements of the Latin American hierarchy. They seem to be embarrassed by the new guidelines spelled out by Vatican II and their own Medellín Conference. The case of Vatican II is complicated by the fact that its documents do not present one homogeneous line of thought. One can look to it for support as well in defending the older view of faith as an autonomous value. Consider this statement: "Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 42). In setting a "religious" mission over against political, economic, and social functions, the statement would seem to be suggesting that we are dealing here not only with different *functions* but also with different *values*. Thus it has not been easy for the Catholic Church to move through the postconciliar world, for one can find at least two opposing views of faith within the very documents of Vatican II. The whole question is somewhat obscure even on the level of official documents.

For that reason, we might profit considerably from an examination of some Protestant viewpoints on this matter. The Protestant Churches are caught up in the same process which now confronts the Catholic Church. But they often feel less inhibited by authority in their attempt to explicate their basic underlying arguments on this whole matter when they take a stand against liberation theology. And their remarks may well give us a clue to the real bedrock outlook underlying opposition statements from the Catholic hierarchy, an outlook that often seems to be disguised somewhat.

A recent book by C. Peter Wagner will serve as a fine starting point.³ It is simplistic and naive in certain respects, but it has the great value of presenting certain Protestant objections to liberation theology in a very straightforward and honest way. Wagner views liberation theology in Latin America as the "theology of the radical left." This is how he sees the crucial problem: "The important issue is not really whether a Christian can hold a Marxist-oriented political ideology or not. The issue is whether Christianity obliges a man set free in Christ to hold to *any predetermined* [author's italics too] ideology at all. The Christian world view transcends all social, economic, and political systems. As long as a

Christian's goals in his relationship to the world are noble and held with a clean conscience, he should be allowed to choose the political means to reach the goals that he feels are best without his very Christianity being called into question. This applies equally to the capitalist and the socialist, the pacifist and the violent revolutionary."⁴

The key problem for Wagner is clearly the transcendence of the faith vis-à-vis ideologies. He makes that point clear, not only in the abstract, but also as a criticism of liberation theology. With the latter, he notes, "we come dangerously close to depriving Christianity of its transcendence and making it just another social institution."⁵ Wagner does not impute that intention to any of the theologians whose work he analyzes, but he suggests that they will inevitably end up doing that, whether they want to or not, because it is the logical conclusion of the methodological premises they hold.

In support of his own position, Wagner cites Gonzalo Castillo Cárdenas talking about "the temptation to identify the Gospel and the Church, implicitly or explicitly with a given revolutionary program which she sees as indispensable for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth . . . I am under the impression that some of the brethren in Cuba fell into that error and now have repented of it." Wagner then goes on to say: "Castillo's conclusion is one to which evangelicals could confidently subscribe. He says, 'The Church has no right to deny her own nature, her divine message, *by identifying herself* with any human program of social transformation.'"⁶

It may well be that none of the authors studied by Wagner propound any such *identification*, but the very ambiguity of the word itself can add to the confusion here. The theological context of the authors examined by Wagner indicates that none of them are thinking of *identification* in the sense that they would establish a hard and fast tie-up between the Christian message and a given program or system—come what way. If, on the other hand, *identification* means "critical support" in this context, then the whole matter is open to debate and discussion. But whatever the outcome of that debate might be, it is clear that there is no sense to the argument that one is thereby losing the transcendence of Christianity; for the critical nature of the support derives precisely from that transcendence.

However, that is not the most interesting and noteworthy feature of Wagner's critique of liberation theology, and in particular, of his conception of the relationship between faith and ideology. The most noteworthy point shows up in six *ecclesiological* points which Wagner detects in the Bible. They bring us directly to the matter we are considering here: i.e., the relationship between ideology and the function of the Church.

1. The function of the Church is the *individual reconciliation* of all human beings with God. Criticizing an issue of the *International Review of Mission*, Wagner says: "Expressions such as 'relate to the Latin American context,' 'stimulate interest in the study of Christian social responsibility,' 'undergird involvement in mission by means of studies related to the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the context,' 'express the growing sense of ecumenical commitment which is inseparably related to the task of mission,' 'awaken the masses,' 'point out the roots of the evils in the Latin American socio-economic-political situation,' 'struggle to remove the principal causes of massive injustice,' all are good statements, but the mission of the church—which is to *persuade men and women to be reconciled individually to God* and to become responsible members of the church of Christ—is not further mentioned."⁷

2. Among the different functions of the Church, priority goes to *the salvation of souls*. Promoting social justice is important but secondary. The "theology of the radical left" has turned this proper order upside down: "They judge evangelical theology not in terms of how true it is to the Bible or how it will result in *the salvation of souls*, but what it will do to promote social justice."⁸ For Wagner, moreover, the secondary function is not achieved apart from the primary function. Indeed it is a direct result of the latter: conversion of the individual not only procures his salvation but also brings about more justice without attacking any structures. Criticizing the theology of Emilio Castro, Wagner says: "In some of his writings, he seems to have an aversion to a soul-saving ministry. He criticizes his opponents' hypothesis that 'if we change the heart of man, the society will also change,' by asserting that 'No such thing as the heart of man exists.'"⁹

