

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION III

IN this final section of our treatment of liberation theology, we will first deal with the relationship between history and the Kingdom, before offering our final reflections and criticisms.

History and Kingdom

Bonino begins his discussion of this topic with a comparison of the christian and marxist ideas of their respective 'Utopias'.¹ In effect, both see a real duality between this world and its fulfilment. For the Marxist, history ceases with the advent of the classless society, and the characteristics of the latter might well be taken, at least by a Christian, to describe a transcendent reality, although Marx and Marxism deny absolute transcendence. The duality between history and the Kingdom for the Christian, has, of course, an element of transcendence and discontinuity, but equally valid is the element of continuity. What is being said here is that it is important not to confuse the question of the ultimate Ground of history and Utopia (the question of God) and the question of the nature of Utopia. Christians and Marxists have disagreed traditionally on both questions. But on the second question, which is the one before us now, it is arguable that the so-called traditional christian view is ill-grounded. For the unbiblical interiorization of the Kingdom has led us to see the relation of this world and 'the next' almost exclusively in individualistic terms; and here there is immediate disagreement between Christians and Marxists:

The christian and the marxist utopias . . . had, therefore, quite opposite historical consequences. The latter galvanizes for action, the former leads to accommodation to present conditions; the latter lends value and meaning to history, the former empties history of meaning and value; the latter legitimizes immediate and provisory stages and achievements, the former relativizes them and makes differences among them irrelevant. Are these consequences intrinsic to the christian gospel?²

Bonino discusses this question under three headings: (i) the problem of the duality of history; (ii) the actuality of a causal link between history and the Kingdom, and not merely an extrinsic analogy; and (iii) how do we produce, under the grace of God, the quality of existence which creates the

¹ Bonino, J. M.: *Revolutionary Theology comes of Age* (London, 1975), p 133.

² *Ibid.*

Kingdom? He insists first of all, as do most liberation theologians, that there is only one history; but, unlike Gutierrez, he makes a clear and necessary distinction between the outlook of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old, there is simply one history, in the New, a duality-in-unity: between the events of salvation in Christ and the ongoing history of the world, which is the field of the new mission of the Church. The former has a certain density of its own in relation to the latter. With regard to ourselves, there is a duality (at least since Augustine, Bonino claims) only to history which nourishes our faith: that is, the history of the events of (Israel and) Jesus Christ, and the history we actually live. This appears to be the distinction between that history in which explicit commentary on 'what is really going on' is given, and history as implicitly graced.

The Kingdom as eschatological fulfilment has been traditionally related (at least since Augustine, Bonino claims) only to history which nourishes our personal faith. The other, general history, has been disregarded as devoid of eschatological significance. But Bonino, along with the generality of liberation theologians, affirms that:

... a total discontinuity between Kingdom and general history cannot be maintained in view of the witness of Scripture and our own experience of God's presence in the world.³

Here the theologians have to walk the razor's edge between the old dualism and a reductionism which speaks *only* of humanness and the 'new man' as the ultimate meaning of history, without any reference to that history which has a normative 'density'. This particular hurdle could, perhaps, be overcome by seeing explicit revelation history as a second-order history, existing in function of the general history, and as commentary on it. Thus the one history is maintained, and also the irreplaceable newness of insight of the explicit history.

But this leaves the second and greater problem of a causal link between general history and the Kingdom. One can interpret humanness, justice and love in the light of the Christ-event and see its divine depth. But how do the processes of history 'bring in' the Kingdom? Segundo has reflected on this most explicit of the sources available,⁴ and Bonino quotes his identification of the problem as one of *causality*. European and north-american theologians, he says, reinforce the older, dualistic approach which relativizes historical action, because they explain the relation between history and the Kingdom in terms like 'sketch', 'analogy', 'anticipation'. 'It seems quite significant for me that none of the terms used', says Segundo, 'contains semantically any element of causality'.⁵ No one would dispute the necessity of a duality

³ *Ibid.*, p 137.

⁴ See Segundo, *op. cit.*, vol 2, pp 122ff; vol 5, *passim*; *The Liberation of Theology* (New York, 1976/London, 1977), ch 5.

