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The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology: A Lutheran Confessional Response to the Theological Methodology of Leonardo Boff

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THE HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A LUTHERAN CONFESSIONAL RESPONSE TO THE THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY OF LEONARDO BOFF

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC -- Augsburg Confession

Ap -- Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Ep -- Epitome of the Formula of Concord

FC -- Formula of Concord

LC -- Large Catechism

SA -- Smalcald Articles

SC -- Small Catechism

SD -- Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

TPPP -- Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

INTRODUCTION

The movement in contemporary theology which is usually given the name "liberation theology" is, in actuality, a broad collection of loosely-connected and often conflicting theologies. Nevertheless, despite great variety, it shares two overriding themes. First, it proclaims the need for liberation from any form of oppression: political, economic, social, sexual, racial and religious. The second theme evident in all forms of liberation theology is the conviction that theology must grow out of the basic Christian communities. Liberation theologians believe that theology is not to be imposed from above, that is, from an infallible source-book or an infallible magisterium of the church. Rather, theology is to be done from below. It is to be derived from the locus of oppression in which people find themselves and is to be directed specifically to the relief of that oppression. Nevertheless, since every local situation is unique, liberation theologians throughout the world have displayed considerable variety.

Since its emergence, less than twenty years ago, at the Conference of Latin American Bishops, at Medellín Colombia, liberation theology has experienced a meteoric rise in popularity world-wide, especially among Christians who perceive themselves to be oppressed in any way. Exported from its birth-place, Latin America, at an incredible rate, wherever it has taken root, it was adapted to reflect a local situation. It has, moreover, in its various manifestations around the world,

spawned an awesome body of literature which is by no means monolithic, but exhibits a tremendous amount of diversity.

This diversity can be seen particularly in the Third World, in which liberation theology generally is divided into three main types: Latin American, Asian, and African. But even within these divisions, liberation theology manifests diversity. For example, within Latin America, the theology emanating from Brazil is quite different from that current in El Salvador due to differences in circumstances. Likewise, the theology of liberation in the Caribbean is different from that in Latin America. In Asia, the theology emanating from Japan differs from that of Korea (Minjung theology) which, in turn varies from that developing in India. Within Africa, the theology produced in South Africa is radically different from that in the remainder of the Continent.

But the picture becomes more confused when the diverse manifestations of liberation theology in North America and Europe are added. In Europe, many of the themes of liberation theology are found in what is known as "political theology." In North America liberation theology has found vocal advocates within nearly every minority group, giving rise to black theology, feminist theology, black-feminist theology, native American theology, Chicano theology, Asian-American theology. But the import of liberation theology is not limited to ethnic minorities in North America. Aspects of liberation theology have also been found congenial to other groups of people, to blue collar workers in major urban centers, to the disabled, the disadvantaged and those advocating "alternate" life styles. No doubt, in the years to come,

there will be yet more mutations of this growing movement known as "liberation theology."

Since each of the many manifestations of this movement tends to see its own brand of oppression as being the most important, this has, quite often, led to conflict among liberation theologians. The diversity and atomization of liberation theology, requires, therefore, that we speak of "liberation theologies," in order to avoid the impression that there is a uniform content within the movement. In fact, it is this conflict among the various proponents of liberation theology that has led Jürgen Moltmann, considered by many to be one of the founders of the movement, to attempt to repair the divisions, when he wrote:

> When we recognize the extent of the interdependencies of oppression in that vicious circle, we shall recognize the need for co-operation between the different forms of liberation. There are different gifts and different tasks, but the freedom we seek is one and therefore indivisible . . . mutual recognition could show them the latent potentialities which they had hitherto failed to activate in their particular situations. . . . The 'points of entry' differ, and are bound to differ, according to the context. Not everyone can do everything all at once. Historically there are different paths to liberation but only one goal of freedom. Without open-minded co-operation between the different forces of liberation and their ability to learn from one another, we shall not get to see the kingdom of freedom. We only hear the divine cry of freedom when we listen to the universal cry for freedom and make it our own, wholly and not partially.[1]

Despite his efforts, Moltmann has not been able to heal the divisions which plague the movement. There is every indication that the diversity will continue and increase.

In light of the situation outlined above, it becomes obvious that an analysis of liberation theology cannot simply be based upon its

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[1]Jürgen Moltmann, The Future of Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 113-14.

contents since it has no consistent theological content which has validity or applicability to all its forms or manifestations. To attempt to evaluate the content of liberation theology as a whole would run the risk of gross generalization and over-simplification and, in the end, would be inaccurate. Since liberation theologians cover an entire spectrum of viewpoints, politically as well as theologically, it is almost impossible to synthesize and evaluate the collective content of their theology. Whatever common content can be discerned in the theology of liberation as it has developed to this point may only be spoken of in most general terms. This is because specific theologies have been shaped by their specific historical contexts, which are unique. As Frederick Herzog writes:

> I do not think it makes sense to lump all liberation theologies together and to act as though they were a theological genre all by themselves. The whole idea of each liberation theology is to take seriously in a particular context analysis of the data for which Christian theology is responsible.[2]

Therefore, it is the basic thesis of this study that a theological critique of and response to liberation theology can be done properly only on the basis of its methodology, for it is the theological method of liberation theology and not its theological or political results which serves as its unifying force. Emilio A. Núñez C. says it simply: "Fundamentally, what distinguishes the theology of liberation most from other theologies is its method."[3] It is the method, and the

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[2]Frederick Herzog, Justice Church: The New Function of the Church in North American Christianity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 6.

[3]Emilio A. Núñez C., Liberation Theology, tr. Paul E. Sywulka (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 164.

hermeneutical presuppositions which accompany it, that shape this diverse and conflicting movement into a unified whole. It is not an over-simplification to say that liberation theology is not a "theology" at all. Rather it is a method of "doing" theology. It is, then, at this methodological level that the challenge of the movement must be met.

This dissertation will examine and critically evaluate the methodology of liberation theology. First, however, it is necessary to explore some of its fundamental emphases and concepts in greater detail so that the movement, its roots, its causes, and concerns, can be examined on its own terms. Chapter one will be devoted to this. Chapter two contains a survey of the literature of liberation theology from Latin America. Latin America is generally considered to be the birthplace of liberation theology. It was there that the movement grew and prospered and put Latin America into the situation, for the first time in its history, of being an exporter of theological ideas. The Latin American liberation theologians have also shown themselves to be among the most prolific among the movement's advocates. This survey will involve a brief discussion of the peculiar situation in Latin America that gave rise to the movement, a brief history of the movement in Latin America itself, a survey of the major writings of the main liberation theologians from Latin America, and a brief summary of the general tenor of Latin American liberation theology.

Tightening the scope more, the hermeneutics of liberation theology will be examined on the basis of one of its most important representative theologians. Leonardo Boff has been selected for this purpose because he is one of the most prolific writers of the movement and he

has distinguished himself as one of its leaders by attempting to establish liberation theology on a solid theological foundation and has devoted a great deal of effort formulating the theological methodology of liberation theology. Boff, a Franciscan priest and professor of systematic theology at the Petrópolis (Brazil) Institute for Philosophy and Theology, gained some unwanted publicity for himself last year when he was officially censured by the Vatican for his views on the church. After a survey of Boff's life and writings (chapter three) his theological methodology will be investigated in detail, especially as it works itself out in the two areas of theology toward which his efforts have primarily been directed, ecclesiology and Christology. This will be the topic of chapter four.

Chapter five will consist of an exposition of Lutheran confessional theological methodology. The basis of this presentation will be the Lutheran Symbolical writings. It will be shown in this chapter that the Lutheran Symbols do, indeed, contain principles of hermeneutics which are binding upon those who wish to subscribe quia to them. The purpose of this chapter, of course, is not to show that Boff is not a Lutheran Confessional theologian. Although Boff is quite knowledgeable about Luther and Lutheran writings,[4] it would be too much to expect a Roman Catholic to be a Confessional Lutheran. The purpose, however, is to present the Confessional hermeneutics so that they may be compared with the methods of Boff. Since liberation theology is, primarily, a method, it is that method which must be compared with the Confessional

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[4] In fact, Boff has written on Luther. See, "Lutero entre a Reforma e a Libertação," Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira, 43 (1983): 714-36.

position. Only in this way is it possible to evaluate the validity and applicability of the theological methodology of liberation theology to Lutheran Confessional theology. Finally, chapter six will contain a comparison of the two views, conclusions and a summary.

CHAPTER I

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Introduction

As difficult as it is to characterize liberation theologies, and as careful as one must be not to generalize, it is possible to point out seven themes which are shared by most, if not all, liberation theologians: Praxis is the starting point of theology, history is the locus of theology, a holistic view of the world, the systemic nature of sin, God is on the side of the oppressed, the transformability of the present order, and the priority of praxis over theory. The purpose of this chapter is to present a synthetic statement of each theme and then illustrate it by means of citations from the works of leading liberation theologians. The citations which follow are drawn from a wide range of theologians (Latin American, Asian, North American, European, and so forth) in order to demonstrate the universality of these themes among liberation theologians. It is necessary to mention at the outset that the emphases vary depending on the area in which the particular theology is reflected. For example, different areas of the Third World emphasize different dimensions of liberation. Whereas Asian liberation theology, in its pluralistic religious setting, seeks to come to terms with the various religions and South African liberation theology emphasizes the oppression of racism and apartheid, Latin American liberation theology

focuses on political, economic, and social oppression. Since the purpose here is to present the emphases of liberation theology generally, and to allow the theologians to speak for themselves, these themes and citations will be presented without critical comment.

Unifying Themes of Liberation Theology

Praxis is the Starting Point of Theology

Most traditional Christian theological systems start to "do theology" on the basis of some philosophical assumptions about knowledge, revelation, the existence of God, or one's own Christian experience. The uniqueness of the theology of liberation is that it insists that all theologizing must start with a commitment to liberation of the oppressed, that is, from "a starting point of praxis, not of theory."[1] It argues that the knowledge of the Gospel is not an abstract, propositional knowledge but, "one that is achieved through identification with the oppressed."[2] It holds that there can be no understanding of the Gospel apart from the performance of the Gospel. This performance entails not only works of mercy but also, indeed above all, works of justice. "Knowing God" is therefore correlative with "doing justice."

This point is made by nearly every liberation theologian. Robert McAfee Brown, one of the most vocal advocates of liberation theology from North America, on the basis of Jeremiah 22:13-17, clearly enunciates this theme, "To know God is to do justice," when he asks:

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[1]Dayton W. Roberts, "Where Has Liberation Theology Gone Wrong?" Christianity Today, 23 (Oct. 19, 1979):26.

[2]Donald G. Bloesch, "Soteriology in Contemporary Christian Thought," Interpretation, 35 (1981):138.

> Where, then, will God be found and known? In the doing of justice, in making one's own the cause of the poor, in breaking with systems of oppression, in joining the struggle with the victims.[3]

Action, praxis, is the starting point of theological reflection for liberation theologians.

History is the Locus of Theology

If the struggle for liberation is the starting point for theology, it is important to understand the antecedents, history and implications of that struggle. For Liberation theology history becomes God's way of speaking to mankind in contemporary situations, and many liberation theologians see the historians, sociologists, and economists as prophets, as discerners of God's word to man. For them history is "the undisputed locus of theology."[4] God is seen at work in all events of liberation and revolution. He speaks not only through Scripture but also through the political upheavals of our day. In fact, all of history is conceived of as sacred history, since all of history reveals even as it also hides the presence of God, who is understood to be in essence "the power of liberating love."[5]

Salvation, therefore, takes place within history, within the baseness and deprivation within which the oppressed live. Robert McAfee Brown uses the Biblical story of Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9:28-43) to illustrate that the real salvation which Jesus came to bring

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[3]Robert McAfee Brown, Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 69.

[4]Dayton W. Roberts, p. 27.

[5]Donald G. Bloesch, p. 138.

(His Messiahship) takes place, not on the mountaintop but at the base of the mountain, in real-life history: "This is what Messiahship is all about: being in the midst of the poor, the sick, the helpless, those with frothing mouths."[6]

James Cone, a prominent proponant of Black liberation theology, is even more insistent that the locus of theology must be in history. Appeals to an eschatological "beyond" have no relevance, he says, to peoples who are experiencing oppression. Theology must either be rooted in the historical present or it must be rejected. Cone writes:

> The proper eschatological perspective must be grounded in the historical present, thereby forcing the oppressed community to say NO to unjust treatment because their present humiliation is inconsistent with their promised future. No eschatological perspective is sufficient which does not challenge the present order. If contemplation about the future distorts the present reality of injustice and reconciles the oppressed to unjust treatment committed against them, then it is unchristian and thus has nothing whatsoever to do with him who came to liberate us. It is this that renders white talk about heaven and life after death fruitless for black people. . . . What good are golden crowns, slippers, white robes or even eternal life, if it means that we have to turn our backs on the pain and suffering of our own children? Unless the future can become present, thereby forcing us to make changes in this world, what significance could eschatology have for black people who believe that their self-determination must become a reality now! White missionaries have always encouraged blacks to forget about present injustice and look forward to heavenly justice. But Black Theology says NO, insisting that we either put new meaning into Christian hope by relating it to our liberation or drop it altogether.[7]

That history is the locus of theology means that much more attention must be given to history than traditional theology has done. Analysis of the concrete, social, political, and economic situation in which oppressed peoples live is an essential part of theology. Frederick

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[6]Robert McAfee Brown, p. 122.

[7]James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), pp. 241-2.

Herzog, who sees praxis as the starting point of theology says that, after one has investigated Scripture with a praxeological perspective, one must turn to an analysis of social structures: "Praxis text [Scripture] analysis is now followed by praxis context [history] analysis."[8] For many liberation theologians, but not all, social dynamics are best understood by the application of Marxist principles of social analysis. Herzog, for example, maintains that this is necessary: "There can be no systematic theology in North America today without the analysis of Marx."[9] The Marxist critique of society is even more important for the Latin American theologians, who will be examined in the next chapter.

A Holistic View of the World

Intimately connected with the above point, is the assertion by many liberation theologians that the Western conception of the world is seriously flawed by Greek philosophical dualism. Liberation theology, on the other hand, asserts a holistic view of man and the world and draws attention to the perceived Western tendency to dichotomize everything. They hold that Western logic has been enslaved by hellenistic thought, by its dichotomies of thesis and antithesis, theory and practice, concepts of spirit versus matter, soul versus body, and so on.[10]

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[8]Frederick Herzog, Justice Church: The New Function of the Church in North American Christianity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 6.

[9]Frederick Herzog, "Birth Pangs: Liberation Theology in North America," in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds., Mission Trends No. 4 (New York and Grand Rapids: Paulist Press and William B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 34.

[10]Dayton W. Roberts, p. 26.

This Greek dualism leads to the distortion of the traditional reading of Scripture. Biblical terms have usually been understood as either "spiritual" or "physical" in their application. But this, they say, is a Hellenic, rather than a Hebraic way of looking at things.