3. The work of Christ is reduced to his activity through the gospel message *within the Church*. In criticizing the thinking of José Míguez Bonino, he first offers this summary of it: "The task of participating in the work of redemption involves not only preaching the Gospel, but 'participating in the work of Jesus Christ who works in the world creating peace and order, justice and liberty, dignity and community.'" Wagner comments: "This reference to the work of Christ in the world is perhaps one of Míguez's most serious departures from Biblical teaching. One searches the Scriptures in vain to find a commandment that would have Christians move into the world with this kind of mission."¹⁰

4. The *unity of the Church* and membership in it is more important than any socio-economic-political option. In commenting on the conclusions of the First Evangelical Consultation in Church and Society (held in Huampaní, Peru in 1961), Wagner presents a counter-argument that

seems to mirror that of Rahner and the Chilean bishops: "Even under the generous assumption that the church as an institution would possess the technical competence to judge the world's socio-economic situation accurately, not even the most convinced optimist would suppose that the church could bring its members to agree to one single political point of view as a possible remedy."¹¹ He then goes on to say: "But as Per Lonning asks, 'Can a Christian who chooses a particular historical option claim that this is the option Christ makes?' Nothing could stand as a clearer warning of the possibility that the passion for social action can become such a strong drive that it inverts Biblical priorities. 'Fear and trembling' should characterize Christians not in relationship to the risk of jumping into ambiguous worldly situations, but in relationship to the possibility of *failing to make the offer of salvation available to mankind*."¹²

5. The "theology of the radical left" does not take into account the *dualism* of the Bible and, in particular, the *negative supernatural forces* that rule this world. Criticizing Rubem Alves, he says: "Alves does not seem much disturbed by the haunting contradiction in a philosophy of history that indicates that for at least twenty centuries God has been hard at work trying to 'humanize mankind,' but apparently with little success. Two world wars, Korea, Hungary, Viet Nam, Biafra, Czechoslovakia—all are dirty smudges on the twentieth-century world's canvas . . . Alves' exposition of the 'forces that oppose the action of God' does not come to grips with the Biblical concept of a temporal dualism in which the supernatural forces of evil play a sinister and important part. He rather searches for *natural* causes of evil."¹³

6. Finally, according to Wagner, there is no *universal promise or plan of salvation*. The only salvation around operates through evangelism and individual conversion. In this connection Wagner criticizes the views of Emilio Castro and Richard Shaull. Castro, he says, "approaches the heart of the issue by asking: 'What is the final destiny of those who die without having known the name of Christ?' but he never satisfactorily answers the question he raises. He does hint, however, that we need not be too concerned, for 'in the New Testament and in the Old Testament there are clear indications for us to affirm that the plan of God in Jesus Christ incorporates all humanity.'"¹⁴ Of course Wagner does not agree with Castro, but his position will be clearer if we first see his criticism of Shaull. Shaull himself writes: "We can no longer think exclusively in terms of rescuing lost pagans from the imminent flames of hell. The missionary today may not have too great an opportunity for direct evangelism though his work is no less important for the proclamation of the Gospel. And most of us do not feel that we do justice to the Biblical

faith if we limit it to providing people with an entrance ticket to heaven."¹⁵ Here is Wagner's comment: "With this rejection of the eschatological urgency of the mission of the church in the world, Shaull makes a decisive break from evangelical theology. It is quite remarkable that he feels that by rejecting the *urgency of saving people from hell* he is being faithful to the Bible. One wonders if Bonhoeffer's exaggerated emphasis on the Old Testament has not caused New Testament theology to become so diluted among secular theologians that the terrifying thought of a human being cast into the lake of fire no longer has as much power to move the heart as does a ragged peasant who has become disinherited by moving into a favela."¹⁶

The simplistic nature of this criticism and its line of argument as well as its forthright honesty may disconcert the reader. Wagner is uncommonly frank in spelling out the theological foundations underlying the Church's function, and the reader might entertain the suspicion that I am using him to paint a caricature. That is not so at all. Indeed my purpose is precisely the opposite of caricature.

The real merit of the points spelled out by Wagner is that they explicate the real underpinnings of the criticism that Catholic ecclesiastical authorities have made against liberation theology. The bishops of Chile, for example, would have performed a real service to the Church if they had explicated the same six points instead of trying to arrive at the same conclusions while hiding their underlying theology. Many sincere Christians in Latin America rack their brains trying to figure out how the hierarchy can cite extensive passages from the documents of Vatican II and Medellín and then arrive at exactly opposite conclusions. They would benefit from knowing that the latter conclusions derive from a different theology, a theology that is kept hidden because it does not dovetail with the main thrust of those two recent events.

Hence, as we noted above, one of the most difficult problems for liberation theology after Vatican II and Medellín was the inhibition surrounding the opposed theology. The real bases of decision-making remain hidden from view and hence impervious to discussion. The same principles are invoked, but one side draws just the opposite conclusions. Protestant thinking does not have to go by way of Vatican II and the Medellín Conference, and that has some advantages. At least one can see against what sort of ecclesiology one is fighting.

III. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH VERSUS IDEOLOGIES

As we just saw, liberation theology is confronted with a serious methodological problem: its anticipated conclusions are in conflict with a particular theology of the Church which continues to remain decisive for

its authorities and its structures. It would be naive to imagine that liberation theology can be accepted in any consistent or serious way by the ecclesiastical structures now in existence.