⁵ Cf Bonino, *op. cit.*, p 139.

between history and Kingdom, but the choice seems to be between saying that change in structures of whatever sort produces the Kingdom by *intrinsic* analogy (which participates in and makes present the reality of the Kingdom), and that structures produce only extrinsic analogies (which have no effective relation to ultimate values, and therefore have to be validated by additional, personal intention and attitudes). The word 'analogy' is ambiguous, and Segundo sees it used only in a weak sense by european theologians.

At base, we have again the fundamental question of commitment to change as a necessary aspect of doing theology. This goes against what is traditionally and often deeply felt by Christians: that they ought to be able to validate (and the 'ought' is said with a certain obstinacy) any circumstances whatever, however inimical to growth they appear to be: and this without actually changing any external factor, but merely by acceptance and assimilation. It is this, in another context, which has led to the distrust felt about the ministry of healing in the Church. We may indicate here that while it is true that we may be able to grow in love by suffering, either personal or collective, this only works when we have no other alternative. To fail to do what is possible is lack of obedience to the grace offered in the situation; it is, in fact, a failure to let the incarnation enter seriously into our own lives. For the will of God is towards integration (and healing) of the whole person; and this includes our relationships, that is, our socio-political reality. The efforts of those who wish to maintain the *status quo*, of course, are directed to convincing us either that we have no alternative, or that it is right to accept the suffering. The only objective answer is to be found in the criterion of what is fully human and humanizing, and this itself requires insight.

Bonino raises some of these points in his own discussion of his third question. In essence, he criticizes the lack of commitment of european theology and its taking refuge (as he sees it) in a 'critical function'. His basic conclusion is:

The gospel invites and drives us to make concrete historical options and assures them of eschatological permanence insofar as they represent the quality of human existence which corresponds to the Kingdom . . . Such an engaged participation necessarily implies a judgment between historical alternatives.⁶

Church and world

Behind all the discussion of man in history lies the implication that man exists in community and christian man in the Church. The new perspective on sociology and on grace in history raises many questions about the nature and mission of 'the community called Church'. But two questions in particular have dominated the discussion in the theology of liberation: (i) what is the relation of the Church to a graced world? And (ii) is the Church meant to be

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 150.

a minority community or a majority gathering?'

On the first question, Gutierrez sets the fundamental perspective which was sketched at Vatican II but has largely been developed since then, namely, of the Church as servant: not at the centre of the stage but at the service of a graced world. Equally important is the stress that the Church does not exist over against the world, so as to enter into dialogue with it as non-world, but is itself a dimension of the world; and the relationship is therefore two-way. The Church is in the world and witnesses to the world, but the world is also in the Church and witnesses to the Church.

In this perspective, the first question becomes even more acute: what then is the Church as a dimension of a graced world? Segundo replies that it is the gathered community which knows through revelation the full meaning of what is going on in the history of the world at large; and as a dimension of the world, it is, therefore, the community of those committed to witness to what it is to be fully human. Does this account for the necessity of the Church if all are, in fact, within God's saving grace? Here Segundo explores the necessity of conversion from unlove, and the further necessity of a group of explicit witnesses in relation to the majority who know only implicitly and obscurely the direction which their human lives should take. It is this last point which Segundo examines at length and with real insight; for it enables him to offer an answer to the second question posed above. A knowledgeable minority in a particular field act as focus, as animators of a community in all sorts of indirect as well as direct ways. They sustain the quality of existence for those who do not explicitly share their insight.

This leads Segundo to offer further reflection on the Church as essentially a minority body. He is not alone in this thesis, but it is controverted, especially by those theologians influenced by the peronist popular movement in the Argentine (for example, L. Gera). Much of the discussion is devoted to fighting the 'terrorism of language' which makes minority and élite synonymous. In his reply, Segundo insists chiefly on the gift quality of the vocation to be a Christian which is not a source of kudos or distinction, and on a careful analysis of the necessity of minority-majority groupings and the relationship between them in any society. The implications of his thesis are very radical, especially in the latin-american situation; but he himself sustains it without a trace of personal élitism. Bonino perhaps indicates a complementary stress when he asks whether we should not recognize that 'Church' is an analogical term covering a number of different instances.