Salvation, they argue, must embrace the whole person and, eventually, all of society. Modern techniques in Biblical studies have rediscovered "Hebraic holism,"[11] that is, the fact that a human being cannot be divided into soul and body, or individual and society. We are whole creatures. Thus, theology cannot tolerate a "narrow definition of soul-saving."[12] Jesus' entire ministry shows that he was concerned with the whole person, with the material and interpersonal needs of human beings and not just their spiritual well-being. Salvation has to do with the whole person.

José Míquez Bonino has spoken forcefully of the implications of this dualism. Leaving the question of the causes of this situation unanswered, he says that its effect has been a denigration and negation of the present:

> There is no doubt that the ardent expectation of the total transformation of the world and the advent of the Kingdom of God was soon replaced in Christianity by the spiritualized and individualistic hope for immortal, celestial life. Whether and to what extent this transformation was due to the influence of the hellenistic culture, to the delay of the Parousia, to the influence of the mystery religions, to the sociologically necessary phenomenon of the institutionalization of the ecclesia is for us at this point a question which can remain unanswered. What matters most is to realize the importance of the conception of two worlds: This present, temporal, earthly, one, which had a preparatory, contingent, and even at points negligible value, and the eternal one which is

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[11] Donald G. Bloesch, p. 138.

[12] Clarke G. Chapman, "Dear Theophilus--Now About 'Liberation Theology' . . .," Dialog, 19 (1980), p. 224.

> the true realm of life, fulfillment and happiness, the goal for the Christian.[13]

Since God's revelation and salvation take place within history, to negate present history by appealing to the "hereafter" for ultimate meaning is unacceptable for liberation theology.

The Systemic Nature of Sin

Sin is likewise conceived of in terms of human wholeness, as destructive of solidarity. It is not conceived of as individual acts or thoughts but is imbedded in systems, economic, social, or political. This implies that, for example, violence, one form of sin, is a much broader concept than popularly thought. It is not just to be found in news stories of rioting or murder, but it is included the very social structures, or systems, under which much of the world's population lives. A holistic definition of violence would be: "Whatever violates personhood."[14]

Dom Helder Camara, the archbishop of Recife, Brazil, describes violence as a spiral of three stages.[15] Violence of the first stage is injustice, that is, the hidden structures of our corporate lives that turn people into objects to be manipulated. This results in homeless men, sick mothers, and starving children. It resembles the fiery lava under a dormant volcano, seething and building up pressure. Stage two violence is revolt, which occurs when suffering cannot be endured.

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[13] José Míguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 132-3.

[14] Clarke G. Chapman, p. 225.

[15] Helder Camara, Spiral of Violence, trans. Della Couling (London and Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1971), pp. 25-40.

The lava bursts forth into the open. The third stage of violence is repression. Those who hold power try to suppress the revolt by whatever means necessary, including intimidation, torture, and eventually massive oppression.[16]

In this way the root of sin is located in the systems and institutions which force people to live in poverty. Of course, the revolt against oppression (stage two violence) is equally sinful, but it has its antecedent and cause in the injustice and sinfulness of the system. Likewise, salvation is conceived of not in spiritual terms, but in terms of actual freedom from violence and oppressive systems. Since the system is seen as the locus of sin, freedom from the system of oppression is the key to liberation.

God Is on the Side of the Oppressed

For liberation theologians, God stands on the side of those who are poor and the exploited (whether that exploitation is seen as economic or political oppression, racism, sexism, or whatever). God does not take sides but because human beings regularly favor the rich, giving them prestige and high offices, God counterbalances their favoritism by championing the cause of the poor.[17] Furthermore, God favors justice and not injustice. This, they say, is the message of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament. And if God favors the oppressed and stands for justice, this is what the follower of God is also to do.

Jürgen Moltmann paints a picture of a God who genuinely suffers

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[16]Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[17]Dayton W. Roberts, p. 225.

with, not only for, his people. When God's children suffer, God Himself suffers:

> But the cry for liberty does not only run through mankind and nature. It is God's own cry as well. The spirit of God himself hungers and sighs in the groans of the hungry, in the torment of prisoners and in nature's silent death pangs. The messianic traditions of Judaism and Christianity do not talk about an apathetic God, enthroned in heaven in untouched bliss. They show us a God who suffers with his forsaken creation because he loves it. He suffers with his people in exile, he suffers with his humanity which has become inhuman, he suffers with his creation which is enslaved and under sentence of death. He suffers with them, he suffers because of them, and he suffers for them. His suffering is his messianic secret. For he has created man for liberty--to be the image of himself.[18]

But, beyond suffering for and with the poor, God actually opts for the poor and the oppressed. This is one of the basic presuppositions of liberation theology. It was stressed at the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops (Medellín, Colombia, 1968) in the words of an appeal to the pastors of the church: "To defend the rights of the poor and oppressed according to the Gospel commandment, urging our governments and the upper classes to eliminate anything which might destroy social peace."[19] But it was enlarged upon and codified in the Third Conference, at Puebla (Mexico) eleven years later (1979):

> With renewed hope in the vivifying power of the Spirit, we are going to take up once again the position of the Second General Conference of the Latin American episcopate in Medellín, which adopted a clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor. We do this despite the distortions

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[18] Jürgen Moltmann, The Future of Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 98.

[19] Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinamericano (2nd: 1968, Bogotá and Medellín, Colombia), The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II, Conclusions, second edition (Washington, D. C.: Division for Latin America - USCC, 1973) 2.22, p. 64.

> and interpretations of some, who vitiate the spirit of Medellín, and despite the disregard and even hostility of others. We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their liberation.[20]

Kosuke Koyama sees God's preference for the poor in that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30). By so doing, Koyama says, Jesus went to the periphery, that is, "the place without honor, prestige and power."[21] Koyama then concludes: "If Jesus Christ has gone to the periphery, theology itself must go there following Jesus Christ."[22] For liberation theology God is on the side of the poor. Theology and the church must likewise be there.

Robert McAfee Brown explains that only a God who sides with the poor is worthy of the name God:

> God always sides with the oppressed. . . . A God siding with the tyrants would be a God of malevolence; a God siding with no one would appear to be a God of indifference but would also be a God of malevolence, giving support to the tyrants by not opposing them; only a God siding with the oppressed would be a God of justice, a God worthy of the name.[23]

Frederick Herzog is even more blunt in his demand that theology must side with the oppressed: "Theology that does not take the world's poor into account from the word 'go' isn't Christian theology."[24]

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[20]John Eagleson and Philip Sharper, eds., Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) IV, 1.1, p. 251.

[21]Kosuke Koyama, Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 251.

[22]Ibid., p. 252.

[23]Robert McAfee Brown, p. 41.

[24]Frederick Herzog, "Birth Pangs," p. 34.

The Transformability of the Present Order

Most liberation theologians are convinced that, not only must the present order of things be transformed, but it can be transformed. They point to several justifications for this view. Our century is the first in which it is humanly possible, many say, to do something about much of the evil we deplore. It is possible, at least in theory, to alter for better or worse the basic conditions of everyday life. In earlier stages of civilization, little could be done about disease, poverty, or famine. That is no longer the case. These and other burdens of suffering could be substantially lightened if society would vow to mobilize its vast array of technological capacities.

This optimistic view of modern technology is generally combined with a feeling of eschatological immediacy -- the anticipation of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God on earth. Much of this thinking is based upon Moltmann's conception of "eschatological anticipation," which can be outlined as follows:

1. Eschatology cannot be a report of future history.
2. Eschatology cannot be the extrapolation of the future from history.
3. Eschatology formulates the anticipation of history's future in history's midst.
4. Historical eschatology is possible and necessary because of, and on the basis of, the eschatological history of Jesus Christ.[25]

This view might also be called "presentative eschatology" because it

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[25]Jürgen Moltmann, p. 48.

anticipates the establishment of the eschatological kingdom in the present.[26]

These factors lead many liberation theologians to conclude that a basic re-ordering or transformation of present society is not only possible, but necessary. José Míguez Bonino, for example, says that the eschatological kingdom is more than reflected or foreshadowed in the present realm. It is really present now, though only in part:

> Since Christ has risen and inaugurated a new realm of life, man's existence in love bears the marks of this new age and will find lasting fulfillment when this new age will become an unresisted and total realization. . . . If these obeservations are true, any language which confines the relation between history and the Kingdom to the realm of image-reality remains inadequate. The Kingdom is not merely adumbrated, reflected, foreshadowed, or analogically hinted at in the individual and collective realizations of love in history, but actually present, operative, authentically--however imperfectly and partially--realized.[27]

Gustavo Gutiérrez indicates that the transformation of unjust social structures can, in fact, be effected but that the spiritualizing of much of theology has hidden this fact: "A poorly understood spiritualization has often made us forget the human consequences of the eschatological promises and the power to transform unjust social structures which they imply."[28] He goes on to explain that, while the establishment of the complete eschatological kingdom of God on earth

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[26]This expectation of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is, of course, heightened, for some theologians, by what might be called Marxist utopianism. This is especially the case, as will be seen in the next chapter, among the Latin American liberation theologians.

[27]José Míguez Bonino, pp. 141-2.

[28]Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, trans. and ed., Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 167.

remains incomplete, whatever is accomplished in the present has eternal implications:

> Faith proclaims that the brotherhood which is sought through the abolition of the exploitation of man by man is something possible, that efforts to bring it about are not in vain, that God calls us to it and assures us of its complete fulfillment, and that the definitive reality is being built on what is transitory.[29]

Cone, from the North American perspective, also indicates that he believes in the possibility of transforming the present unjust structures into just ones when he says: "Hope must be related to the present, and it must serve as a means of transforming an oppressed community into a liberated--and--liberating--community."[30]

The Priority of Praxis over Theory

For the liberation theologians, then, theology begins and ends in the life of a Christian community. Ideas and life are interrelated in the community. As a local church is not detached from its place or culture, so theology is not composed by individuals in an ivory tower. Nor is it simply given from above, in an infallible source-book or by the magisterium of the church. Instead, Christian thinkers are part of a Christian community. They reflect on God's self-disclosure through the yearnings, hopes and uncertainties of that group, and the wider society beyond. In the same way, the final test of a theology is in the transformed lives of its community, and, eventually, of humanity.[31]

The hope of a reconstituted society is what lies behind the fondness of liberation theologians for the word praxis, which means

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[29]Ibid., p. 237. [30]James H. Cone, p. 245.

[31]See, Clark Chapman, p. 227.

an unending reciprocity between action and reflection within the community. So liberation theology does not see itself as just one more doctrine, or one more fad of theological opinion. Rather it claims to do what all theology ought to be doing: putting action before words, praxis before theory. Frederick Herzog sees Jesus as the paradigm for such a conception:

> Obviously there was also thinking, hard thinking. But the hard thinking grew out of and was tied to a definite praxis. Jesus' praxis, we need to observe, gave rise to Christian thought. "Thinking on his feet," Jesus incarnated God. Thus praxis gives rise to thought.
>
> What we need to understand is that unless we are intimately involved in the same matrix of human life in which Messiah Jesus incarnated God we cannot shape a Christian theology. The Gospel story is not primarily a talk-text, but a praxis-text. God-talk comes in God-walk. Involved in this ministry we begin to understand theology.[32]

Míguez Bonino, referring to the ushering in of the kingdom of God on earth, explains the priority of praxis over theory in the following way:

> Instead of asking, where is the Kingdom present or visible in today's history? we are moved to ask, how can I participate--not only individually but in a community of faith and in a history--in the coming world? The main problem is not noetic but, so to say, empirical. It has to do with an active response.[33]

Gustavo Gutiérrez likewise stresses the human aspect of the work of establishing the kingdom of God as he explains the relationship between theory and practice. The Gospel is a free gift of God but the establishment of a just society is the work of men. God and man work together to bring about justice on earth:

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[32]Frederick Herzog, Justice Church, p. 3.

[33]Míguez Bonino, p. 143.

> The Gospel does not provide a utopia for us; this is a human work. The Word is a free gift of the Lord. But the Gospel is not alien to the historical plan; on the contrary, the human plan and the gift of God imply each other. The Word is the foundation and the meaning of all human existence; this foundation is attested to and this meaning is concretized through human actions. For whoever lives by them, faith, charity, and hope are a radical factor in spiritual freedom and historical creativity and initiative.[34]

Conclusion and Summary

Liberation theologies have shown a tremendous variety of content in their theological presentations and systems. The content of a particular theology depends, first of all, upon the outlook of the theologian and, secondly, upon the area of the world from which he or she comes. Different areas of the Third World, for example, emphasize different dimensions of liberation. Whereas Asian liberation theology, in its pluralistic religious setting, seeks to come to terms with the various religions and South African liberation theology emphasizes the oppression of racism or apartheid, Latin American liberation theology focuses on political, economic, and social oppression. Since each local situation is unique, liberation theologies display considerable variety. Korean Minjung theology could no more be transplanted to Brazil than South African liberation theology could be exported to Hong Kong. Third World liberation theology itself is not monolithic. Nor is the theology being produced within the various areas of the Third World. The great variety of emphases found in Latin American liberation theology will be shown in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, the above presentation, while fully recognizing the great differences between the theologians, has shown several themes

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[34] Gustavo Gutiérrez, p. 238.

common to all liberation theologies. Moreover, these themes serve to substantiate the basic thesis of this study that liberation theology is, in its essence, not a theology at all, but a method. It is a new way of looking at the world and at theology; a new way of doing "theological reflection;" a new way of studying the Scriptures. It is a "theology from below," inspired, to a large extent, by the modern theology emanating from Europe. But it would be wrong to ignore or minimize the great concern which these theologians exhibit for those on the periphery of society, the oppressed, the marginalized, the poor. It is the hard, cold facts of their existence that moves these theologians to take a second look at Christian theology, a look "from below," as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it:

> There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled--in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.[35]

Juan Luís Segundo says that liberation theology has two major characteristics. First of all, he says, it is "reductive,"[36] which means that it does not intend to reproduce the entire theological system which has been bequeathed to it by tradition. It is not interested in doing so. It merely wishes to "reduce the multitude of dogmatic enunciations to certain fundamental mysteries of revelation that give

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[35]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, new greatly enlarged edition (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 17.

[36]Juan Luís Segundo, A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity, vol. 1: The Community Called Church, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. ix.

an account of our faith."[37] Secondly, Segundo says, liberation theology "essentially starts with, and takes account of, the world in which our contemporaries live and work."[38] Thus, liberation theology is a method and it is only secondarily interested in theological content.

It is precisely for this reason, moreover, that it is something with which to reckon. It is as a theological methodology that liberation theology challenges the church. The external appearance of liberation theology will change and it will change greatly and rapidly, as the situations in which the theology is produced change. But the basic methodology seems to have a long future. Some advocates are speaking of it in terms of a paradigm change, a whole new way of looking at the world, a change which is even more significant than those brought about by the Reformation. Thomas Hanks says:

> The time has come when we must ask whether the politico-theologico-religious upheaval in Latin America [and in other places as well] is not of greater significance for the proper understanding and use of the Bible than is the Reformation itself.[39]

Liberation theologians themselves resist the notion that the themes of liberation theology can be incorporated into the traditional theological framework as just another "doctrine." Ernesto Cardenal, for example, rejects the idea that the theology of liberation is "one more appendix of traditional theology applied now to the theme of revolution. It is not so. This is an entirely new theology. . ."[40]

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Thomas D. Hanks, God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression, trans. James C. Dekker (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 61.