Insofar as criticism of the existing ecclesiastical function is concerned, it would seem that liberation theology has a greater affinity with the current European "political theology," also known as the "theology of revolution." Indeed one of the authors criticized by Wagner, Rubem Alves, might be regarded as closer to that current of thought than to Latin American liberation theology. Moltmann has probably exerted a greater influence on him than any Latin American theologian has. Moltmann himself is quick to criticize the triumphalist pretentiousness of a Church which assumes it will be able to preserve its universalist potential by maintaining impartiality: "Only in and through the dialectic of taking sides does the universalism of the Crucified become a reality in this world. The phony universalism of the Church is something very different. It is a premature and untimely anticipation of the *Kingdom of God*."¹⁷

Yet, despite surface appearances, we shall see that this "political theology" puts liberation theology in a difficult position vis-à-vis a factor even more profound and definitive than the Church itself. The factor in question is mentioned in Moltmann's statement quoted above. It is the kingdom of God, the ultimate reality. In short, it is *eschatology*.

All Christian churches contain an eschatological element, since our faith "gives substance" to the things for which we hope (Heb. 11:1). And what we look forward to is the kingdom, or reign, of God. Wherein lie the differences in the eschatology of the various Christian churches? I think we can say that basically it lies in their differing conceptions of the relationship between events in history on the one hand and the kingdom of God on the other hand.

Since the time of the Reformation at least, the characterizing feature of the Catholic Church in this area is its emphasis on the *merit* of human endeavors for *gaining entrance* to the eternal kingdom of God. And this notion of merit is of the utmost importance for liberation theology.

The fact is that in the Catholic view the merit of a human action had no direct relationship to its historical effectiveness. Neither successful endeavors nor unsuccessful endeavors are meritorious *as such*. The historical end result of human actions, in other words, does not have anything directly to do with totalling up a person's merit. What really counts is the effort expended and a God-directed intention. To use a doctor as our example here, the current conception of merit is not concerned at all with whether the patient is cured or not. What gains merit for the doctor is the effort he makes to cure the patient and the intention to do that for

the glory of God rather than for the sake of fame or the life of the patient. The latter merely serves as the occasion for merit.

It is quite apparent that this conception of merit assumes that there are two very different, if not opposed, planes of value and efficacy. For society, for the human and historical plane, the value of a doctor is in direct proportion to the historical results he obtains. For God, for the plane of eternal values, those historical results not only do not count but are actually dangerous. They are dangerous insofar as they are historical *values*, real satisfactions that can compete with the effort and intention that count for eternity.

In Catholic theology and spirituality these two planes have been given characteristic names. The *supernatural* plane is the plane of eternal values; the *natural* plane is the plane of temporal values. In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez rightly notes that such a theology could only arise insofar as the "theology of the two planes" lost its hold on people's minds.

How did the theology of the two planes come to exert such a strong hold over the Catholic Church? It did so because for a long time it seemed to be the only logical and feasible way of expressing a dogmatic datum that had been gradually minted during the earlier struggle against Stoicism. The dogmatic datum was that only *grace*, only God's free gift, enabled man to do anything worthwhile in terms of such a divine destiny as eternal life.

Underlying the translation of this dogmatic datum into the theology of the two planes were two assumptions: (1) that a free gift can be recognized by the fact that some people possess it whereas others do not, without any fault on their part; (2) that the absolutely gratuitous nature of the gift, its supernatural nature, presupposes the existence of purely natural states, persons, and values in real-life history.

Some years before Vatican II, these two presuppositions began to be challenged. It began to appear that we did not need these presuppositions to maintain the theological principle of the gratuitous nature of the supernatural—if you will pardon the redundancy. The fact is that a gift need not be recognized simply by the fact that some possess it and others do not. Everyone can possess something, yet that something may still be a gift. You don't have to go looking for some human being in history who lacks grace, at least for the moment, in order to be able to affirm the supernatural or gratuitous nature of God's grace. In short, the two prevailing suppositions only applied to the petty gifts that we human beings give to each other.

Let me clarify this point with an example. Even before he is born, a certain child might be endowed with a fortune. That would mean, of

course, that his birth and subsequent development would be surrounded with lavish preparations and extraordinary care. I say "extraordinary" because other children presumably would not enjoy the same fortune. To the child in question, however, his way of life would seem to be the most "natural" thing in the world so long as he did not compare it to that of other children and come to realize how he had benefited from a gift. But now let us further assume that the gift-giver is so generous that he gives the same gift to every child of a given generation. That would change the life-styles of all of them, and the gift could not be recognized by making comparisons. Yet the gift does not cease to be a gift, for the children could have been born without it. To realize and appreciate this decisive factor in life, the one child or all the children would have to ponder that alternative possibility. But we cannot ask the child or all the children (in the second hypothesis) to imagine what a purely "natural" existence would have been for them, because they do not have around them the elements they would need to fashion such a picture: *everything* has been changed by the gift.

Something very similar, if not exactly the same, holds true for the theology of grace. If it has been given to all human beings to live in essentially *gratuitous* conditions, then they insofar as they are believers must recognize that God was free to create them without that gift, to create them in a state of *pure nature*. But one cannot ask human beings to *imagine* what that state would have been like because they have no such example in their present-day existence or in that of their contemporaries. Thus the concept of pure nature is what is called a "limit concept." It is necessary to understand and appreciate another concept (i.e., grace), but it cannot point out any concrete thing in history.