The differing strands of discussion in this section have concentrated on the claim of liberation theology as helping to create a 'new man', based on a view of man in a historical framework. It is not an essentialist model of man

⁷ Segundo, J. L.: *A Theology for the Artisan of a new Humanity* (New York, 1973), vol I, 'The Community called Church'; *The Liberation of Theology* (New York, 1976), chs 5, 7, 8; Bonino, *op. cit.*, chs 4 and 8; Gutierrez, G., *A Theology of Liberation* (London, 1974), ch 12.

(as rational animal) with accidental qualities, nor of a lonely existentialist man; rather it is a view incorporating and going beyond the insights of previous models to a vision of man in history with a creative, socio-political role in the building up of this world as the sacrament of salvation, and as helping in the creation of the Kingdom in the same process. The lynch-pin is a view of history developing in a graced world, and of man called to meet God-in-Christ in the world, in events, in others, and so to contribute by his concrete commitment to change the world with a view to bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Reflection, commentary, criticism

The method used in writing these notes has been to concentrate on the central issues raised by the Theology of Liberation: firstly, its claim to be a new way of doing theology; and secondly, (and subordinate to this), its effort to present the content of a new view of man. J. L. Segundo underlines this stress on method as follows:

It is my feeling that the most progressive theology in Latin America is more interested in being liberative than in talking about liberation.

In other words, liberation deals not so much with content as with the method used to theologize in the face of our real-life situation.⁸

With this as guide, let us turn our reflections once again to questions of method. This will culminate in a brief treatment of the issue of violence. For throughout this discussion we have had to bear in mind the 'real situation', in which exponents of this theology and the communities in which they work run considerable risk of arrest and torture at the hands of the dictators now ensconced more firmly than ever in Latin America.

A committed theology?

It was the very urgency of the task in hand which led Latin American theologians to be critical of first-world theology and its methods; they have commonly called it 'idealist' and 'academic'. It is important, in the interest of constructive dialogue, to identify both charges and accused more precisely. Otherwise, we create the impression of setting up an Aunt Sally; and those who suspect that they are the subject of misrepresentation are justifiably resentful. The 'idealist' mentality has already been described and discussed.⁹ It consists in first elaborating a system of ideas and then applying it to the situation. In theology, it means the affirming of absolute Christian truths enshrined in scripture and the pronouncements of the Church, which are then applied to very varied situations. The main reason for rejecting this approach lies in the argument that there are no timeless formulations, nor precise and irreformable nucleus of eternal truth at the level of human

⁸ Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, p 9.

⁹ Cf *The Way*, vol 17 (October, 1977), pp 301ff.

expression. Any and every system of ideas is in fact conditioned by the history and experience of its proposers. There are more or less adequate human insights into truth; but the 'idealist' claim to have direct access to truth should give way before another model, the 'scientific', which takes up the attitude of a listener and allows truth to disclose itself in the historical and changing circumstances of human existence. To charge first-world theology with an idealist approach in this sense is quite unjustified, and this is recognized by a maturing latin american theology. It does not any longer place its charge against european and north american theologians at precisely this point. But it is none the less true that the idealist model still guides the thinking of many of the pastors of the Church in both first and third worlds. Hence it is a real and not a phantom adversary of liberation theology.

The further charge of being 'academic' is in practice the equivalent of being 'uncommitted'. This too needs to be looked at closely, for it is an ambiguous charge. What liberation theology is first of all emphasizing here is the commitment of any academic discipline; to have any definite method implies decisions, choices and presuppositions which may fail to appear because they are largely unexamined. Yet they are nonetheless determinative. Even the failure to make a decision is a decision to leave things as they are. Thus all knowledge, however systematic, is 'partial': that is to say, it is both incomplete and predisposed to a particular perspective. First world theology is perfectly well aware of this as well. These and other problems of hermeneutics (of method and interpretation) have long been of major concern.¹⁰

In the second place, the charge against european and north american theology is that it does not recognize its own emergence from a particular political stance; the consequence of which is to fail to opt for a political commitment. This charge - if it is a charge - can be sustained; and there is the counter-charge that political commitment is not the business of theology. It is this issue that needs some further discussion.

A political commitment?