[40] Ernesto Cardenal, "Preface: Revolution and Theology," in Hugo Assmann, Practical Theology of Liberation, trans. Paul Burns (London: Search Press, 1975), p. 3.

Thus, Frederick Herzog's statement with reference to the hermeneutics of liberation theology seems to be entirely justified: "A fad it is not."[41] This is the view of liberation theologians generally, but not only of liberation theologians. Emilio A. Núñez C., who, although a Central American, is a critic of many aspects of liberation theology, also believes it is more than a passing fad:

> Contrary to what North American and European observers once believed, the theology of liberation in its various forms has not been a passing fad on the contemporary theological scene. This theology appears to have come to stay with us, whether as a system of thought that carries within itself the seed of its own transformation, or as an aggregate of ideas or questions that are already exercizing a profound influence on the theological movements of our time.[42]

Although the method needs to be "fleshed out" and given more content, it has opened up perspectives that will take theology, on a long march into the next century. So opines Segundo as he speaks of his own continent (South America):

> Whether they are followed or not, the pathways opened up here [i.e. the methodology of liberation theology] lead into a long and unforeseeable future. The only thing that can be said for sure is that they take their cue from flesh-and-blood human beings who are struggling with mind and heart and hand to fashion the kingdom of God out of the human materials of our great but oppressed continent.[43]

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[41] Frederick Herzog, "Birth Pangs," p. 26.

[42] Emilio A. Núñez C., Liberation Theology, tr. Paul E. Sywulka (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 8.

[43] Juan Luís Segundo, Liberation of Theology, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 241.

CHAPTER II

LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A SURVEY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, in some detail, the major works of Latin American liberation theologians. While liberation theologians do not comprise a majority of the theologians in Latin America (in fact, they are a small minority), yet there has been a significant group of highly learned and very prolific writers which has had a tremendous impact, not only within Latin America itself, but also throughout the Third World generally, and in Europe and North America as well. The literature emanating from Latin America is vast in scope and quantity. It is not possible to evaluate all of it here. There is, however, a smaller group of theologians who have distinguished themselves as leaders and who have had a formative influence on the liberation theology movement. Primarily through the efforts of Orbis Publishing Company, in Maryknoll, New York, most of these works have also been published in English. This study will concentrate on the major works in English by the major liberation theologians from Latin America. It is only through a broad study of this sort that one can begin to understand this movement, with all its diversity and variety. First, however, it is necessary to see that there are peculiar factors in Latin America which have given rise and impetus to this movement

and that there are certain background works which are essential for its proper understanding.

There are several factors that make the Latin American situation unique and which, in contradistinction to other parts of the Third World, have contributed to the rise and the energetic fervor of its liberation theologians. These are essential for a proper understanding of both the origin of Latin American liberation theology as well as its rapid rise to prominence. These will be mentioned briefly before turning to specific theologians.

The first, and most obvious, of these factors is that Latin America is the only major area of the Third World in which the vast majority of the population is Christian.[1] This cannot be said of any other area of the Third World. This simple fact, when combined with the reality that most of these people live in abject poverty and dependence, has forced Latin American theologians to examine their Christian faith in a way which has no parallel in the world today. The basic question which is being asked by many people is, "How can our Christian faith, which promises salvation and liberation, be reconciled with our present reality of dependence and poverty?" In a way, liberation theology in Latin America can be seen as an attempt to answer just that question.

Juan Luís Segundo has very aptly described the church in Latin

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[1] In fact, Latin America now contains more Catholics than any other section of the world, including Europe. According to recent statistics published by Kenneth L. Woodward, "Church in Crisis," News Week, 9 December 1985, p. 68, more than one-third of all Catholics in the world (a total of 825.6 million) live in Latin America (346 million).

America as being both youthful in its outlook and exhausted in its inner structure.[2] He says that if youthfulness and immaturity could be measured, the church in Latin America might come off looking like the youngest sector of the church. It seems to be indifferent to its own internal problems, as older institutions are not. Instead it turns its gaze outward to the surrounding reality, analyzing it, condemning it, and pledging to effect its transformation. It is convinced that the salvation mentioned in the Gospel is the progressive, ongoing liberation of people from all the forms of enslavement that they perceive to be encumbering them. The Latin American church does not overlook the fact that full and complete liberation will take place outside historical time, but at the same time, it believes that total liberation is conditional upon a liberation process in history. No magic in the hereafter will be able to make up for what human beings have failed to do here below. It is in this respect that the Latin American church appears to be a youthful church -- in its radical posing of questions and its thorough involvement in the most acute problems facing its continent.

At the same time, however, Segundo points out that the church in Latin America gives the impression of being "an exhausted and depleted church."[3] Even though it has been in existence for four centuries, it does not have enough priests of its own to carry out its functions. It must import them from abroad in such great numbers that they make up half of the priestly population in the Roman Catholic Church. It lacks

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[2]Juan Luís Segundo, The Hidden Motives of Pastoral Action: Latin American Reflections, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), pp. 1-2.

[3]Ibid., p. 2.

missionaries to send to its marginal inhabitants in rural regions.[4] It lacks the economic resources it needs from its own members in order to satisfy its most urgent needs and, hence, must import financial aid from abroad.

Because of these factors, and many others, the church in Latin America occupies a unique position within Christianity. It is a church struggling, as it were, for its independence, and is attempting to find its own way. Theologians from North American and Europe may find it disquieting to discover that the theology emanating from Latin America is a theology virtually devoid of content. Although there are notable exceptions, which will be pointed out in the following pages, it is generally recognized that, "the most serious steps taken by Latin American theology so far have been in the area of theological methodology."[5] This methodology, in its most simple terms, consists of two elements: 1) it begins with an analysis of the socio-politico-economic situation of the people, and 2) it forms its theology in direct response to that. The fundamental presupposition of all of Latin American liberation theology, despite its great variety, is that Christianity offers liberation to oppressed people and that liberation, while never complete in history, nevertheless begins here and must begin here.

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[4]This problem, of course, is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant churches are experiencing the same problems. I know of a pastor in Brazil who, in the interior of the country, serves 13 parishes which are spread out more than one hundred miles apart.

[5]John Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), p. xii.

Background Works

It is, of course, impossible for a few recent books to trace the history of a continent as large and complex as Latin America is. This is especially true when it is remembered that Latin America has a modern history which spans four hundred years and encompasses the long and turbulent story of Spanish and Portuguese colonization. In this complex history, moreover, the Catholic Church was a major participant. There are several books, however, which deserve special attention because they have attempted to reinterpret the history of Latin America, or parts of it, specifically in terms of liberation theology.

Enrique Dussel, professor of ethics at Cuyo University in his native Argentina, who studied in Spain, France, Germany and Israel, is the one who has done the most to put liberation theology into a historical perspective. In his first major work on the topic, History and the Theology of Liberation,[6] he divides the history of Latin America into three eras, that of colonial Christendom (16th to 18th centuries), neo-colonialism (1808-1962), and a new era which began in 1962 with the opening of the Second Vatican Council. This basic scheme was expanded and enlarged in his major work, A History of the Church in Latin America.[7] This book has become the standard work in its field and is recognized as the best one-volume treatment of the subject. Phillip Berryman, a North American who spent 15 years (1965-

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[6]Enrique Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

[7]Enrique Dussel, A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979), trans. and rev. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981).

1980) in Central America has added a volume, The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions,[8] which focuses on the recent story of Christian involvement in Central America in far greater detail than any other. Penny Lernoux's Cry of the People[9] provides a comprehensive summary of the contemporary Latin American situation. Finally, David W. Edgington's Christians and the Third World,[10] offers up to date statistics and tables on such things as gross national products, food consumption, infant mortality, population growth and medical facilities in Third World countries, including Latin America.

During the decade of the 60s, the Catholic Church witnessed two significant events that have been seen as catalysts for the rise and development of liberation theology. The first of these was the Second Vatican Council (1962-5),[11] in which the Catholic Church showed itself to be far more aware of social problems and inequalities than previously. Two very important books that explore Vatican II and recent Catholic social teaching are The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social

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[8]Phillip Berryman, The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

[9]Penny Lernoux, The Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America -- The Catholic Church in Conflict with U. S. Policy (New York: Penguin, 1982).

[10]David W. Edgington, Christians and the Third World (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1982).

[11]The documents of Vatican II can be found in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, gen. ed., Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975).

Teaching Since Pope John, edited by Joseph Gremillion,[12] which contains a penetrating analysis of the evolution of Catholic social teaching since 1962 as well as many of the most important conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesial documents which deal with society, and Donal Dorr's Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching.[13]

The Second event of the 1960s which occurred within the Catholic Church, and one that is even more important in terms of liberation theology, was the Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinamericano (CELAM II), which occurred in Medellín, Colombia in 1968. At this conference, the Bishops of Latin America went significantly beyond the social affirmations of Vatican II. By taking the rather general social statements of the conciliar teaching and applying them to the concrete social situation of Latin America, Medellín became known as the "Vatican II of Latin America."[14] In a real sense, this conference can be seen as the birthplace of Latin American liberation theology because it directed attention to what was perceived as the pervasive oppression and injustice in Latin America and the need for the Catholic Church to show a "preferential option for the poor." The sixteen documents emanating from their

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[12]Joseph Gremillion, ed., The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

[13]Donal Dorr, Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984). Another helpful work is, Christine E. Gudorf, Catholic Social Teaching on Liberation Themes (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980). See also Gregory Baum's much briefer treatment, "Faith and Liberation: Development since Vatican II," in Gerald M. Fagin, ed., Vatican II: Open Questions and New Horizons, Theology and Life Series, vol. 8 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), pp. 74-104.

[14]Deane William Ferm, "Third World Liberation Theology: A Bibliographic Survey," Choice, 22 (June 1985):1446-1459.

second conference can be found in The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council.[15] To a certain extent, the entire liberation theology movement in Latin America can be seen as commentary on Medellín. An additional volume, Between Honesty and Hope,[16] issued at Lima by the Peruvian Bishops' Commission for Social Action in 1969, provides helpful background documents which went into the making of the Medellín documents.

Although Vatican II and Medellín provided a tremendous stimulus, liberation theology itself, according to its proponants, came directly out of the local basic Christian communities scattered throughout Latin America. These communities sought, in their own distinctive ways and largely determined by their own particular circumstances, to relate their Christian faith to the everyday lives of the poor. Among the pioneers of this movment is Oscar Romero, whose The Church Is All of You,[17] helped to lay the foundation for the "communidades de base." Also significant are Dom Helder Camara's works, Spiral of Violence,[18]

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[15]Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinamericano (2nd: 1968: Bogotá and Medellín, Colombia), The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II, Conclusions, second edition (Washington, D. C.: Division for Latin America - USCC, 1973).

[16]Between Honesty and Hope, Documents from and about the Church in Latin America, issued at Lima by the Peruvian Bishops' Commission for social Action, trans. John Drury, Maryknoll Documentation Series (Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1969).

[17]Oscar A. Romero, The Church Is All of You: Thoughts of Archbishop Oscar Romero, comp. and trans. by James R. Brockman (Atlanta: Winston Press, 1984).

[18]Dom Helder Camara, Spiral of Violence, trans. Della Couling (London and Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1971).

and The Desert Is Fertile.[19] Camilo Torres's Revolutionary Priest[20] documents the conflicts which the struggle on behalf of the poor involve. The story of the Christians for socialism movement of the early 1970s, which was another forerunner to Liberation Theology, is told in a volume edited by John Eagleson, Christians and Socialism: Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America.[21] Finally, an essential book for understanding liberation theology is Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed.[22] This work has had a major impact on the methodology of liberation theology. Particularly important are Freire's views on the dynamic nature of humanity, "conscientization," and praxis.

A Survey of Major Works by Latin American Liberation Theologians

It has already been noted that Latin American liberation theology, although it is unified by several important, central themes, represents a varied, often diverse, movement. The many theologians engaged in forging the new Latin American theology approach the task

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[19]Dom Helder Camara, The Desert Is Fertile, trans. Dinah Livingstone (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974). Other important English works by Camara include, The Church and Colonialism: The Betrayal of the Third World, trans. William McSweeney (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1969), and Revolution through Peace, trans. Amparo McLean, World Perspectives, vol. 45 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

[20]Camilo Torres, Revolutionary Priest: The Complete Writings and Messages of Camile Torres, ed., and with an introd. by John Gerassi (New York: Random House, 1971).

[21]John Eagleson, ed., Christians and Socialism: Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975).

[22]Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

from different vantage points and bring to bear distinct backgrounds. This presents a problem for a study, primarily from the standpoint of methodology. There have been attempts to analyse Latin American theologians and group them according to broad themes and emphases.[23] These are helpful but they are ultimately unsatisfactory because the themes and emphases often overlap to such a degree as to make the classifications ambiguous. Furthermore, a chronological treatment of the theologians is difficult because all of them are contemporary and are still producing writings. Perhaps the best way to treat the subject is to present the major Latin American liberation theologians in alphabetical order. This will allow them to speak for themselves and the reader will be able to discern the great variety which they represent as well as the unifying themes found in their works. At the end, then, it will be possible, by way of summary, to note both their diversity as well as the recurring themes which unite them. Only their major works published in English will be examined. This will be of most value for North American readers and it will become obvious that, even restricted to their English works, there remains an abundance of material upon which to base a fair assessment of the literature. The works of Leonardo Boff will not be included in this survey but will be considered in the next chapter.

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[23]For example, José Míguez Bonino, in Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 62-83, attempts to classify Latin American liberation theologians into four categories: 1) those with an ecumenical perspective (such as Juan Luís Segundo); 2) those who work from a popular base (for example, Lucio Gera); 3) those who are more active politically (such as Gutiérrez and Hugo Assmann); 4) the Protestant liberation theologians (Rubem Alves and, perhaps, Míguez Bonino himself).

Rubem Alves

Rubem Alves studied theology in his native Brazil and at Princeton Theological Seminary. He has served as Study Secretary for Church and Society in Latin America and is at present professor of philosophy of religion at São Paulo University. A member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, he is one of the few prominent Protestant liberation theologians from Latin America. Because of the time he spent in the United States, he wrote his books in English and they were only subsequently translated into Spanish and Portuguese. This also, perhaps, accounts for the fact that Alves seems to be the least Latin American of the Latin American liberation theologians.