This point of view, worked out in particular by Karl Rahner, served as the background for Vatican II's statement that all human beings are called to one and the same supernatural vocation and, thanks to the grace of God, possess the means needed to fulfill this vocation (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). This holds true both within and outside the Church. The effects of grace within the Christian are the same as those produced by grace in all human beings of good will (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

Thus it was that the Catholic Church officially abandoned the theology of the two planes and opened the way for a theology that was quite different: i.e., liberation theology. Of course that does not mean that all resistance to liberation theology based on the older notion of the two planes was thereby terminated. As we have already noted, ecclesiastical authorities have continued to describe the function of the Church as a purely "religious" one, finding support in other conciliar statements which clearly seem to set a "supernatural" realm over against the realm

of "natural" human history. My point here is that the statements of Vatican II are clear enough to ensure that the basic theological foundations of liberation theology may not be declared heterodox.

One could say that the eschatological element opposed to liberation theology is stronger and more resistant in Protestant circles than in Catholic circles. This is not to suggest that the eternal, metahistorical factor is not of equal importance in both. It is, but the *historical* factor is not of equal importance in both. The disappearance of the notion of *merit* from Protestant theology, dating from the time of the Reformation, seems to have undermined the possibility of any theology of history.¹⁸ In Catholic theology the only thing that united the plane of human activity in history with the plane of God's eternal kingdom was the notion of *merit*, that is, the "eternal" worth of human effort and right intention. But even this tie was cut in the Protestant theology of salvation by faith alone: i.e., salvation by virtue of Christ's merits alone.

By the time of the Reformation, the struggle with Stoicism which had laid the foundation for the theology of the two planes was a thing of the past. So was the struggle between pope and emperor, which had helped to give new life to the theology of the two planes as a possible solution to a real-life problem. By the time the Catholic Church was confronted with Martin Luther, in other words, the theory of the two planes was no longer a critical issue; it had become a point of orthodoxy in the Catholic Church.

Luther's doctrine of the *two kingdoms*, by contrast, became the politico-theological foundation for the whole edifice of the Reformation, as James S. Preus has pointed up again recently. The Reformation could not survive without the armed political support of princes. To make themselves independent of theological criteria, it became necessary to defend the difference between the plane of religious authority and the plane of secular authority. According to Preus, that was the price that had to be paid for other more liberating aspects of the Reformation. But as time went on, as it became evident that the Reformation no longer needed any political support, the price came to seem too high. That at least is the view of Preus, to mention one name. He writes: "The political character of Luther's theology has to be judged against that of the Bible, which in its repeated calls for justice and righteousness and in its concern for the poor and oppressed makes no distinctions between bodies and souls, but proclaims a Gospel for the whole man. The Lutheran doctrine of the two realms evades that calling by narrowing that Gospel. *The fastidious depoliticization of the doctrine of justification, via the two-kingdoms doctrine, has served the church's interests well-politically.* But has it served the world?"¹⁹

Reinhold Niebuhr offers us an example of this theological influence on the political realm. He is talking about religious opposition to Hitler in Nazi Germany:

Lutheranism, which in my opinion has the most profound religious insights on ultimate questions of human existence, has remained defective on problems of political and social morality, until the encounter with Hitler cured it of some of the most grievous errors: its doctrine of the "two realms"—the "realm of heaven" and the "realm of earth"; the one the realm of grace "where nothing is known except forgiveness and brotherly love" and the other the realm of "law" where "nothing is known except the law, the sword, the courts and chains." This might be a good description of the two dimensions of life and morals, but the fatal flaw in the doctrine of the two realms was that the one realm was that of private and the other of official morality. Politics, in short, was designed to maintain order in the sinful world. The purely negative function of the state was aggravated by an absolute religious sanction of its authority and the prohibition of all resistance.²⁰

It would be unfair, however, to pretend that the Lutheran doctrine of the *two kingdoms* was the outcome of a specific political situation or a political tool for confronting said situation. The doctrine of the *two kingdoms* is intimately bound up with other central themes in Lutheran theology: e.g., with the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the key notion that glory belongs to God alone (*solī Deo gloria*). In short, it has much to do with something that Karl Barth stressed once again shortly before his death: i.e., the rejection of the Catholic attempt to connect God "and" man, faith "and" good works. Thus the Lutheran rejection of this "and" in the problem of justification turns faith into the confident but essentially passive acceptance of God's fixed plan for human destiny and the construction of his eschatological kingdom. Indeed some Europeans in the field of "political theology" use that precise argument to counter any attempt to attribute to mankind an historical *causality* in the construction of God's kingdom.

For example, Rudolf Weth writes: "*God himself* brings about the revolutionary action that is decisive for the *coming* of his kingdom. His action cannot be effected or replaced by *any human action*." Weth bases his view on a central text of Luther in which he comments on the passage in Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 25:34) where the universal judge summons the elect to take the places that have been set aside for them from the beginning of the world. Luther's commentary is all the more important insofar as the Letter to the Romans, not the Gospels, was the initial basis for his doctrine of justification by faith alone. Here Weth applies the doctrine to other parts of the New Testament, and specifically to one that talks about the definitive establishment of the kingdom of God.