It may be useful first to highlight the presuppositions on which liberation theology makes its criticism. At the base of the argument lies the prior commitment not simply to understand the world but to change it. This in turn rests on an analysis which underlines process and becoming as the most significant category for understanding creation at all levels: at the level of organic evolution, of the historical development of man, and of the process by which the Kingdom of God is being brought to fulfilment. All in mankind is subordinate to becoming fully integrated as persons-in-the-world on the way to fulfilment in the Kingdom. Human creativity is not therefore timeless and unconditioned. It arises out of a listening to and a co-operating with the processes at work at all levels. Thought then ceases to be an end in itself, and any radical dichotomy between understanding of the process and

¹⁰ Cf Palmer, R. E.: *Hermeneutics* (Evanston, 1969).

commitment to participate in the process is rejected. In a word, thought is not above the process; it is a dimension of the process.

It may be said at the outset that it would be as false to accuse western theology of refusal to commit itself to change as it would be to deny a place to understanding and reflection in liberation theology. We have here two models which emphasize different aspects of the theological task. Given a greater political freedom in its environment, first world theology is committed to change the world in a more diffuse and less direct way. It is more concerned to understand and to assist integral human liberation through understanding; while third world theology, in a situation of oppression, is more disposed to develop understanding as a consequence of commitment to liberation.¹¹ In marxist terms, we are back with the inter-relationship of 'superstructure' and 'substructure'. Intellectual and politico-economic factors interact and mutually develop each other; this is not a one-way traffic but a genuine circulation from the life of each individual and group (with its history and tradition) to reflection on that life, leading to adaptation of that life, and so on.

But even given possible complementarity rather than opposition in the ways of theologizing of the first and third worlds, it will be useful to look closer at the method of wresting reflection from action which is liberation theology. Here, then, we begin to examine the latter for its own contribution rather than for its criticism of first-world theology.

(i) There is a growing retreat from sociology and a more thorough-going turning to politics as a tool for enquiry and analysis. The purpose in using either is, as we have seen, roughly the same: to put some intelligibility into the complex world of actual, historical experience, so as to enable the committed christian theologian to criticize his specifically christian tradition with new questions, and obtain new insights to enable him to direct further developments. But the reason why sociology as such is proving less useful as a tool of interpretation is its current 'pragmatic shift': it has become less and less concerned with global ideas and broad fields of fact in favour of specific surveys and fragmented specialities. In consequence, it is less ready to touch on matters of evaluation and motivation. For example: the enquiry made by Max Weber into the relation between capitalism and calvinism is unlikely to find imitators today. The field is too broad. And in the matter of evaluation, a survey may discover, for example, statistics of Mass attendance, but leaves us little the wiser as to the motivations of the Mass-goers; it does not evaluate the results in terms of advantage or disadvantage for roman Catholicism as a faith. In a word, the effort has been made by sociology to approach nearer to the model of the natural sciences, whereas hermeneutics has sought to emancipate the interpretation of human activity in history,

¹¹ One aspect of the relation of theory to practice was argued out in Europe in the debate on academic *versus* kerygmatic (primarily practical) theology in the 'fifties. The conclusion reached was that there are not two theologies but two aspects of theology.

art and language from the distortions of a too rigid application of this model.¹²

(ii) Along with this retreat from sociology in general, an increasingly critical attitude to marxist sociological theory in particular has grown up.¹³ The reasons for this are varied; but by and large they can be traced to the over-simplifications and dogmatic nature of contemporary marxist orthodoxy rather than to the departure from fundamental philosophic ideas which owe a lot to Marxism. For one thing, orthodox Marxism after Marx has tended not to accept the relative autonomy of the superstructure in the dimensions of law, art, history, religion; although, towards the end of his life, Engels affirmed that Marx and he had never denied this relative autonomy. What is clear, however, is that to maintain this is essential to a christian use of marxist ideas.¹⁴ As a result, according to prevailing marxist orthodoxy, there is no real place for the development of religious ideas and motivations. Further, the marxist analysis of class struggle leading to revolution and the classless society has been radically criticized afresh. The fact that Marx's own expectations of revolution in the nineteenth century did not materialize (but that complex adjustments took place within the capitalist pattern) has always been a telling point. It has also been difficult to determine whether the necessary 'conscientization' of the oppressed class demanded by Marx, in order to polarize the class struggle and create the conditions for the revolution, is not rather a doctrinaire manipulation of the situation rather than co-operation with an inevitable process.