His first major work, A Theology of Human Hope (1969),[24] was originally written as his doctoral dissertation. Alves's purpose in writing this work, according to his own words, is "to explore critically the elements and possibilities of a new language that some groups of Christians are attempting to learn."[25] It is a language that is being forged by what Alves refers to as the "world proletariat" which has a "new consciousness, a new self-understanding, which speaks a new language and has a specific sense of vocation."[26] But this new language can only be spoken "on the way," that is, in the historical context in which man finds himself and from the concrete commitments which his life requires from him. It is a new type of humanism,

> . . . not based on an abstract definition of the essence of man but rather on man's freedom to re-create his world and himself anew,

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[24] Rubem A. Alves, A Theology of Human Hope (St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press, 1975).

[25] Ibid., p. xiii.

[26] Ibid., p. 6.

> according to his own choice. It is a political humanism. And it is more than that: it is a new type of messianism, which believes that man can be free by the powers of man alone: humanistic messianism.[27]

Alves summarizes this new language, first of all, as a language determined by and for history. It ". . . does not speak about a meta-historical, meta-worldly realm in which hopes are fulfilled and sufferings are brought to an end. It remains historical through and through . . ."[28] Secondly, however, the language must always remain secondary to the history itself.[29] Thirdly, this language is always negative and secularizing, ". . . it is expressive of the permanent negation and hope that relativizes and desacralizes every present."[30] Finally, it is not purely descriptive language, but an expression of imagination, which, ". . . breaks the spell of the things that are present."[31]

In his second major work, Tomorrow's Child (1972),[32] Alves reiterates many of the themes of his first book, but also moves significantly beyond it. It is basically an analysis of the present situation in the world, as he sees it, which he hopes to change so that our children will not have to endure the oppression under which we live. He says that society is held captive by a "monopoly of power" which is made up of the following components: 1) capitalistic corporations; 2) the war machine; 3) modern science, which explains and rationalizes the first two.[33] Having described his perception of the reality of modern

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[27]Ibid., p. 17. [28]Ibid., p. 160. [29]Ibid., p. 161.

[30]Ibid., p. 163. [31]Ibid., p. 166.

[32]Rubem A. Alves, Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[33]Ibid., pp. 21-2.

life, Alves then turns his attention to an analysis of the various responses which have been attempted.[34] He rejects adaptation, resignation, or a counter-culture as viable solutions. Instead he suggests planting a seed for the future, "the seed of our highest hope."[35] That seed is the hope of world-wide revolutionary struggle. Revolution, however, is not enough; negation must be accompanied by hope:

> By itself, suffering can only produce bitterness, resentment, and the ethics of reaction. Suffering alone is not creative. It must first become pregnant, must give birth to hope. That springing up of hope is the moment when the community turns away from the ethics of resentment in order to become creative. It is the moment when one realizes that for the desert to become a garden it is not enough to pluck up thorns and thistles; one must plant flowers and orchards.[36]

Hugo Assmann

Hugo Assmann is a Brazilian Catholic Priest. He studied theology in Brazil and Europe and has served as assistant professor in Germany. His participation in the struggle for liberation has successively forced him out of Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Chile. Until recently, he was a professor at the University of Costa Rica and the National University and was on the staff of the Department of Ecumenical Studies of the University of San José (Costa Rica). Most recently he is back in his native Brazil, as a professor at the Methodist University of Piracicaba.

Assmann's contribution to the corpus of libration theology literature came in 1973, under the Spanish title, Teología desde la praxis de la liberación: Ensayo teológico desde la América dependiente

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[34] Ibid., pp. 188-91.

[35] Ibid., p. 197.

[36] Ibid., p. 201.

(Theology from the Viewpoint of the Praxis of Liberation: A Theological Essay from Dependent America).[37] Its English title is Theology for a Nomad Church.[38] Although this is the only volume which Assmann has contributed, it occupies an important place because it attempts to clarify the meaning of liberation theology in the face of ". . . the extraordinary diffusion of the language of liberation . . ."[39] not only throughout Latin America but throughout the entire world. He specifically denies any direct identification with other "revolutionary currents abroad in the world" because, although they have points of resemblance, none of them really coincides in analysis or aims with the process of liberation. The reason for this is that "The real starting-point for a 'Latin American theology of liberation' has to be found . . . in our specific struggle for liberation from our situation as dominated peoples."[40] Because of this, people who are not actively involved in the struggle cannot fully understand the ". . . essential elements of the problems of liberation,"[41] and he is highly critical of Europeans like Karl Rahner and Johann Metz, who refuse to adopt the specific political postures which the struggle for liberation demands. Talk is not enough; the struggle must take place on the level of strategy and tactics:

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[37]Hugo Assmann, Teología desde la praxis de la liberación: Ensayo teológico desde la América dependiente, I (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1973).

[38]Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976). The English version of this work is also found under the title, Practical Theology of Liberation, trans. Paul Burns (London: Search Press, 1975).

[39]Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church, p. 113.

[40]Ibid., p. 114.

[41]Ibid., p. 118.

> Any talk of the historical implications of Christian commitment has to come down to the level of the strategy and tactics of the fight for liberation. Theology, even as a "science," must be a "rebel science", and a committed one; it must take sides and place itself at the service of groups recognized as being in the van [sic] in the process of liberation, just as the social sciences are doing.[42]

José Comblin

José Comblin is a Belgian theologian and social critic who has lived and worked in Latin America since 1958. A doctor of theology, he was expelled from Brazil 1972 after having taught theology for seven years at the Theological Institute in Recife. He is now teaching at the Catholic University of Chile (Talca) and is also a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain. He is the author of some twenty books in Spanish, French, Portuguese, and English.

Of Comblin's many works, several which have been translated into English deserve special note. The first of these is The Meaning of Mission: Jesus, Christians and the Wayfaring Church.[43] In this book, Comblin shows his great concern for personal piety and devotional life. For Comblin, mission must be the starting point for all theological reflection.[44] More importantly, however, the essential ingredient in mission is humanization: "The purpose and end result of evangelization is our salvation. It saves us from evil, from the cowardice that prevents us from being truly human. . . . Is that not a process of humanization?"[45] Thus, the mission of the church is to spread salvation,

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[42] Ibid., p. 124.

[43] José Comblin, The Meaning of Mission: Jesus, Christians, and the Wayfaring Church, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

[44] Ibid., p. 18.

[45] Ibid., p. 56.

which means making human beings more fully human:

> To save us means ultimately to save whatever it is inside us that is the wellspring of our initiatives, our projects, our options, our creative dreams, and our perseverance in adversity. It means to save our faith in human effort and in ourselves by revealing to us its inexhaustible source in a creating God who is the God of freedom rather than of bondage.[46]

The second work of Comblin for the purposes of this study is a little book entitled Jesus of Nazareth: Meditations on His Humanity.[47] It is a simple, straight-forward meditation on the life of Jesus, on the basis of a reconstruction formed by the principles of an historical-critical approach to the Biblical accounts. His purpose is to point out ". . . the danger of illusion which accompanies a metaphysical leap to Christ's divinity that is made without dedicating sufficient time to meditation on his humanity."[48] Thus, this book takes its place among the growing number of works by Latin American liberation theologians who are attempting to provide a reinterpretation on the doctrine of Christology based upon the Latin American experience.

The final book for consideration, and by far the most important in terms of liberation theology, is The Church and the National Security State.[49] It is this book which has put Comblin in the forefront of the liberation theology movement. It was developed, in English, from a series of lectures which Comblin delivered at the Harvard School of

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[46]Ibid., p. 68.

[47]José Comblin, Jesus of Nazareth: Meditations on His Humanity, trans. Carl Kabat (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

[48]Ibid., p. 6.

[49]José Comblin, The Church and the National Security State (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

Divinity. The book begins with an overview of Western theological thought, its development and its uses, followed by a chapter tracing the history of liberation theology in Latin America. This is an extremely helpful discussion, identifying six sources of liberation theology.[50] After this Comblin develops an outline of the attitudes and practices of the church and Christians in Latin America over the centuries. Next comes the core of the book: an examination of what he considers to be the dominant political theory of the day and the church's response to it. This dominant theory is what he calls the "national security ideology." It is this ideology, he says, that has taken the church captive and usurped the place of God:

> The ideology of national security is generally called nationalism by its authors. But it is a radical, absolute nationalism. . . . Consequently, the nation takes the place of God. What happens then to the God whom the military elite claim they want to worship by establishing a "Christian society"? This Christian God is only a cultural symbol. In actual practice the action is commanded by no god other than the nation and national security, the unconditional goals of all citizens.[51]

The strategy that he recommends for changing this ideology is to view society, not in a static way where the status quo is merely reinforced by theology, but in a dynamic way whereby the main question becomes not whether there should be change, but what will be the nature of the change: "When society is dynamic and changing, everybody is responsible for the structure of the future society because everyone helps to make or prevent social change."[52]

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[50] Ibid., pp. 30-49.

[51] Ibid., p. 78.

[52] Ibid., p. 224.

Noel Leo Erskine

Noel Leo Erskine is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. He has served as a Baptist pastor and a professor of Caribbean history in his native Jamaica. He earned his M. Th. at Duke University and his Ph. D. at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He is one of the few Latin American theologians to approach liberation theology from the perspective of the Caribbean.

Although it varies greatly in many respects, the Caribbean forms an important part of Latin America and it shares much of its history. On the other hand, because of its primarily African racial make-up, the Caribbean shares many affinities also with the Black experience in North America. It is this tension which Erskine attempts to resolve in his book, Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective.[53] Very little has been heard to date from Caribbean theologians and Erskine deserves special mention because he is one of the first to attempt to fashion a theology which is characteristically Caribbean in nature.

Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez is a Peruvian priest who has done his post-graduate theological studies in Europe. He serves as advisor to student movements in Lima and is an active participant in ONIS, an organization that works among the poor, primarily in the slum areas around Lima. His theological output is largely the product of his involvement with

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[53]Noel Leo Erskine, Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

working-class people in Rimac, a slum area of Lima, in which he still lives and works.

His book A Theology of Liberation,[54] has been translated into several languages and is the best known and most comprehensive presentation of the new theological thought in Latin America. This book has been hailed as the Magna Carta of liberation theology. Its importance is even recognized by some of the major Latin American theologians themselves. For example, Juan Luís Segundo says that Gutiérrez's book proved ". . . rather convincingly that liberation theology is not provincial or fundamentalist, whatever else one might think about it."[55] In this book Gutiérrez develops the major theme of liberation theology, that the purpose of theology is not to convince the nonbeliever of the truths of the Christian faith, but to humanize the economic, social, and political order of society.[56] Because of this he maintains that "the theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology. . . . This is a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed."[57] Praxis is

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[54]Gustavo Gutiérrez. A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, trans. and ed., Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973). A very helpful companion volume for the study of Gutierrez's work is Robert McAfee Brown's Makers of Contemporary Theology: Gustavo Gutiérrez (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980).

[55]Juan Luís Segundo, Liberation of Theology, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 5.

[56]Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 10.

[57]Ibid., p. 15.

the starting point and, unless that is understood, the theology itself will not suffice:

> . . . we can say that all the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation, are not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes. They are not worth one act of faith, love, and hope, committed -- in one way or another -- in active participation to liberate man from everything that dehumanizes him and prevents him from living according to the will of the Father.[58]

Gutiérrez attempts to ground his view of liberation in Scripture and interprets the Exodus and the coming of Christ as the two crucial Biblical events that signify liberation from oppression.

A second work by Gutiérrez, The Power of the Poor in History,[59] consists of eight major essays published since 1973, which represent his theological development in the decade since the publication of A Theology of Liberation. The essays cover a variety of topics, but basically they are a reiteration of the themes found in his previous work.

José Míguez Bonino

José Míguez Bonino is, like Rubem Alves, one of the few Protestant liberation theologians in a continent that is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. A native of Argentina, Míguez Bonino is professor of systematic theology and ethics at the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires.

Míguez Bonino made a major contribution to the development of liberation theology with his Doing Theology in a Revolutionary

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[58]Ibid., p. 308.

[59]Gustavo Gutiérrez, The Power of the Poor in History, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

Situation.[60] Perhaps its greatest contribution is that it contains an excellent introduction to the main features of Latin American liberation theology.[61] It also contains a very helpful description of the contemporary situation in Latin America as well as a "critical reflection" on some of the major tenets of liberation theology.

Míguez Bonino has devoted considerable attention to the capitalism-socialism debate. This can be seen to a certain extent in the above work, but more prominently in Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution.[62] In this work, which was first delivered as the 1974 London Lecture in Contemporary Christianity, Míguez Bonino very clearly spells out his main contention:

> It is my thesis that, as Christians, confronted by the inhuman conditions of existence prevailing in the continent, they have tried to make their Christian faith historically relevant, they have been increasingly compelled to seek an analysis and historical programme for their Christian obedience. At this point, the dynamics of the historical process, both in its objective conditions and its theoretical development, have led them, through the failure of several remedial and reformist alternatives, to discover the unsubstitutable relevance of Marxism.[63]

Yet, he suggests a new form of socialism that will eliminate the basic inequalities of the capitalist system but will not be a mere parroting of doctrinaire Marxism.

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[60] José Míguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadlephia: Fortress Press, 1975). This work has also been published in English under the title, Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age (London: SPCK, 1975).

[61] See especially Chapter Four, "The Theology of Liberation," Ibid., pp. 61-84.

[62] José Míguez Bonino, Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge of Revolution (Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans, 1976).

[63] Ibid., p. 19.

José Porfirio Miranda

José Porfirio Miranda has long been an advisor and lecturer for workers' and student groups throughout his native Mexico. He studied economics at the Universities of Munich and Munster and received his licentiate in Biblical Sciences from the Biblical Institute in Rome in 1967. Since then, he has been a professor of mathematics at the Instituto de Ciencias and professor of economic theory at the Instituto Tecnológico in Guadalajara. He has also been professor of philosophy at the Instituto Regional (Chihuahua), professor of philosophy of law at the National University and professor of exegesis at the Instituto Libre de Filosofía, both in Mexico City. Presently, he teaches at the Universidad Metropolitana Tztapalapa in Mexico City.

Miranda is, one might say, the most single-minded of the theologians considered for this study. Eschewing contact with the church and his theological colleagues, he has carved out his own distinctive niche in Latin American liberation theology by becoming the leading advocate of Marxism as the crucial tool for understanding and changing Latin American society. This is plainly seen in his first work, Marx and the Bible (1971).[64] Miranda's basic contention in this work is the positive correlation between Marx and the Bible. It is not enough, however, merely to change our view about Marxism. What is called for, if Miranda's correlation is correct, is a complete transformation of our Western way of thinking:

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[64] José Porfirio Miranda, Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression, trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974).