Luther's own text is this: "How could they [Segundo: the children of the kingdom] merit what already belongs to them and what was prepared for them long before they were even created? It would be more correct to say that it is the kingdom of God which merits us as its inheritors . . . The kingdom of God has already been prepared. But the children of God must be prepared for the kingdom. So it is the kingdom that merits the children of God, not the children of God who merit the kingdom."²¹

Leaving aside the whole question of the correctness of Luther's exegesis here, we can readily see that it thoroughly rules out any attempt to find or establish a causal relationship between activity in history and the construction of God's kingdom. It situates that kingdom in the remote past and the remote future (the *eschaton*), thus detaching it wholly from historical activity in the present.

Now German "political theology" is markedly dependent on the Lutheran theology of justification.²² So it should not surprise us that it systematically tries to eliminate from theologico-political language any term that might suggest a causal relationship between historical activity and the construction of the eschatological kingdom. And this is true even when it is talking about revolution. Except in rare exceptions, the historical reality produced by human effort is described as "anticipation" (Moltmann), "analogy" (Weth), "rough draft" (Metz), and so forth.

This stress on the eschatological element, to the detriment of the historical element, has important consequences for liberation theology. Two critical ones must be considered here.

1. This eschatological relativization of any and every existing historical reality, this desacralization of any and every political regime, initially has a liberating impact. It disestablishes the world we know; it de-absolutizes the hallowedness that any and every political regime claims in order to perpetuate itself and deny its historical relativity. The key word in this political theology, *hope*, is intimately bound up with that kind of liberation. The future is liberated from the weight of the past. *Faith* enables people to imagine new possibilities and to escape the mesmerizing allure of the established order.

But when we go in for a more concrete examination of the specific circumstances in which this liberative function is to be carried out, its liberating character does not show up so clearly. We live in an interconnected world where different socio-economic systems and regimes hold sway. In such a world it is unrealistic to think that relativization of the established systems will produce some sort of cyclic efficacy.

Let us consider this point more closely. Relativization of any and every political system, in the name of God, can serve initially to stimulate

creativity and imaginative thinking. And it can also do the same thing after a newly created project has begun to harden into another fixed and unimaginative system. But we live in a world where new and old systems coexist and communicate with one another. In such a situation there is a tendency for eschatological relativization to be generalized. Even before some new regime is worked out, it is criticized in the name of some new hope. At the same time, the opposed regime is being criticized under the same head but for opposite reasons. And even the search itself is relativized because there is no element in history that can be related causally to the construction of God's eschatological kingdom.

My suspicion is that this sort of generalized disestablishment and relativization ends up being a politically neutral theology. The "revolution" it talks about seems to be more like a Kantian revolution than an historical revolution. It merely revolutionizes the way we formulate our problems. Real-life revolution must have enthusiasm behind it, but the concrete circumstances in which this eschatology operates at present seem to throw a dash of cold water on any such enthusiasm—not only on the phony ideological enthusiasm created by the status quo but also on the imaginative enthusiasm for new projects spawned by criticism and hope.

In this connection I think we would do well to examine certain passages written by Rubem Alves, who is a disciple of Moltmann. One immediate consequence of the aforementioned principles is particularly worthy of note: the most radical means of bringing about change are rejected. The reason for this rejection is simple but basic: no one can adopt such means without losing his "cool," without losing his modicum of relativization which enables him to maintain control over events. Here is what Alves has to say about violence: "From the viewpoint of the man who is free for the future, violence is a totally different reality. It is whatever denies him a future, whatever aborts his project to create a new tomorrow; it is the power that keeps him prisoner of the futureless structures of a futureless world. Violence is the power of defuturization, which strives to close man's consciousness to the future and the future to man's consciousness."²³

Hope is paradoxically translated into a radically pessimistic view of the whole process of change, even when the latter is not violent, precisely because any and every change prompted by man cannot help but lose out to world-dominating sin. The kingdom of God can only be fashioned by someone who is free from sin, and that comes down to God alone. Opting for "messianic humanism," Alves writes: "That is why messianic humanism refuses to draw its hope from the slave's faithfulness to the protest that is intrinsic to his condition of slave. Its historical experience

shows that those who once were the negative slaves, and therefore the bearers of freedom, become, once they achieve their freedom, dominated by concern for the preservation of their present and are then infected with the sin of their masters: they are now those who want to forestall the future . . . The structure of oppression, accordingly, is able to create a man in its image and likeness, a man whose consciousness is as unfree as that of his master. He is the slave who does not want to be free. His will to freedom becomes will to domestication. The history of freedom, therefore, cannot be based on the powers of *man alone*.²⁴ Is Alves suggesting that there is a better chance for success when man works *with* God? The question is offbase, for the reason we cited earlier: a theology derived from Luther finds it very difficult to conceive of any such collaboration.