All in all, while a 'conflict pattern' rather than a 'consensus pattern' may still seem appropriate in the circumstances, this is a very general guideline and is not limited to marxist analyses.¹⁵ In fact what has happened on the part of both Christian and Marxists who co-operate in the struggle against oppression is the gradual abandonment of doctrinaire orthodoxies; the more universal appeal to pragmatic considerations has tended to draw them together.

(iii) The retreat from sociology has been accompanied by a turning to politics, which, for liberation theology, has a very broad definition:

(Politics) is the sphere for the exercise of a critical freedom which is won through history. It is the universal determinant and the collective arena for human fulfilment . . . Nothing lies outside the political sphere understood in this way. Everything has a political colour . . .¹⁶

Within this wide description, third-world theology works increasingly with the tool of political philosophy, which allows scope for the factors excluded

¹² Gadamer, H. G.: *Truth and Method* (London, 1975).

¹³ Segundo, *op. cit.*, ch 2.

¹⁴ For the reference to Engels' letter to Bloch, see Segundo, *op. cit.*, p 36. For the argument followed here, cf *The Way*, vol 17 (July, 1977), pp 227-28.

¹⁵ Cf *The Way*, vol 17 (October, 1977), p 304.

¹⁶ Gutierrez, G.: *A Theology of Liberation* (London, 1974), p 47.

more and more by sociology: that is, general ideas and questions of motivation. The practical implications of a political option in latin America can be well understood from these words of the *Pastoral of seventeen bishops from the third world*:

... the Church has for a century tolerated capitalism with money-lending at interest and other activities which have little in common with the morality of the Gospel and the prophets. But it can only rejoice over the gradual emergence of a new social system less remote from that morality... Christians have a duty to show 'that true socialism is the fullest way of living christianity, - with a just distribution of goods, and equality for all'.¹⁷

The question to be asked now is not, how successful is the political option of Christians committed to liberation, but what relation does the commitment have to theological reflection, especially in comparison with the traditional theologizing labelled 'idealist' by liberation theology. The question can be posed as a dilemma: either we accept the 'idealist premises' that the Church possesses certain knowledge of the eternal truths by revelation, and can deduce sure conclusions for application to particular cases, or we draw our guidelines from reflection on human situations; and then there is no certainty of insight or teaching, and in fact, no specifically christian contribution at all. This is the question which occupies the main section of Segundo's latest book referred to throughout these articles, *The Liberation of Theology*.

Segundo's thesis is that theologizing is the second step in the work of the theologian: commitment to the service of men is the first. His first argument is that the 'major problems of man are definitely not tackled on a plane of certain knowledge, after which we must decide whether they are also to be framed in terms of some specific historical context' (p 76). Once a human being has made some general option, science can point out some intellectual instrument to fit in with the option. And he argues that theology is no exception to this rule. 'In other words, theology is not chosen for theological reasons' (*ibid.*).

Segundo's second argument is exegetical in character. He discusses the conflicting methods used by Jesus and the Pharisees in their confrontations. The latter begin deductively from revelation (the Law): quoting, for example, the law of the Sabbath. But they do not know how to apply their theological certitudes to the phenomenon of Jesus, because he does not fit into their theological categories. Jesus on the other hand reformulates the questions or the problems on the only level where they can find a positive solution: in terms of what is good for people (for example: 'Is it permitted to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath?'). And so, the argument runs, the basic precondition for theological reflection and appeal to religious sources is likewise

¹⁷ Gheerbrant, A.: *The Rebel Church in Latin America* (London, 1974), p 175.

the option for humanly perfective goals, otherwise one will simply not see the meaning, the significance, of Jesus.

Segundo's third argument is an appeal to the character of the new testament writings: they are not direct accounts of the sayings and acts of Jesus, but a witness to how the early Church saw and interpreted Jesus from their own standpoint and with their own preoccupations. There is a distinction always to be drawn between the living event and its interpretation. New interpretations flow from a living situation and reflection on it, and subsequent understanding can only develop through understanding the Church's questions via its tradition.