> . . . we must realize that it is not enough merely to take seriously today the Marx whom we scorned yesterday; nor is it enough to execute almost imperceptibly some effectual change. The former preterition was not a mere careless omission. If we are to abandon yesterday's position, we must also revise the whole system of ideas and values which made such a position necessary. Real conversion is needed, not lukewarm concealment of changes which are made underhandedly.[65]

Finally, he says, a choice must be made: "The West or Christianity, 'either . . . or.'"[66]

Many of these themes are also found in Miranda's next book, Being and the Messiah,[67] which is essentially a commentary on the Gospel and First Epistle of St. John. This highly philosophical work attempts a total redefinition of the message of Christianity, using an existentialistic motif with a Marxist foundation. A little of the passion of his feelings and his disdain for traditional theology can be seen in the following excerpt:

> A god who intervenes in history to elicit religious adoration of himself and not to undo the hell of cruelty and death that human history has become is an immoral god in the deepest sense of the word. A god who is reconciled or merely indifferent to the pain of human beings is a merciless god, a monster, not the ethical God whom the Bible knows. We would be morally obliged to rebel against such a god, even if our defeat were inevitable.[68]

Miranda continues his investigation of the correlation between Marx and the Bible in his next book Marx Against the Marxists: The Christian Humanism of Karl Marx.[69] This book was first published in

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[65]Ibid., p. xv.

[66]Ibid., p. xvii.

[67]José Porfirio Miranda, Being and the Messiah: The Message of St. John, trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

[68]Ibid., p. 187.

[69]José Porfirio Miranda, Marx Against the Marxists: The Christian Humanism of Karl Marx, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980).

1978 with the Spanish title, El christianismo de Marx (The Christianity of Marx). The purpose of this work is to correct the "satanic image of Marx," which was concocted by both conservatives and certain Marxists, and is manifestly false.[70] Against a determinist, positivistic, materialistic interpretation of Marx, Miranda attempts to vindicate the spiritual roots of Marx's teaching, his defense of human liberty, his moral concern, and his Christian humanism which, Miranda says, was in conscious identification with Christ.[71]

Finally, Miranda makes another vigorous defense of "Christian communism," in Communism in the Bible (1981).[72] This book, in much simpler and briefer form than the others, Miranda calls a manifesto: "This is a manifesto. . . . And it seeks to make itself heard by all the poor of the earth."[73] The main theme of the book is that communism, far from being opposed to Christianity, actually finds its origins in the Bible. He asks, "What manner of insanity has swooped down on the Western world that it combats the Christian project par excellence [that is, communism] as if it were its greatest enemy?" when, in fact, "it is Christianity that started communism?"[74] The reason Christians have not been able to see this more clearly until now is that they have been held captive by "conscience-tranquillizing theologians,"[75] and by a deliberate "falsification perpetrated by the official conception of Christianity."[76]

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[70] Ibid., p. xii.

[71] Ibid., pp. 224-31.

[72] José Porfirio Miranda, Communism in the Bible, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

[73] Ibid., p. ix.

[74] Ibid., p. 2.

[75] Ibid., p. 39.

[76] Ibid., p. 67.

Juan Luís Segundo

Born in 1925, Juan Luís Segundo is an Uruguayan Jesuit, with doctorates of theology and sociology from the Universities of Louvain and Paris. He is founder of the Pedro Fabbro Center in Montevideo (Uruguay). Segundo is perhaps the most ecumenical of the new Latin American Catholic theologians in terms of his deep roots in European theology, his interest in tradition, and the wide range of his theological interests. The fact that most of his efforts have been directed towards putting on regular seminars covering various aspects of theology, primarily for the education of laymen, makes it possible to characterize his theology as "an open theology for adult laymen."[77]

Segundo's The Hidden Motives of Pastoral Action (1972)[78] is the product of a dialogue, which took place over a period of ten years, between Segundo and various North Americans and Europeans who were preparing to engage in missionary activities in Brazil. During these dialogues, he became convinced that "hidden motives" lie behind the silence of the church and its inability to deal effectively with the particular problems of missionary work in Latin America.[79] His analysis of the situation in Latin America reveals tremendous changes, particularly due to massive migrations to the large population centers,

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[77]José Míguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, p. 62. Alfred T. Hennelly's Theologies in Conflict: The Challenge of Juan Luís Segundo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) provides a very helpful survey of Segundo's theology and its significance for Latin American liberation Theology.

[78]Juan Luís Segundo, The Hidden Motives of Pastoral Action: Latin American Reflections, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978).

[79]Ibid., p. 2.

which require fundamental changes in pastoral action. Yet the church is involved in a "conspiracy of silence"[80] which stems from a three-fold fear:

> . . . we are beset with unconfessed fears. Psychologically we are fearful for ourselves in the face of other people's freedom. Theologically we are fearful for the salvation of the masses if they are deprived of protective institutions. Pastorally we are fearful for the gospel message, suspecting that it does not have the power it once had to attract people on its own. These are the hidden but decisive motives underlying most of our pastoral activities in Latin America.[81]

His solution is greater stress on evangelization and a completely new ecclesiology in which "The universality of the church is qualitative, not quantitative."[82]

Segundo's most significant volume, and perhaps the single most important book in the entire literature of Latin American liberation theology, is The Liberation of Theology (1975).[83] The book stems from a course Segundo gave at Harvard Divinity School during the spring semester of 1974. He is very sensitive about the "academic disdain" which liberation theology has evoked from the great centers of theological thought around the world. Thus, he strives to put liberation theology on a more solid footing by establishing a concrete methodological approach:

> Now, however, it may be time to get down to epistemology. By that I mean it may be time to get down to analyzing not so much the content of Latin American theology but rather its methodological approach and its connection with liberation. The fact is that only a study of our method of theologizing vis-a-vis the reality of

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[80] Ibid., p. 83.

[81] Ibid., p. 106.

[82] Ibid., p. 138.

[83] Juan Luis Segundo, Liberation of Theology, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

> Latin America, and an agreement on that methodology, can successfully challenge the mechanisms of oppression and the efforts of the oppressor system to expropriate the terminology of liberation.[84]

The only thing that can maintain the "liberative character" of any theology, Segundo maintains, is not its content, but its methodology.[85]

The distinctive method which he develops for liberation theology is what he calls "the hermeneutical circle," composed of four decisive factors: 1) our way of experiencing reality, which leads to ideological suspicion; 2) the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular; 3) a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account; 4) a new hermeneutic, that is, a new way of interpreting the "fountain head of our faith (that is, Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal."[86] Thus, the theological methodology of liberation theology represents an endless process in which Scripture and the lives of the basic Christian communities continually intersect and challenge each other.

Segundo, like Gutiérrez, views theology not as an academic discipline for scholars but as the reflection of the real-life experiences of basic Christian communities. This approach characterizes Segundo's series entitled A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity (1968-1972).[87] These five volumes are the result of a series of

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[84]Ibid., p. 5. [85]Ibid., pp. 39-40. [86]Ibid., p. 9.

[87]The five volumes in this series, all published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, and all translated by John Drury are listed here in order of publication: vol. 1: The Community Called Church (1973);

courses in theology developed by the grassroots communities of the Pedro Fabbro Pastoral Center at Montevideo, Uruguay, which Segundo founded and led until it was closed in 1975. In these books Segundo addresses such specific religious concepts as the church, grace, the sacraments, God, sin, guilt and many others. The extreme importance of these works lies in the fact that, while they are very difficult reading because of their seminar-like structure, they are one of the few attempts to instill content into the theology of liberation which is an authentic reflection of the grassroots communities.

Jon Sobrino

Jon Sobrino is a native of Spain but has been a long-time resident of El Salvador. A theologian, he is professor at the José Simeón Canas University of Central America and also at the Center for Theological Reflection, in San Salvador (El Salvador). His major contribution to the development of liberation theology has been the attempt to establish a Christology which he feels is appropriate for the Latin American setting.

Sobrino's main work is Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach (1976).[88] This also must be considered one of the most important works to have been produced by Latin America liberation theology because of its attempt to move beyond method and instill content into Latin American theology. It is the product of a course in

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vol. 2: Grace and the Human Condition (1973); vol. 3: Our Idea of God (1974); vol. 4: The Sacraments Today (1974); vol. 5: Evolution and Guilt (1974).

[88]Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978).

Christology which Sobrino gave at the San Salvador Center for Theological Reflection in El Salvador in 1975. Its direct purpose, according to Sobrino, is to "give Latin Americans a better understanding of Christ and to point up his historical relevancy for our continent."[89] Sobrino sees three problems with the traditional Christian view of Christ.[90] First of all, it has often reduced Christ to a sublime abstraction which, in its neutrality, only reinforces the oppressive systems of the status quo. Secondly, Christ is traditionally seen as the embodiment of universal reconciliation which keeps Christians from seeing the sinfulness and conflictual nature of history. Finally, Christ has been absolutized, which gives the theoretical justification people need for any sort of personalist or individualist reduction of the Christian faith.

Sobrino aims to correct these traditional misunderstandings by using the historical Jesus as the hermeneutical principle which provides a bridge between praxis and knowledge:

> . . . we feel that the historical Jesus is the hermeneutic principle that enables us to draw closer to the totality of Christ both in terms of knowledge and in terms of real-life praxis. It is there that we will find the unity of Christology and soteriology.[91]

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[89] Ibid., p. xv.

[90] Ibid., pp. xv-xxvi.

[91] Ibid., p. 9. At this point it may be helpful to mention several very important collections of essays, published by Orbis recently, which contain articles by most of the above theologians as well by others and which demonstrate some of the directions that Latin American liberation theology has taken in recent years. They are: Rosino Gibellini, ed., Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); Pablo Richard et al., The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology, trans. Barbara E. Campbell and Bonnie Shepard (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); and José Miguez Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

In his examination of the historical Christ, Sobrino points to the close parallel between the contemporary Latin American setting and the historical context in which Jesus lived.

Conclusion and Summary

On the basis of the above survey of the major works of the main Latin American liberation theologians it can be stated that, despite significant differences among them with regard to emphasis and tone, there are certain recurring themes which are common to all of them and which may be considered constitutive of Latin American liberation theology. These themes may be summarized as follows:

1. Common to all these theologians is their repeated and insistent call for the liberation of the people of Latin America from the perceived oppressive structures which keep them in bondage. This liberation is not to be conceived as an ultimate salvation in the "next world," but is, if it cannot reach completion, to at least begin in the concrete, historical circumstances in which the people of Latin America live.

2. In view of their belief that human liberation must take place on the level of historical reality and have a direct, liberative impact on the lives of the poor and oppressed, a second feature common to all these theologians is that the first task of the theologian is a negative, critical analysis of the social, political, and economic structures which determine the historical context in which the people live. This, more often than not, and to varying degrees, involves Marxist social analysis.

3. There is a theological parallel to the above point which is common to most of these theologians. A negative, critical analysis is also turned against the prevailing theology, which is thought to be a product of Western culture and dominated by theolgians of the North Atlantic countries. This "oppressive" theology must be analysed and radically reinterpreted in such a way that it reflects the historical situation of the oppressed peoples of Latin America.

4. The above points indicate that the central characteristic of Latin American liberation theology is that it is really nothing more than a method. Several of the theologians acknowledged this frankly. The core of the new theology emanating from Latin American (and this could be said of all forms of liberation theology from all over the world) is that it represents a new way of doing theology, a new

theological methodology which takes as its central hermeneutical principle the concrete, historical situation of those who are forming the theology.

5. Concomitant with point four above is the observation that liberation theology in Latin America is virtually devoid of theological content. Despite the efforts of men like Segundo and Sobrino, who have attempted to provide some theological content, very little progress has been made in this area. The reason for this is due to its methodology. Since the starting point is to be the particular circumstances of the theologian, it is impossible to develop a theology which is universally valid. Indeed, it ought not be so. To devise a theology which would be absolute and universal would destroy the methodology itself. The best that can be done, and this is the task that the Latin American theologians are actively involved in, is to develop a theology which is valid for Latin America, or a particular part of it.

Many more names could have been added to the above survey. Only the restricted scope of this survey, as well as limitations of time and space, have prohibited also the mentioning of the works of theologians such as Segundo Galilea, Ernesto Cardenal, J. B. Libânio, Antonio Pérez Esclarín, Elsa Tamex, Adolfo Pérez Esquival, Pablo Richard, Victorio Araya, J. Severino Croatto, Thomas Hanks, and many others.

The decade between the Medellín (Colombia) conference of 1968 of the Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinamericano (CELAM II) and its Puebla (Mexico) conference of 1979 (CELAM III) saw a tremendous proliferation and development of Latin American liberation theology. Pope John Paul II himself opened the Puebla conference and sought to steer a middle course between the conservatives and the liberals, the opponents and proponents of liberation theology. The Puebla documents cover a great many subjects and can be found in the Conferencia papers, Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America: Conclusions.[92] An extensive summary of the conclusions plus insightful

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[92]Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinamericano (3rd: 1979:

commentary is to be found in the book edited by John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, Puebla and Beyond.[93] Although the impact of Puebla was not nearly as dramatic as that of the Medellín Conference eleven years earlier, Puebla attests to the fact that the spirit of Medellín has survived and, for the foreseeable future at least, the process of Latin American liberation theology will continue undiminished.

Puebla, Mexico). Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America: Conclusions. Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops. Official English Edition. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat, Committee for the Church in Latin America, 1979. A very interesting document which traces some of the progress in Latin American liberation theology from Medellín to the eve of Puebla and offers suggestions, from the perspective of Latin America, for the direction which should be taken at Puebla is The Church at the Crossroads: Christians in Latin America from Medellín to Puebla 1968-1978, published as IDOC Europe Dossier Six (Rome: IDOC International, 1978).

[93] John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, eds., Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

CHAPTER III

LEONARDO BOFF: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Introduction

Leonardo Boff is one of the most prolific of the Latin American liberation theologians. His breadth of interest and erudition, as well as his single-minded commitment to the cause of the liberation of the poor and oppressed, have driven him to author a great many books and articles covering a wide range of topics. Prior to assessing his theological methodology, it will be necessary to survey Boff's life and the situation in which he works before surveying briefly his major works, limited for the sake of practicality to his separately published works (which number well over 30). This will set the larger theological context within which Boff develops and employs his theological methodology. Finally, since Boff's relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is an important element in his professional and theological life, his dealings with the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which officially censured him last year, will be reviewed in the final section.

Boff's Life and Situation

Leonardo Boff, a native of Brazil, is a professor of systematic theology at the Petrópolis (Brazil) Institute for Philosophy and Theology. A Franciscan priest, educated in Brazil and Munich, Germany, he

also serves as advisor to the Brazilian Conference of Bishops and the Latin American Conference of Religious. In addition, he is editor of the Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira and also of the Portuguese edition of the periodical Concilium, as well as religious editor of Editora Vozes, a publishing company located in Petrópolis.

At forty-six years of age, Boff has had, perhaps, a greater impact on the theology of Latin America than any other theologian. A variety of factors have gone into making him, as one account called him, "the liberation theologian in Latin America."[1] First of all, he has studied under some of the most important theologians of Europe. At the University of Munich, Boff came under the direction of scholars such as Leo Scheffczyk and Heinrich Fries. An even more important influence on Boff was Karl Rahner, one of his professors at the University of Munich. The influence of Rahner can be seen in nearly all of Boff's writings, a fact which Boff himself acknowledged in the introduction to one of his books in 1984:

> The first essay, "The Theology of Liberation, Creative Reception of Vatican II from the Viewpoint of the Poor," was written in German as an homage to Prof. Karl Rahner, on his 80th birthday, thanking him for his inspiration in my years of study at the University of Munich, where he was professor. His unexpected death on March 30, 1984 took from us the most intelligent and creative theologian of the current century. Now he sees the divine realities upon which he meditated so much and which he helped us to glimpse and to love.[2]

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[1] Joop Koopman, "Boff Optimistic, Heads for Vatican Inquiry," National Catholic Register, 2 September 1984, p. 8.