If Alves' remarks presume to describe objective historical reality, as they clearly do, then one must conclude that man always works alone. And Alves goes on to forget man completely in the remarks that immediately follow: "The slave may forget about his suffering, but God does not. God is the suffering God, the God who does not ever allow the pains of history to be overlooked and healed by the hypnotic power of the politics of preservation. Because God . . . is the God in history, and since his presence in history is always resisted by the powers of the old, God is a suffering God."²⁵

This standpoint also leads Alves to reject *de facto* cooperation of any sort with revolutionaries in history:

But messianic humanism also rejects the opposite sin of the revolutionaries. Since the repression and the restoration of the erotic sense of life depends on the powers of *man alone*, he finds it necessary totally to discipline his present in order to gather his energies for the task of liberation. In order to destroy the repression imposed upon society he finds it necessary to impose upon his present a similar structure of repression. The present loses itself. It exists only for the sake of a future. . . . Man is absolved from inhumanity and brutality in the present, as the time of transition, the time that does not count. And the future, once it is brought about by the revolutionaries, tends to become closed, because it is believed that it is the presence of the *eschaton*. This is why revolutions that were once the bearers of new hopes soon became crystallized, rigid, and dogmatic, a veritable resurrection of the sins of the conservative.²⁶

That is why God must operate *alone*. In the strictest theological sense of the word, he must "create" the liberation that man denies himself and will never manage to procure: "The normal unfolding of the politics of the old cannot give birth to the new. The new is here nothing more than the old under a different form, a different mask. It regenerates itself,

thereby perpetuating the old world of unfreedom under a different guise. But because God's politics negates the natural unfolding of the old, room is made for the new. And one can truly say that it is created *ex nihilo*, since the new cannot be explained in terms of *the logic of natural causality*."²⁷

Here the distinction between the supernatural and the natural as two separate planes which never touch each other unexpectedly crops up in this radically eschatological vision of the kingdom to rule out any and all commitment of Protestant theology to liberation in history. When this theology remains consistent with itself and its fonts, the revolution it speaks about is transformed into faith and hope in something metahistorical and a disgusted turning-away from real-life history.

2. The second critical factor in the relationship between political theology and liberation theology is a language difficulty. The fact is that Alves, with his ahistorical conclusions, does not represent the majority of Protestant theologians of liberation.²⁸ Many of them, such as Richard Shaull, are far more pointed in proposing historical solutions for the problem of liberation. Indeed Shaull's paper at the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (in the summer of 1966) scandalized many of the participants with its concrete revolutionary content. But even so, the Lutheran tradition considered above continues to have an impact on the language used, if not on the content and the options proposed. Thus, if my observation is correct, we get two different languages. When Shaull is talking about the historical realm, the language is intensely committed and revolutionary. But when he tries to translate all that into theological terms, a certain reserve takes over and his language seems to be inhibited. Here I should like the reader to examine a few remarks of Shaull from the standpoint of a Latin American Christian who wants concrete guidance amid the thorny issues of the existing political situation and who looks to his Christian faith for this guidance.

Here is Shaull's remark: "The kingdom of God always stands over against every social and political order, thus exposing its dehumanizing elements and *judging* it. At the same time, the Kingdom is a *dynamic* reality; it is 'coming' through the work of him who is restoring the nations."²⁹ The very first phrase could only prove disconcerting to the Latin American. Total relativization of historical realities, far from being dynamic, ends up as merely static contemplation. Shaull is too intelligent and honest to overlook that fact, which is why he brings in the qualifying word "dynamic" in the next sentence. He tells us that the kingdom is coming. Through whom or what? The Latin American waits anxiously to see what Shaull will say. What group or thrust or ideology is ushering the kingdom of God into historical reality? Alas, the turn of Shaull's

remarks can only produce despair in the Latin American. No human being, no human group, no human ideology, no human process of change is responsible—only *God alone*. Just as the bishops of Chile end up opting for the risen Christ alone, so Shaull ends up opting for God alone. Both choose not to opt for anyone or anything in concrete history.

Must a theology give that sort of response to be Christian? Such a response clearly would deal a fatal blow to the credibility of Christian theology and to liberation theology as such. Of course it is a fake death in a sense, because one and the same person, who is both a human being and a Christian theologian, can be drastic and intensely committed in his or her historical judgments when not talking in theological terms. But when a shift is made to the latter, the answers seem to lose all contact with history and the decisions that must be made within it.

Let us consider another remark by Shaull, of particular interest because it specifically alludes to the theology of Moltmann: "As Professor Moltmann (*Theology of Hope*) has worked this out, the Christian symbols point to a God who goes ahead of us and who is bringing a new future into being. His word is essentially a word of promise, that awakens in us the hope for a new future. It is a word that upsets old stabilities, arouses dissatisfaction with the old order, and frees us to expect and serve the things that are to come."³⁰

Once again we find the same two elements noted above. Firstly, the fact that God "goes ahead of us" does not mean that we are co-workers with him. Only God is the subject of "bringing a new future into being." Nothing is said about mankind, though it is man and woman who are anxiously trying to figure out what decision they should make. Moreover, the phrase "bringing into being" is an evident allusion to creation *ex nihilo*. No human collaboration is involved. Secondly, here again it is evident that a critical attitude is the element in man and the Christian which corresponds to God's creation in history. The word of God "upsets old stabilities, arouses dissatisfaction with the old order." Here we seem to see a partiality and a partisanship that should be translated into some sort of decision in history. But Shaull cannot be unaware of the fact that it is very difficult to make a concrete choice in terms of *old* and *new*. Quite aside from the fact that the new is not always preferable to the old, there is the more important fact that the same things can be new or old depending on historical circumstances.