Lastly, the book turns to examine the failure of the idealist method in practice. Segundo quotes the example of the christian democratic party in Chile before Allende. As it found itself closer and closer to the realities of political power, it was forced to try to enunciate an alternative policy to those of the left and the right. What it fastened on to were the slogans, 'communitarian ownership' and 'revolution in liberty'. And the reason why this policy failed was that it was not a political policy at all, designed to deal with a real situation, but an evangelical ideal which depended for its implementation on the abstract possibility of converting the hearts of the people. It was sheer proclamation, the imposition of an *a priori* demand as condition for anything being done. As such it was useless for effecting change, and the party found itself in practice more and more aligned with the right against Allende.

Faith commitment as the first step

As one follows the argument, it becomes clearer that, in the affirmation of the need for commitment before theology, the central issue is in fact the commitment of faith (in the broadest sense), and its relation to beliefs and policies. In specifically christian terms the question is where the beginning of christian faith lies. Is it a prior faith in humanity, 'outside' belief in the gospel? If so, why go on to christian belief at all?

The problems are real enough, but Segundo's conclusion is inevitably that the questions are confusing, and that the problems stem from the confusion. The presumption is the identification of the notion of faith with a specific understanding of the faith. Faith is being identified with theology or more generally, with ideology or idea-system; and so faith-commitment is being confused with faith-belief. The Pharisees in the example quoted worked within faith-belief or theology, and thought Jesus 'faithless' because he appealed to faith-commitment. The christian democrats substituted for a policy (a concrete series of practical ideas) an ideal commitment without the means of carrying it out.

Segundo argues that the solution lies in distinguishing faith and theology (or ideology). Faith, like love, is a transcendent commitment, without specific form; but it is given a specific form in a theology or belief-system. Faith, then, always has a theological form; but the distinction between them

is essential to enable us to relativize any theology, which then becomes a model or pattern for describing some aspects of the uncapturable richness of reality. Segundo himself illustrates the distinction by reference to the process of learning. One learns facts or data; but in learning, one also learns how to learn, to acquire a method which itself is empty, but which is activated and given form in the study of particular material, for example, history. A method implies decision, a commitment to a particular framework or way of understanding; but since it mediates understanding, it is not an arbitrary decision. Furthermore, because we repeat the process often, we establish a tradition of learning which we can share with others. But the learning starts with a commitment to understand from within a certain tradition (a family or school or Church). It is only gradually that we come to clarify the distinction between method-commitment and content, and to recognize that the former can be expressed in a variety of ways, for it transcends content.

As a result of making the distinction, a number of things become clearer. It is not necessary, in the first place, to demand one specific system of ideas or beliefs, which is timeless and certain, as essential equipment for dealing with particular situations. On the other hand, one cannot begin with bare commitment, without any theological or ideological stance (for example, faith simply in 'humanity' or 'the gospel' or 'the revolution'). Commitment begins as commitment in a specific tradition. But one can and should relativize and reformulate the expression of that commitment by standing back from the specific form and referring to a wider though still limited framework; for example, to look beyond the commitment to God in the sabbath law to a commitment to him in the wider good of human beings.

But the relativizing of particular theologies creates its own problems. Is there a specifically christian contribution to the process of liberation, or is it any better than any ideology which enshrines concern for mankind? Secondly, is there within Christianity any normative theology which could decide the issue, for example, between peaceful revolution and revolutionary violence? The first problem has already received an answer to some extent in the assertion that one cannot begin with bare commitment: one must begin within a tradition. The christian makes this decision on the grounds that commitment within his tradition represents the most adequate starting place, the most adequate formulation he can find: otherwise he would not be a Christian. It is, however, very tempting to start apparently outside an explicit christian commitment, and there is a fundamental truth being affirmed by those who would wish to do so. If we are not to start with clear dogmatic definitions on the idealist pattern, then it is necessary to start in some sense indirectly and inductively, believing that the truth can be arrived at – the truth Christ came to reveal – in the human process of development; and this for two reasons: firstly, because the christian belief in the coming of the Kingdom is a belief in a dynamic and sure process in which the Spirit is guiding seekers for the truth, and in which it is possible to find and foster

true human growth; and secondly, because the theology of grace already described (which is inclined to speak of a single graced-nature) presupposes that the fulness of human growth is truly to become Christlike.