[2] Do Lugar do Pobre, second ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1984) p. 10. Translation mine. In this work all citations from Boff's works are my translations, either from Portuguese, Spanish or German, except those that are taken from English translations of his works.

Also of interest is the fact that Boff wrote his doctoral dissertation, in 1970,[3] under the direction of Joseph Ratzinger,[4] whom he was to meet again later under very different circumstances. At the same time, Boff comes from a country with one of the most progressive churches in the Third World.[5] Liberation theology, partly through the efforts of Boff, has been accepted more widely in Brazil than in any other country. There are good reasons for this.

Brazil is the largest country in South America, and also has the largest Catholic population of any country in the world.[6] In addition, it has experienced greater economic development than nearly every other country of the Third World. This has produced a great deal of tension and has resulted in great economic and social inequality. From the plush hills overlooking Rio de Janeiro, where his Institute is located, Boff can easily see the contrasts of his great country. From the wide beaches and the central business district, where the privileged of Brazil congregate and play, he can move his eyes to the huge favellas, the slums, pushed up against the hillside, where people live in extreme poverty, without the barest necessities.

Despite the fact, however, that support for liberation theology is strongest in Brazil, debate over the propriety of that support

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[3]It has been published under the title, Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1972).

[4]Tarcisio Beal, "The Trials of a Liberation Theologian," National Catholic Reporter, 28 September 1984, p. 20.

[5]Ibid.

[6]According to recent statistics, Brazil, which is predominantly Roman Catholic, has a population of 131 million. See George Russell, "Taming the Liberation Theologians," Time, 4 February 1985, p. 59.

continues to rage within the Brazilian hierarchy. Eugenio Cardinal de Araujo Sales, the conservative Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, contends that liberation theology consitutes one of the "gravest risks to the unity of the pastors and the faithful."[7] Sales was referring primarily to the significance that some liberation theologians, like Boff, have placed in "base ecclesial communities" (comunidades eclesiales de base), which represent Latin America's most notable evangelizing innovation and which are the primary vehicle for the spread of liberation theology. Some have estimated that there are as many as 150,000[8] of these grass-roots Christian communities scattered throughout Latin America, as many as half of them in Brazil.

Within the base communities, which average ten to thirty members each, the stress is on shared religious instruction, prayer, and communal self-help. Local priests often provide guidance to community leaders, but the principal focus of the groups is on relating the lessons of the Bible to their day-to-day experiences and activities, whether they be urban slum-dwellers or rural campesinos.[9] These communities also show promise in the attempt to solve an endemic problem in Latin

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Joop Koopman, "Boff Optimistic," p. 8, erroneously reports that there are 150,000 base ecclesial communities in Brazil alone. This figure is apparently exaggerated. Boff himself, in 1981, indicated that there were 70,000 in Brazil. See Boff, Church: Charism and Power, Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church, tr. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 126.

[9]The comunidades eclesiales de base (CEBs) play, as might be expected, a very important part in Boff's ecclesiology and they have been the subject of several of his works. This will be taken up again in the next section where his views on the church will be investigated further.

America, the chronic shortage of priests (in Latin America, there is one priest for every 7,000 Catholics, versus one for every 880 in the United States).[10]

A Survey of Boff's Major Writings

As noted earlier, Boff is probably the most prolific of all the Latin American liberation theologians, perhaps of all theologians in Latin America today. The list of his separately published books numbers over thirty. Added to this are numerous articles and editorials which he has published. All of this makes the task of providing a general survey of his published works very difficult. However, Boff has shown himself to be quite singleminded in his approach to theology. Besides applying himself to the development of the theology of liberation and its methodology, which, in a sense permeates all his work, the vast majority of his effort is confined to two basic areas of theology: ecclesiology and Christology. In terms of ecclesiology, Boff has been particularly interested in the renewal of religious life, the place of women and the feminine in the Catholic Church, the relation between the Church and society and the nature of the Church itself. Boff's Christology is primarily concerned with developing a picture of Christ which reflects the lives of the poor and oppressed people of Latin America. Thus, he himself provides a convenient framework in which to present an overall picture of his theological interests. This section of this chapter will be devoted to a brief survey of his major, separately-published writings. Generally, they will be presented in

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[10]George Russell, "Taming," p. 59.

chronological order of their dates of publication. This will provide the opportunity not only to gain an appreciation of the broad scope of Boff's work, but also to discern any changes or progress in his thinking which may have occurred over the years. An overall appreciation of Boff's writings reveals a depth and variety which is not often found. Some of his books are highly academic, replete with copious footnotes and documentation. Others are deeply devotional, showing Boff's fundamental personal spirituality. What is more, many of his works combine elements of both these aspects. These will be pointed out as they occur in the following presentation. Boff is certainly not finished writing. Nevertheless, his recent silencing by the Vatican in Rome insures that, at least for the time being, the following presentation is an up to date survey.[11]

Writings on Ecclesiology

Most of Boff's writings can be, in one way or another, related to the general category of ecclesiology. In a sense, it is valid to say that Boff's major contribution to the liberation theology has been in the area of the study of the church. One might say that his literary output begins and ends with ecclesiology since his first work, his

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[11]In the following presentation, the original title of the work will be given first, when possible, followed by an English translation in parentheses. However, the original was not always available and it was necessary, in many cases, to use a translation. Many of Boff's most important works have been translated into English. Many others have been translated into Spanish. Hence, in the footnotes which follow, the bibliographic information of the original (usually Portuguese) will be given when available, followed by the title (whether Spanish or English) and bibliographic and pagination information of the source used for this study. It is understood that all citations which come from a source other than an English translation are my own translations.

doctoral dissertation, and the one that resulted in his censure, were both on the church. His writings on the church may be divided into four main subdivisions: the life of the religious, the place of women in the church, the relationship between the church and society and the nature of the church itself.

On the Life of the Religious

Since Boff is a member of the Order of Franciscans and has also served on the editorial board of the Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos (Latin American Confederation of Religious), much of his work has been devoted to effecting a renewal of religious and monastic life in his continent. One of his earliest works deals with this theme. Vida Religiosa y Secularización (Religious Life and Secularization)[12] examines the signs and rituals employed by religious in Latin America to determine if they continue to have relevance for people today. The following citation shows the purpose of the book but it also foreshadows the kind of criticism of the church which was to become so prominent in his writings by the end of the decade:

> On a very concrete level, it is up to each community [i.e. monastic community] to study and see if the use of the habit continues to be a sign which the people of the region accept and understand, or whether it is seen rather as a countersign. Such a reexamination is also necessary in terms of the language or mode of living and community behavior. The important thing is that the sign, be it sacred or profane, speak to the transcendental realities promised to man by God.[13]

Another work, Pobreza, Obediencia y Realización Personal en la

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[12]Colección CLAR 18 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1974).

[13]Ibid., p. 38.

Vida Religiosa (Poverty, Obedience and Personal Realization in Religious Life),[14] takes a look at religious vows. He disdains the legalistic aspect that often accompanies vows, maintaining that the important thing is not to profess the vows publicly, but to live out one's vows "in their concrete reality which translates to the level of daily life."[15]

The Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality has published an English translation of some of Boff's writings on Religious life entitled God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World.[16] This book contains mostly translations of works which had been previously published in Spanish and Portuguese, with some new material. It offers the reader of English an excellent opportunity to gain insight into Boff's conception of religious life and how he believes it is to be renewed:

> All authentic renewal is rooted in a strengthened and deepened experience of God. Only in relation to such an experience can, and should, new theoretical constructs be articulated and those of the past reinterpreted, and only thus can a more suitable presence of religious life in the Church and in society be sought.[17]

Yet another work on religious life is La Vida Religiosa en el Proceso de Liberación: Una Experiencia a partir de la Periferia (Religious Life in the Process of Liberation: An Experience from the

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[14]Colección CLAR 22 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamerican de Religiosos, 1975).

[15]Ibid., p. 19.

[16]Tr. and ed., Robert Faith, Religious Life Series 3 (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1981).

[17]Ibid., p. ix.

Periphery).[18] This book is directed primarily toward Europe, "Since it is there that the centers of decision concerning our situation are found. And it is also from the center that one may expect substantial help in the process of liberation."[19]

De la Espiritualidad de la Liberación a la Práctica de la Liberación: Hacia una Espiritualidad Latinoamericano (From the Spirituality of Liberation to the Practice of Liberation: Towards a Latin American Spirituality)[20] is a little booklet in which Boff attempts to show the true spirituality of the movement for liberation in Latin America. It is a spirituality which stems, not so much from the traditional centers of spirituality, such as the monasteries and religious orders, but from the bottom of society: "We believe that in these last years there has been a volcanic irruption of God in our Latin American continent: He has chosen the poor, and given them the privilege of being his sacrament of self-communication."[21]

One of his most recent books on religious life, and one that has been translated into English, is São Francisco de Assis: Ternura e Vigor (Saint Francis of Assisi: Gentleness and Vigor).[22] In this work Boff, reinterpreting the founding father of his own religious order, uses Saint Francis as a model for a more active religious life in Latin

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[18]Second ed., PEDAL 98 (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1980).

[19]Ibid., p. 12.

[20]Iglesia Nueva 54 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1981).

[21]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[22](Petropólis: Editora Vozes, 1981). The English, Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation, tr. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1982) was used for this study.

America today:

> Francis of Assisi, more than an idea, is a spirit and a way of life. The spirit and way of life are only made manifest in practice, not in a formula, idea, or ideal. Everything in Francis invites practice: exire de saeculo, leaving the imperial system, in an alternative act that makes real more devotion toward others, more gentleness with the poor, and greater respect for nature.[23]

A final volume to be considered under the heading of religious life is Como Pregar a Cruz Hoje numa Sociedade de Crucificados? (How to Preach the Cross Today in a Society of victims?),[24] Great care must be taken when preaching the cross, he says, not to perpetuate the unjust status quo by telling people to accept their cross when they are already being crucified by those in power:

> . . . we must constantly ask, how are we to preach the cross and death today and how are we not to preach them? Care in our language is called for by faith itself, which does not allow us to use the name of God and the symbols of his mercy to legitimate attitudes and situations that negate his will or conceal the will to dominate on the part of the powerful.[25]

On the Place of Women in the Church

Boff has also devoted a considerable amount of attention to the place of women in the church. This attention, however, has not only been directed toward enlarging the role of women in the affairs of the church and in religious life, but also toward developing the feminine aspects of faith and theology. He deals with this subject in many of

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[23] Ibid., p. 157.

[24] (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1984). This work was also published, under the same title, as chapter 6 in Do Lugar do Pobre, (see footnote 2 above). It is treated here separately, however, because its main purpose is to explore how the cross and death of Christ may be preached, particularly in the context of the life of the religious.

[25] Ibid., p. 4.

his works, in the form of chapters or sections of books which deal with the larger question of the church in general[26] as well as in articles.[27] But he has published two volumes which deserve special mention because they deal with the question more exhaustively.

The first of these is O Rostro Materno de Deus (The Maternal Face of God).[28] In this book Boff discusses the history of the subjugation of women and the feminine throughout the history of the church. He suggests that the feminine offers another way of being human, with Mary, "the sacrament of the maternal tenderness of God,"[29] as the primary model. This would imply a reevaluation of language, with emphasis on the symbolic (feminine) rather than on the conceptual (masculine):

> In this context the feminine emerges as the possibility of an alternative way . . . that we give more space to the dimension of the feminine in our culture. By means of the feminine we are enabled to have another type of relation, more fraternal, more tender and more solidary with our cosmic and earthly roots. All the great spirits which engender in us a deep human integration were spirits which were sensitive to tenderness and to the expressions of the soul.[30]

The other work which deals with the feminine aspect of theology is El Ave María: Lo Femenino y el Espíritu Santo (The Ave Maria: The Feminine and the Holy Spirit).[31] This is a devotional study of the

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[26] Most notably in Eclesiogénese: As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base Reinventam a Igreja (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1977), pp. 81-105.

[27] See especially Boff, "María, Mujer Profética y Liberadora," in Jorge Gómez, et al, Evangelización en América Latina, Colección CLAR 37 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1978), pp. 27-42.

[28] The full title is, O Rostro Materno de Deus: Ensaio Interdisciplinar sobre o Feminino e suas Formas Religiosas, third ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980).

[29] Ibid., p. 264. [30] Ibid.

[31] Iglesia Nueva 57 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1980).

prayer, "Ave Maria." In it Boff attempts to develop the feminine aspects of theology, of God, and nearly every aspect of faith. These two works taken together show that Boff has attempted to incorporate the exclusion of women from the life of the church into his larger program for liberation of all oppressed peoples.

On the Relationship between the Church and Society

Boff has expended a great deal of effort in attempting to redefine the relationship between the church and society in general. This has led to a number of books on the subject, all of which in one way or another, attempt to bridge the gap which has existed within traditional theology between the church and the world. Some of these works approach this question from the viewpoint of the sacraments, others from an eschatological perspective, still others from the viewpoint of the experience of God in the world. But all of them show Boff's impatience with any theology which would ask people suffering from oppression to endure their situation and wait. Boff's purpose is to take grace and the blessings of God's Kingdom out of the "hereafter" and out of the exclusive hands of the priests of the Church and put them into the hands of the poor and make them concrete in their lives.

The first book of this type is Vida Para Além da Morte (Life Beyond Death).[32] The main purpose of this book is to show that eternal life is not just something that is to be awaited in the next life. It begins here and now. In it Boff attempts to give a more concrete,

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[32](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1973). The Spanish, La Vida más allá de la Muerte, Perspectivas CLAR 6 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1977), was used for this study.

earthly interpretation of heaven, hell, and many other traditional Christian doctrines.

La Experiencia de Dios (The Experience of God),[33] attempts to demonstrate that God cannot be known but must rather be experienced. The experience of God is everywhere and in everything because it penetrates our existence:

> . . . not a few are the voices that warn: "Let us pause a little . . . Within the realm of thought, let us not use the word God any more. Let us keep silence. . . . Let us experience that Mystery which encircles and penetrates our existence . . ." Only from that perspective may we stammer a Name which will not be his name, but the Name of our love for That which is the Without-Name and the Ineffable.[34]

Los Sacramentos de la Vida y la Vida de los Sacramentos (The Sacraments of Life and the Life of the Sacraments)[35] is a very important work. Here Boff develops, to a much greater extent than anywhere else, his belief that the whole world is sacramental because the whole world points people to God. He summarizes the purpose and scope of the book very well with his own words:

> The intention of this work is to awaken the sacramental dimension which has become dormant or profaned in our life so that we may be able to celebrate the mysterious and concrete presence of the grace which inhabits the world. God was there already long before we were awakened, but now, when we open our eyes, we contemplate the world as a sacrament of God. Whoever understands the sacraments of life is very near, no, he is already within the Life of the sacraments.[36]

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[33] Colección CLAR 26 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1975).