Consider capitalism and socialism, for example. One cannot choose between them in terms of old and new. Both systems have their own history in different countries. Socialism can be "old," as is evident from the remarks of a theological journal in Prague about Latin American liberation theology. After acknowledging the merits of our theology, it

goes on to complain that liberation theology has not pointed out clearly that liberation is already a fact in the socialist countries.³¹

The point, then, is that the use of "new" and "old" in Shaull's theology does not really presume to provide us with a criterion for making judgments and finding direction in history. It merely represents man's trusting and reverent response to the creative activity of God alone. But there is a third feature in the above remark of Shaull that was not evident in the earlier citation. Here Shaull depicts a broader range of human attitudes. Besides alluding to the critical attitude, Shaull presents three positive attitudes. The word of God *awakens hope* for a new future, and *frees* us to expect and *serve* the things that are to come. Hope, freedom, service: are we to regard these things as characteristic features of a revolutionary option? The obvious answer would seem to be "no," unless we are dealing with a very queer sort of revolution.

Hoping and the freedom to hope can indeed be the first or initial steps towards revolution, its starting point. But a real revolution will subsequently call for attitudes of a very different sort. Shaull himself is perfectly aware of that fact, and he can scandalize an audience with his descriptions of a revolution that is real in every sense of the word. His third element, service, could very well be synonymous with real-life revolution if it were given its full scope and import. But that assumption is ruled out by the final turn of his thought. We are to serve "the things that are to come." Once again a potentially explosive option loses all its historical force when the verb is complemented with an object. The bishops of Chile *opt* . . . for the "risen Christ." Shaull says that we *serve* . . . "the things that are to come." Somewhere the historical thrust and content of decision-making gets lost.

IV. GRACE IN A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

It should be clear at the end of this chapter that the intimate and unavoidable relationship between faith and ideologies poses serious problems: (1) to the theology and structures of the Church; and (2) to a specific conception of eschatology which has been very operative within the Catholic Church and still remains powerfully active and central in the Protestant Churches. I shall have more to say about the function of the Church and its relationship with ideologies in subsequent chapters. So here I should like to say a few more words about eschatology to finish up with that topic.

Liberation theology is a profoundly ecumenical theology. It seems that the Christian's concern to collaborate in the process of liberating mankind unites him more effectively and surely with other Christians than does any attempt to resolve age-old theoretical problems. Libera-

tion poses problems of such magnitude that Christians of whatever denomination feel closer to those who have made the same option in history than they do to other members of their own denomination. This ecumenism extends beyond the boundaries of Christianity, in fact, uniting all men of good will in decisive options and separating them from those of "ill will" wherever they are found.

But when liberation theology examines its own methodology, it runs into a second level of ecumenism where a new light begins to dawn over all the old and critical controversies. Let us adopt Paul Lehmann's assumption that God's policy is to make human existence human and maintain it as such.³² This assumption may help us to appreciate better what happened in the past, particularly at the time of the Reformation. Our previous remarks in this chapter will serve as the backdrop for the point we are trying to stress here.

In contrast to the Lutheran view of justification by faith alone, Catholic theology stresses justification by good works in accordance with the moral law. At first glance it would seem to be hardly Christian at all, or very Old Testament in cast at best. There is only one thing that would seem to justify it, but that one thing is very important. However shakily, it does try to preserve the principle that human liberty is liberty *for* something definitive and indeed eschatological: the building up of the kingdom of God. It differs from Luther's notion of the servant will (*servo arbitrio*) in that important respect.

On the other hand, the Lutheran principle of salvation by faith rather than by good works does seem to be central to the New Testament message of people like Paul, for example. But following Fromm's distinction between freedom *from* and freedom *to* (or *for*), one would be inclined to say that Luther was faithful only to the former aspect of Paul's thinking, that Paul also discussed freedom *to*. In short, Luther clearly and correctly pointed out that faith should free the Christian from the law and preoccupations with it. That was his creative intuition, welling up from his own consuming inner problem.

On the one hand, then, we find Catholic legalism; on the other we find Lutheran passivity. The element that might have helped to reconcile the two—freedom *to* construct the kingdom—was lost in the shuffle. The two sides hardened poles apart instead of melding into a fruitful and liberative synthesis.

Faith liberates man from a preoccupation with the law so that he can launch out into creative love rather than remain paralyzed by the problem of personal security and individual salvation. The only criterion for the latter things can be the static criterion of the law. But in entrusting

our destiny to God, we should not imagine that God simply wants us to leave him alone because any cooperative effort on our part would somehow diminish his glory. On the contrary, the Christian God is a God who loves and who, as such, needs to be loved. He needs our creativity for his work, and so he asks us to entrust our destiny to him in faith. So the Catholic doctrine was clearly inadequate insofar as it made the law the object of our liberty, and the Lutheran doctrine was inadequate insofar as it turned faith into a deprecation of human liberty.

Are we being too presumptuous when we say that liberation theology must be grounded on a profound reconciliation of these two Christian viewpoints and their work of mutual correction? I do not think so. And the concrete experience of dialoguing about liberation, seeking proper decisions, and making appropriate commitments would seem to justify my opinion.