However, the conclusion of this argument is that it is sufficient to remain on an implicit level of recognition. Such an approach kicks away the ladder by which one has climbed, and it stems from the over-simple application of the distinction of faith and theology. For it is necessary to establish a third element between the two. Faith is transcendent, and therefore, in a real sense, empty: theology is a partial and time-conditioned expression of faith. But there is also the historical development of insight, 'doctrine'; and I use the term here to denote the normative frameworks, the rules which define what history has shown can and cannot be said by a Christian in his theologies about the fundamental elements in the tradition. It is thus possible to make a comparative evaluation of theologies within christian faith. Not just anything will count as a theology. It is Segundo's strength that he distinguishes the theologies from the language rules of doctrines. But he tends to assimilate the latter to faith, to the unthematic, empty commitment (when considered on its own). It is the allowing for the third factor which seems to me best to describe the phenomenon of faith and belief through history, and which permits one to relativize, but not totally so, the theologies in which faith is expressed.

Revolutionary violence

If not just anything will count as a christian theology, then equally, not just anything will count as loving in the christian tradition. The question of revolutionary violence could occupy much more space than remains to me. Again we must remember how living and anguishing a question it is, and that the answer is not clear-cut; remember, too, that the main source of violence lies in those who resist justice. Here I can only make some reflections stemming from theological considerations on the types of pre-supposition discussed already in these articles.

First, then, it is necessary to explain what is meant by violence. Two aspects are normally considered; first, physical violence; and then the violence of constraint, manipulation, or pressure on personal freedom. The ideal of the gospel presented in the Sermon on the Mount is that of the powerlessness of love, and any decline from that is recognizably an aggressive failure to win the free assent of those addressed. A third category is proposed by Segundo: the 'violence' of choice to love some and not others; the choice, therefore, to exclude some, a thing we necessarily do every day. This seems a strange usage. The limitation of love rests on the facts of the situation which limit what is possible. To work within limits is not to devalue another, and it is the latter which I take to be integral to the notion of violence.

The theological question comes down to asking whether the 'powerlessness' of the Sermon on the Mount is to be seen as normative. The distinction between theology/ideology and faith has led many latin american theologians

to affirm that the Sermon is simply one theology and not determinative:

... it is not at all certain that Jesus would have altered the Old Testament view and advised us to turn the other cheek if he had been confronted with the whole issue of israelite slavery in Egypt.¹⁸

Now it might be the case that if the Sermon is purely theological, then the christian faith might be represented in another theology (of violence) without prejudice. But if the Sermon's moral command to non-violence is parallel to the nature of a doctrinal statement as a necessary framework clarified through historical development, then the foundation for a theology of violence based on the simple faith-ideology distinction would be unsatisfactory. And it does seem that the 'empty' command to love cannot be enshrined equally in non-violent and violent revolution, for the developing biblical and historical tradition on the value of persons seems to dictate a normative value to freedom and non-manipulation, not to say physically non-violent ways of treating others. On the other hand, neither position in practice is to be seen as exhausting the credible possibilities. There is a validity, for example, in the witness of both the soldier and the pacifist. But while both values are real and relativize each other to some extent, liberation theology has yet to show that within the christian tradition there is no priority to non-violence, and that violence is not always the last resort, the lesser of two evils, for which the seeking of forgiveness, not celebration, is the appropriate response.

I would like to conclude briefly with the statement of Helder Camara on the mutuality of action and reflection, since this theme sums up the main thread of these articles:

Let every word be the fruit of action and reflection. Reflection alone without action or tending towards it, is mere theory, adding its weight when we are overloaded with it already; and it has led the young to despair. Action alone without reflection is being busy pointlessly. Honour the Word eternal and speak to make a new world possible.¹⁹

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¹⁸ Segundo, *op. cit.*, p 86.

¹⁹ Camara, Helder: *The Desert is fertile* (London, 1974), p 58.