[34] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[35] Iglesia Nueva 19 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1975).

[36] Ibid., p. 16.

The next work, O Destino do Homem e do Mundo: Ensaio sobre a Vocação Humana (The Destiny of Man and of the World: An Essay on the Human Calling),[37] develops some of the themes already discussed. Its main purpose is to show that men and women are not called to serve God outside the world, but within the context of their concrete situations. "To savor and celebrate in divine joviality the encounter with God and with his Mystery, within the earthly and relative vocations," he says, "is the essence of being a Christian and the fontal root of all Christian religious life."[38]

A Graça Libertadora no Mundo (Liberating Grace in the World),[39] represents Boff's fullest treatment of the relationship between the church and the world, between nature and grace. It is in this work that he attempts, in greater detail than in any other book, to negate the traditional distinction between nature and grace, between human history and salvation history, between the present situation and the hope of the eschatological Kingdom of God. He says that grace "signifies the presence of God in the world and in human beings" and that:

> Grace is always an encounter between a God who gives himself and a human being who does likewise. By its very nature grace is the breaking down of realms or worlds that are closed in upon themselves. Grace is relationship, exodus, communion, encounter

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[37](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1974). The Spanish, El Destino del Hombre y del Mundo: Ensayo sobre la Vocación Humana, Colección CLAR 25 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1975), was used for this study.

[38]Ibid., p. 153.

[39](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1976). The English, Liberating Grace, tr. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), was used for this study.

> openness, and dialogue. It is the history of two freedoms, the meeting of two loves.[40]

Boff's purpose in this work is to enable people to experience the grace of God in their lives, not only in the church, but in their everyday experiences. His aim is, as he says, "to sharpen people's vision and fine-tune their antennas for the here-and-now reality of our lives."[41]

A singularly important volume, especially in terms of Boff's conception of liberation theology and his theological method, is a book which he co-authored with his brother, Clodovis, entitled Da Libertação: O Sentido Teological das Libertações Socio-historicas (On Liberation: The Theological Meaning of Socio-historical Liberations).[42] This work will give occasion for more reflection at a later point but it is important to mention in this connection because here Boff attempts, in the clearest terms possible, to relate historical liberations with the salvation which Christ came to bring.

Many of the above themes are also presented in the final volume to be considered under this heading. Vida Segundo o Espiritu (Life according to the Spirit),[43] is an attempt to show that the Spirit of God is at work in all people and in all historical movements of people.

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[40] Ibid., p. 3.

[41] Ibid., p. 214.

[42] (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1979). The English, Salvation and Liberation, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY and Melbourne: Orbis Books and Dove Communications, 1984), was used for this study.

[43] Third ed. (Petrópolis, Editora Vozes, 1985). This book was originally published, in 1982, as another work on the religious. However, in later editions, Boff revised it to be more inclusive of all Christians. Hence, it is treated in this section rather than in the section covering religious life.

On the Nature of the Church

The remainder of the books which Boff has written on the church deal more specifically with the nature, function, purpose, or future of the church than those previously presented. They, of course, underscore and emphasize many of the themes which have already been discussed. Nevertheless, they form a group because they treat more explicitly matters that pertain to ecclesiology.

The first of these is the first major literary effort produced by Boff, his doctoral dissertation. As already noted, it was published, as it was written, in German under the title Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung.[44] One can easily discern from the title that this work has served as the source and groundwork for much of his subsequent work. Basically, it is a reinterpretation and an application of the principal enunciated at the Second Vatican Council that the Church represents the universale sacramentum salutis.[45]

In Eclesiogênese: As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base Reinventam a Igreja (Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Ecclesial Communities Reinvent the Church),[46] Boff attempts an analysis and appraisal of the base ecclesial communities which have sprung up all over Latin America. His purpose is to put this movement, which has been seriously challenged by many in the Catholic Church, on a more solid theological basis. His claim is that these small groups of Christians who come together for

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[44] See Footnote 3 above.

[45] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "Lumen Gentium," 21 November 1964, 48.

[46] See footnote 26 above.

spiritual and physical edification are an authentic manifestation of the universal church:

> The purpose of the Church in the world is to grow to the point of being able to speak every language that exists under heaven, expressing the same experience of salvation of God the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. In their own way, the CEBs [comunidades eclesiales de base] incarnate this experience of salvation. For this reason, they are in truth the authentic universal Church realized in the base.[47]

Lectura del Documento de Puebla desde América Latina Creyente y Oprimida (A Reading of the Puebla Document from Believing and Oppressed Latin America)[48] is a commentary on the document issued by the Third Conference of Latin American Bishops, who met at Puebla, Mexico in 1978. It is an incisive study, identifying ten central axes which are found in the document. Of particular interest in the present context are Boff's comments on the changes that Puebla may bring to bear on the way the Catholic Church conceives of itself and how it functions in the world. He predicts the growth of the base ecclesial communities, more lay involvement and a greater role for women.

The next work, Igreja: Carisma e Poder, uma Eclesiologia Militante (Church: Charism and Power, a Militant Ecclesiology),[49] is probably Boff's best known work because it was this book that attracted the attention of the Vatican. Actually, it merely represents the culmination of much of his previous work, dating back to the beginning of his literary effort. Nevertheless, Boff does speak very clearly and

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[47] Ibid., p. 37.

[48] Iglesia Nueva 50 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1980).

[49] (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1981). The English, was used for this study. See footnote 8 above.

forcefully in this book. He is highly critical of the Roman Catholic Church and suggests a radically different orientation on the nature of the Church, which begins, as one would expect, from the bottom, with the poor in the base ecclesial communities. He contends that the institutional Church has adopted a pagan concept of power, which he explains in the following graphic way:

> As much as it may irritate those in positions of ecclesiastical power, we must repeat that the institutional Church has not passed on the test of power. We might have hoped that it would have brought forth a new manner of exercising power according to the call of the Gospel. However, the Church's exercise of power followed the patterns of pagan power in terms of domination, centralization, marginalization, triumphalism, human hybris beneath a sacred mantle.[50]

He recommends that, instead of basing its authority on such a concept of power, the Church base its authority on charism, which he defines as "a manifestation of the Spirit's presence in the members of the community, causing everything that they are and do to be done and ordered for the good of all."[51] Boff was aware, as he wrote this book, that he offered a challenge to the powers of the Church. Yet, he believes that his way is the way of the future, once again poking an accusing finger at his Church:

> Perhaps the institutional Church, with the experience and prudence of all older people, will smile upon hearing these reflections--like old Sara. She was sterile and believed it impossible for her to conceive. She smiles. Putting ourselves in Abraham's place, we hear God's question: "Why has Sara smiled? Is anything impossible for God" (Gen. 18:14). Smile Sara, because once sterile you have become fertile, you have become a new creation! Sara has already conceived. There, in Sara's womb, the signs of new life are already beginning to appear: a new Church is being born, in the dark recesses of humanity.[52]

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[50]Ibid., p. 56. [51]Ibid., p. 158. [52]Ibid., p. 64.

A final work, Do Lugar do Pobre (From the Place of the Poor),[53] represents Boff's most recent and mature thought on the church. In many ways it is even more critical of the Catholic Church than the previous work. It is comprised of a collection of essays written about 1983 to 1984 and it was released shortly before Boff was called to Rome. It is his last book published before he was silenced. It, too, reflects a highly inimical posture towards the Church of Rome. He writes openly about a "conspiracy" on the part of conservative groups in Europe and Latin America against his views. Nevertheless, he expresses his conviction that "the theology of liberation, in different forms, is today the theology of the poor, peripheral churches of the Third World."[54]

Writings on Christology

The second major area of theology to which Boff has applied himself is Christology. He has not produced nearly the amount of literature on this subject as he has in the area of ecclesiology. Nevertheless, his work on this topic is also significant and voluminous enough to put him in the forefront of those Latin American liberation theologians who have written on Christology. His primary effort is directed towards providing a reinterpretation of Christology which will, in his estimation, be more applicable and meaningful for the poor and oppressed people on the periphery of the world. This implies stressing the universal or cosmic aspect of Christ and His work, emphasizing the humanity of Christ and pointing out the similarities between the suffering Christ and suffering humanity.

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[53]See footnote 2 above. [54]Ibid., p. 40.

Boff's first Christological work, O Evangelho do Cristo Cósmico (The Gospel of the Cosmic Christ),[55] fits into the category of those subjects which were of primary interest to him during his early career. The aim of this book is to stress the universality of Christ and to show that Christ and His benefits are available through human history.

Jesus Cristo Libertador: Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica para o nosso Tempo (Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for our Time)[56] is, perhaps, Boff's most important treatise in Christology. Here, to a much greater extent than in the previous work, Boff turns his attention to the theme of liberation and attempts to paint a picture of Jesus as a liberator. The final result is a Christ made in the image of the kind of liberator Boff feels is necessary for the task, as the following citation shows:

> He [Jesus] detheologizes religions, making people search for the will of God not only in holy books but principally in daily life; he demythologizes religious language, using the expressions of our common experiences; he deritualizes piety, insisting that one is always before God and not only when one goes to the temple to pray; he emancipates the message of God from its connection to one religious community and directs it to all people of good will . . . and, finally, he secularizes the means of salvation, making the sacrament of the "other" a determining element for entry into the kingdom of God.[57]

Many of the elements of Boff's theology which have already been shown are apparent here. Boff, however, does not hesitate to admit that he is, in essence, recreating or reinterpreting Jesus to conform better to

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[55](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1971).

[56](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1972). The English, Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time, tr. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), was used for this study.

[57]Ibid., p. 98.

his own conception of what a savior of Latin America should be. He acknowledges that in his task, as he says, ". . . we insert all our peculiarities, our life and preoccupations into this task. In so doing, we would wish that he prolong his incarnation within our history and reveal a new face especially known and loved by us."[58] This, in his opinion, is the way it should be. He approaches his task from a different perspective than European theologians and, despite the fact that this is a scholarly work, with copious citations from German and Latin works, he maintains that it is written from the viewpoint of Latin America:

> The predominantly foreign literature that we cite ought not to delude anyone. It is with preoccupations that are ours alone, taken from our Latin American context, that we will reread not only the old texts of the New Testament but also the most recent commentaries written in Europe. The facts will be situated within other coordinates and will be projected within an appropriate horizon. Our sky possesses different stars that form different figures of the zodiac by which we orient ourselves in the adventures of faith and of life.[59]

The next work, A Resurreição de Cristo: A nossa Resurreição na Morte (The Resurrection of Christ: Our Resurrection in Death),[60] is a very interesting work. It traces the various modern Protestant and Catholic approaches to the resurrection from the dead. Then it examines modern anthropological theories and tries to relate them to the resurrection and come up with a new definition which will be more meaningful to contemporary men and women. The resurrection of Christ is used as the model for this reinterpretation.

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[58] Ibid., p. 32.

[59] Ibid., p. 43.

[60] (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1973). The Spanish, Nuestra Resurrección en la Muerte, Iglesia Nueva 37 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1978), was used for this study.

Encarnação: Jovialidade e Humanidade de nosso Deus (Incarnation: The Joviality and Humanity of our God)[61] is a devotional booklet, written by Boff for the purpose of providing a series of meditations on Christmas. It offers an interesting and refreshing contrast to the more scholarly works. All the themes found in his larger books on Christ are found here, but they are presented in a less sophisticated way, obviously intended for the less academic readers.

A very important work is Paixão de Cristo - Paixão do Mundo (Passion of Christ - Passion of the World).[62] It is in this book that Boff makes the most direct identification of the suffering of Christ and the suffering of his Latin American people. He maintains that the condition of oppression experienced by Latin Americans serves as a lense or prism through which to gain closer unity and identification with Jesus:

> Such a situation [the experience of oppression, etc.], common today in many countries where the regime of security at any price reigns with its repressive aparatus, constitutes a lense by means of which the passion and death of Jesus Christ is read and interpreted. Not a few are the Christians who, undergoing a similar experience of passion and cross, have felt themselves united to the Suffering Servant and have identified with the Man of Sorrows, Jesus Christ.[63]

Jesucristo y Nuestro Futuro de Liberación (Jesus Christ and Our Future of Liberation)[64] attempts to identify the work of Christ more

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[61](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1976). The Spanish, Navidad: La Humanidad y la Jovialidad de Nuestro Dios, Iglesia Nueva 31 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1977), was used for this study.

[62](Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1978).

[63]Ibid., p. 12.

[64]Iglesia Nueva 32 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1978).

closely with the movements for liberation taking place in Latin America and the world. There is very little new in this book. The material is largely drawn from themes already developed in previous works.

The next work, Via-Sacra da Justiça (The Sacred Way of Justice),[65] is also a significant work. It is primarily a devotional book, structured around the fifteen stations of the cross. Each station is composed of two parts, the first dealing with the historical facts of Jesus, according to tradition, and the second dealing with how Jesus' passion is lived out anew in the poor and oppressed in Latin America. It is an important book for several reasons. First of all, as Boff himself says, it represents the culmination of his work in the area of Christology, acquired over a period of at least seven years. Secondly, it is devotional. The importance of the devotional in Boff's work has already been mentioned. It stems, in part, from the fact that he is a member of a religious order. But it is particularly significant here. He has analysed and presented Christ and his work from many different perspectives. In this work, however, he steps back and assumes a worshipful posture. He stands in awe before a great Mystery. It shows that, despite Boff's often stridently critical posture, towards the Church, towards traditional theology and towards conservative political views, he is motivated by a deep spiritual piety. The following citation from this work seems to sum up all these points:

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[65] Second ed., (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980). This book, originally published in 1978, has been translated into English under the title, Way of the Cross - Way of Justice, tr. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980). The Portuguese was used for this study.

> In the light of the perspectives and convictions worked out over the course of these seven years of Christological studies, I now present this sacred way, which is meant to be a prayerful theology or a theological prayer.[66]

The final work to be considered for this study is O Painosso: A Oração da Libertação Integral (The Our Father: The Prayer of Integral Liberation).[67] It deals not so much with Christ Himself as with the prayer which He taught us. In that prayer, however, Boff finds fertile ground for his views on liberation from oppression and poverty. He deals successively with each of the petitions, but his main interest is to divide the prayer into two parts, the one dealing with the things of God, the other with the things of men. In this prayer, he says, we encounter the correct relationship between God and humans, between heaven and earth, between the religious and the political. The first part of the prayer speaks on God's behalf: the Father, keeping His name holy, His kingdom, His will. The second part is concerned with human interests: daily bread, forgiveness, temptation, and evil. Nevertheless, there is a unity or complementarity between the two parts. Boff explains:

> The two parts constitute the one prayer of Jesus. God is not just interested in what belongs to him: his name, his kingdom, his divine will. He is also concerned about our affairs: bread, forgiveness, temptation, evil. Likewise we are not just concerned with what is vital to us: bread, forgiveness, temptation, evil. We are also open to the Father's concerns: sanctification of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, the realization of God's will.[68]

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[66] Ibid., p. 6.