NOTES

1. As I noted in note 22 of Chapter I, it is far from evident to many North Americans that our hermeneutic must go back specifically to the "Christian" sources, to our biblical writings. I think this calls into question the very possibility of faith, starting from Bultmann's assumption that any and every divine intervention in the realm of phenomena must be regarded as mythical. On that assumption any "revelation" in the strict sense would be mythical by that very fact. Thus, even though Bultmann feels that his assumption is compatible with the Christian faith, strict logic should compel him to offer a new definition of faith or of Christianity. For in his view the divine revealer is absent from the "Christian" message, and one is at least forced to say that any other message in history, even one opposed to the "Christian" message, has as much right to be believed. The problem does not face Latin American theology in this form, and so its solution is not critical here. But I think that the dualism suggested by Bultmann between transcendence and a phenomenal world is one of those false dualisms typical of the nineteenth century and all subsequent evolutionary thought: either spirit or matter, immanence or transcendence, instinct or reason, and so forth. Teilhard de Chardin tried to show how such dualisms could be overcome while preserving their truth. I think his approach holds equally true for a revelation in history. See, in particular, the text cited in note 20 of Chapter II.

2. The first affirmation is expressed in such passages as these:

"The Church opts for the risen Jesus Christ" (p. 67).

"Today in Chile we are faced with the opposing alternatives of capitalism and socialism. It is important to remember that they are not the only possible ones—since there is nothing to prevent us from trying a third approach—and that there are many forms and degrees of both capitalism and socialism" (p. 68).

"Thus we can arrive at different political options while remaining united in our basic, absolute option for the risen Jesus Christ" (p. 69).

"If we take the word 'opt' in the strict sense, that is, in the sense of choosing one group and excluding the other, then it is clear that the problem is being posed on the basis of a simplistic and dualistic view of the world that attempts to draw a neat dividing line between groups of 'good guys' and groups of 'bad guys' and to force us to speak out in favor of one side and against the other side. . . The Church does not choose between different human groups. In and with Jesus Christ, the Church makes a decision for all those whom Jesus himself opted for: for all the people of Chile" (p. 65).

Their second affirmation is supported by all sorts of reasons grounded on historical experiences. I cannot sum them up here. But here is how the affirmation itself is stated:

"Hence . . . the concrete embodiments of Marxist socialism so far cannot be accepted as an authentic alternative to capitalism" (p. 82).

As I indicated in note 2 of Chapter II, this document is reproduced in an anthology of episcopal documents designed to bear witness to the active witness of the Chilean episcopate during the years of Allende's presidency (1970–1973). But it is sad and almost embarrassing to find that the last document in that anthology was finally approved by the Chilean episcopate on September 13, 1973, two days after the military coup and Allende's own death. When their partisans were being persecuted and sometimes killed in the streets, the Chilean bishops were meeting to make some final observations on the "Christians for Socialism" movement and to condemn them. For this document and further background material on the Chilean situation, see the anthology *Christians and Socialism*, Eng. trans. (Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books, 1975).

3. C. Peter Wagner, *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970). The author served as a minister in Bolivia.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Jürgen Moltmann, "Dieu dans la révolution," in *Discussion sur la théologie de la révolution*, French trans. (Paris: Cerf-Mame, 1972), p. 72.

18. See, for example, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 91–95. At the time of the Reformation Bucer may have been the only person who attempted to clarify the relationship between justification by faith alone and historical effort to build up the kingdom of God. The point deserves further study.

19. James S. Preus, "The Political Function of Luther's *Doctrina*," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (October 1972) 598.

20. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Germany," in *Worldview* 16 (June 1973) 14–15.

21. Rudolph Weth, "La 'Théologie de la révolution' dans la perspective de la justification et du royaume," in *Discussion, op. cit.* (note 17), p. 120. The citation from Luther is from *De servo arbitrio*.

22. Catholic theologians in this circle, and even more those outside it, betray a clear Lutheran influence on this point. They do not make the distinctions I propose here between individual justification on the one hand and an extrapolation of the problem insofar as the construction of the kingdom is concerned. This convergence is due in part to the ecumenical climate prevailing since Vatican II. But it is also due to the fact that Catholic theology has honestly admitted the fact that it had simply overlooked Paul's teaching on justification by faith. See, for example, the joint study of the Letter to the Romans which was written up by Hans Küng. Even though this admission is not made uncritically by Catholic theologians, in my opinion they are not critical enough when it comes to extrapolating Paul's thought to the work of constructing the kingdom. In short, they tend to overlook the authentic feature of his thought which the Catholic Church did defend at the time of the Reformation.

23. Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969), pp. 111–12.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

28. As the title of Wagner's book would indicate, liberation theology is so "radical" that it would cease to be "evangelical" in his eyes.

29. In *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, edited by J.C. Bennet (New York: Association Press, 1966); cited by J.M. Lochman, "Ecumenical Theology of Revolution," in *New Theology* 6 (New York: Macmillan 1969), footnote 22, pp. 121–22.

30. Richard Shaull, "Christian Faith as Scandal in a Technocratic World," in *New Theology* 6, p. 130.

31. See Adolfo Ham, "Introduction to the Theology of Liberation," in *Communio viatorum* (Prague), Summer 1973.

32. Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 101 and *passim*.