[67] (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1979). The English, The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation, tr. Theodore Morrow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983) was used for this study.

[68] Ibid., p. 5.

Summary

From this broad survey of Boff's writings, it is possible to discern several overriding emphases which are found throughout his work. These may be summarized as follows:

1. The primacy of the anthropological element over the ecclesiastical. For Boff, theology is to be conceived, not as something that is handed down by the church hierarchy, but as the product of the people as they seek to fashion their faith in such a way that it is applicable and meaningful for them in their present context.

2. The primacy of the utopian element over the factual. The determining element of faith is not the past, biblical or church history, but the future, that is, the firm expectation of the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. This kingdom is not only foreshadowed in human liberation movements, but it is actually present in them and is brought about by them.

3. The primacy of the critical element over the dogmatic. Theology is not to be allowed to stagnate into dogmatic formulas but is to serve a critical function which will allow theology to remain always open to the future. Criticism refines and purifies the Christian experience so that it may be made incarnate within the historical experiences in which people are living.

4. The primacy of the social over the personal. The Christian religion is essentially a social religion. Salvation is not for the privileged few, it is for all people and it is not only for part of the human being (the soul, spiritual things) but includes the whole person, together with the world and its structures. Likewise, sin is not merely a personal thing, it is something which infects the structures and institutions of society.

5. The primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy. The essential purpose of Christianity is not to reduce the message of Christ to systematic categories of intellectual comprehension but to create new habits of acting and living in the world.[69]

Finally, it will be helpful to provide a brief recapitulation of Boff's views, vis-a-vis the church and Christ. In terms of ecclesiology, after all the criticism against the hierarchy and after all the

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[69]These are taken from Boff's appraisal of his own work in Jesus Christ Liberator, pp. 43-7. He applies these points specifically to his Christology but it is evident that they apply to all of his theology in general.

philosophical speculation that is characteristic of much of his work, Boff believes that the purpose of the church is to exercise a "historico-salvific function" in the world, which must translate into action:

> The specific and proper role of the church does not consist in transmitting revelation and salvation to the world. These are always available to human beings, in history. The function of the church consists in bearing testimony to, and being a sign of, the salvation that is already present in the world. Hence what is decisive for the church is not how many human beings it can gather by means of its clerical organization. . . . Its consciousness and its conscience impel it to act in the world in specific ways.[70]

Boff's Christology consists primarily in the belief that Christ cannot be reduced to dogmatic concepts. Christ is much more than the dogma of the church, He is an unfathomable Mystery. This fact implies a posture toward the dogmatic traditions of the church which,

> . . . neither denies nor extols it. As part of the lived past of the living church, this tradition is one manner--valid in itself--of coming to grips with the mystery of Christ. But the unfathomable riches of Christ are not exhausted in ecclesiastical formulas, be they ever so venerable. And this holds not only for the councils of Chalcedon or Constantinople, but even for the various christologies that are part of the New Testament. . . . Only at the end of history, therefore, will we be given to know fully who and what he is. Until his definitive coming, it is given to us only to assist at his manifestation as Lord of history. This is revelation today.[71]

Boff and the Vatican

When Leonardo Boff was summoned to a colloquium in Rome by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), on September 7, 1984, it was not the first

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[70]"Images of Jesus in Brazilian Liberal Christianity," in José Miguez Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 13-14.

[71]Ibid., p. 13.

time that he had had problems with the Vatican. He had earlier dealt with the congregation, by correspondence, for three years, starting in 1973, over the theme of his book, Jesus Christ, Liberator. Although he was finally exonerated, he had been suspected of denying that Christ was aware that He would die for the good of mankind.[72] Then, on October 14, 1980, Boff had a conversation, in Rome, with Archbishop Jerome Hamer, then CDF secretary. Hamer advised Boff to take a sabbatical year in Rome to "Catholicize" his mind. Boff replied, "If you want to convert me, let me go to the upper Amazon and live with the communities there. I might find the living Christ among them."[73] Boff went to the Amazon, but it did not keep him out of trouble for long. With the publication of his next book, Church: Charism and Power (1981), Boff found that he had tried the patience of the Vatican.[74]

The book is really a collection of articles dating primarily from 1977 to 1981. Chapter twelve, however, dates much further back. Now entitled "The Church as Sacrament of the Holy Spirit," it is a reworked version of Boff's Munich University dissertation originally published in German in 1970.[75] In the Foreward, Boff thanks two theologians for their help and encouragement: Bonaventura Kloppenburg, his

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[72]Joop Koopman, "Boff Optimistic," p. 8.

[73]Peter Hebblethwaite, "Boff Calls for Inside Look at Poverty," National Catholic Reporter, 21 September 1984, p. 6.

[74]In the meantime, Leonardo's brother, Clodovis, a Servite priest who devoted part of each year to working among the base ecclesial communities in Brazil and, himself, a very prolific writer on behalf of liberation theology, was suspended from his teaching post at the Pontifical University of Rio de Janeiro. See, Koopman, p. 8.

[75]Hebblethwaite, p. 6.

former professor and fellow Franciscan, who had groomed Boff to be his successor in the chair of theology in Petrópolis,[76] and Professor Joseph Ratzinger, to whom Boff writes, "I thank for his interest in the publication of this work."[77] His relations with both these men was to change significantly.

In the late 1970s Kloppenburg emerged as one of the chief opponents of liberation theology. He objected to the base communities that were such a vital part of the new theology. He denounced their harmful effects in a publication in 1977. In 1982 Kloppenburg reviewed Church: Charism and Power, and charged Boff, his former pupil, with heresy. Boff forwarded this article to Ratzinger, who by now was Prefect of the CDF, confident that he would receive a sympathetic ear. Ratzinger suggested that he should reply to the charges, which Boff did.

Nothing more was heard until May 15, 1984 when, quite unexpectedly, Boff received a six-page letter from Cardinal Ratzinger, expressing some reservations about the contents of the book and inviting Boff to come to Rome for a "conversation"[78] on September 7, 1984. Citing Boff's method as "untenable," and his logic as "relativizing," Ratzinger determined that the views expressed in this book "are such as to endanger

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[76]Tarcisio Beal, "The Trials of a Liberation Theologian," National Catholic Reporter, 28 September 1984, p. 20.

[77]Boff, Die Kirche als Sakrament, p. 16.

[78]This is the term used by the Cardinal himself in the letter. A copy of this letter may be found in L'Osservatore Romano (Eng.) n. 14 (880) 9 April 1985, pp. 11-12. The letter appears under the title "Notification on the Book: 'Church, Chrisma and Power: An Essay in Militant Ecclesiology' by Fr. L. Boff, OFM," and bears the date 11 March, 1985.

the sound doctrine of the faith. . . ."[79] The letter, however, contained no references to any specific retributive acts which may have been contemplated.

Thus, on September 7, 1984, Boff met with Cardinal Ratzinger in a four-hour session in which Boff presented a fifty-page reply to the "observations" and "questions" contained in the Cardinal's letter of May 15.[80] Also attending, to lend their support to Boff, at least in the later stages of the meeting, were two Brazilian cardinals, Aloisio Lorscheider of Fortaleza and Paolo Evaristo Arns of São Paulo.

Boff emerged from the meeting very hopeful. By all accounts, the conversation had been cordial and friendly.[81] Boff and his supporters felt confident that he would receive no more than a reprimand.[82] But they were wrong. Six months after the conversation, on May 1, 1985, Boff received word from Rome that he had been officially silenced. He is prohibited from teaching, speaking, writing or continuing his editorial work. On May 30 Ratzinger said the silencing would last for one year, and it was described as a "sabbatical year."[83]

Boff intended to use the time to study theological developments in Africa and Asia. Since then, however, he has been informed by Rome

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[79]Ibid., p. 12.

[80]"Editor's Note," in Church: Charism and Power, p. vii.

[81]This, according to Ratzinger's own account. See "Notification," p. 11.

[82]Penny Lernoux, "Act 'Shocks' Brazilians United with Theologian," National Catholic Reporter, 24 May 1985, p. 23.

[83]"Vatican Denies Boff Silencing to End Soon," National Catholic Register, 4 August 1985, p. 3.

that the ban will continue indefinitely. In addition, the Vatican has threatened to remove its imprimatur from all of Boff's books and the Paulist bookstores that sell Boff's works in Brazil have been ordered to suspend sale of his writings.[84] Upon hearing of the congregation's latest move, Boff reportedly remarked that he prefers "to walk with the Church rather than remain alone with my theology."[85]

The efforts of the Vatican may have been successful in silencing Boff, but they have, in a sense, backfired. Boff's popularity, which was already great, has grown significantly as groups from all over the world have risen to his support. In Brazil, three São Paulo human rights groups strongly condemned the Vatican's actions. In a joint statement, the groups complained that Boff's disciplining "deeply offends the fundamental rights of both the priest and theologian punished."[86] They hope to obtain one million signatures in Boff's support. Brazilian Protestant bishops have also come out strongly in Boff's favor and are seeking the support of the World Council of Churches in Geneva to put pressure on the Vatican to reverse the ban.[87] In addition, the Franciscans attending their general chapter meeting in Assisi, Italy last June, shortly after the announcement of Boff's censure, drafted a letter, signed by 104 of the 135 chapter delegates, supporting Boff and

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[84]Penny Lernoux, p. 23.

[85]Joan Lewis, "Roman Letter Outlines CDF Objections to Book by Boff," National Catholic Register, 7 April 1985, p. 9.

[86]"Academics, Rights Groups Condemn Vatican Silencing, Ask Explanation," National Catholic Reporter, 24 May 1985, p. 23.

[87]Penny Lernoux, p. 23.

contending that "the Vatican had treated Boff unfairly."[88]

This is the current situation. While he continues to study, he has been relieved of his teaching duties and is not allowed to publish. In the meantime, his popularity grows, reaching, it seems, legendary proportions. One has commented that the Vatican's order "will silence one of the most authentic prophetic voices of our church."[89] Nevertheless, this hiatus in Boff's literary production provides the opportunity to offer an assessment and an analysis of this tremendously prolific theologian's methodology.

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[88]"Franciscans Back Boff, Rap Rome," National Catholic Register, 28 July 1985, p. 2. Pope John Paul II sent a warning to this meeting that they should avoid "theories and practices" which would "substitute the text of the rule from an interpretation of it and to obscure the simplicity and pureness with which it was written by St. Francis." This was seen by some as a veiled threat to Franciscans like Boff. See, "Franciscans," National Catholic Reporter, 24 May 1985, p. 24.

[89]"Academics," p. 23.

CHAPTER IV

LEONARDO BOFF'S THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Boff places the movement known as liberation theology within the context of the great movements of emancipation that have characterized the modern age. Its uniqueness, however, lies in the fact that the impetus for change comes from within the ranks of the church and from faith. This may be the only time in recent years, he says, "that faith has proposed to be a concrete factor in the liberation of the oppressed in a conscious and planned way."[1] Moreover, it does not come from the powerful and the privileged in the church, but from the poor. The perspective of the poor, Boff maintains, "helps us to rediscover the gospel as good news and Jesus Christ as liberator of all oppression."[2] Thus, liberation theology is a movement "born on the periphery of the world and the Church," in Latin America, "where the poor see in it the articulated voice of their poverty, which demands liberation."[3]

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[1] Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation, tr. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 83.

[2] Do Lugar do Pobre, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1984), p. 10.

[3] Saint Francis, p. 83.

The articulation of such a theology, however, requires the adoption of what Boff calls a "new paradigm" for doing theology. He summarizes this new paradigm in the following way:

> The theology made in this process . . . is a reflection on the social reality, especially with the eyes of the poor, in the light of the Word of Revelation, from the practice of Jesus of Nazareth and his Apostles.[4]

The essence of Boff's theological methodology may be found in this brief citation. It involves reflection, or analysis of the social reality, in the light of revelation, resulting in the liberating practice of Jesus.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate, in greater detail, all three elements of Boff's methodology: social analysis, theological reflection, pastoral practice (which he often refers to as praxis). Before this can be done, however, it will be necessary to make several clarifications. The second part of this method, reflection, as was seen above, involves what Boff calls revelation. In order to understand his method, it is first necessary to understand what he means by revelation. And this brings to light a question concerning the relationship between revelation and Scripture. Thus, the first section of this chapter will be devoted to Boff's concept of revelation. The second will deal with his conception of the nature of Scripture and his use of Scripture. Only then will it be possible to gain an appreciation of his method. Many of the aspects of Boff's theology treated in this chapter were also mentioned in connection with the survey of his writings in the last chapter. But they will be discussed

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[4] Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 43.

more thoroughly and systematically in the present chapter. The final section of this chapter will deal briefly with Boff's estimation of the liberation theology movement and its future.

Boff's Concept of Revelation

The key to understanding Boff's theological methodology lies in his concept of revelation. This is a point which Boff himself freely acknowledges. In essence, he believes that revelation is present in history and through history. He affirms this, as was seen in the survey of his writings, in many places and in many different ways. At times Boff speaks of this revelation in terms of the universality of God's grace. At other times he stresses the "sacramental" character of all of nature. In other places he emphasizes the revelatory nature of historical movements of liberation. But, no matter how he says it, his purpose is to show that God reveals Himself, or discloses Himself in history, in nature, in human beings, or in social structures. It is best to let Boff speak for himself:

> One of the richest theses of modern liberal theology has to do with the concept of revelation--the key to any and every Christian theology. Whereas classic theology affirms an archeological concept of revelation occurring in the past and closing with the death of the last apostle, liberal theology [that is, liberation theology] emphasizes the ongoing character of the fact of revelation. Thus, as the whole of history is the history at once of salvation and perdition, so also is the revelation at once of God and of the human being.[5]

For Boff, revelation is the "self-communication of the mystery of God."[6]

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[5]"Images of Jesus in Brazilian Liberal Christianity," in Jose Miguez Bonino, ed., Latin American Christologies, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 11.

[6]El Ave Maria: Lo Femenino y el Espiritu Santo, Iglesia Nueva 57 (Bogota: Indo-American Press Service, 1980), p. 15.

But it is more than that. Man, and indeed all of nature, play their proper roles in revelation, so that, according to Boff, the "Word of God" is inspired by "the action of God blended with the action of men."[7]

What this means is that revelation and God's grace are not limited to any particular means or sphere of existence. They are found anywhere and everywhere. He says that "History is pregnant with Christ," and His blessings,[8] and that nature appears as the "gratuitousness that embodies God's presence in the world."[9] Above and beyond their nature as creation, all things "reveal God present in creation and sharing himself with it."[10] This revelatory nature of all created things is what Boff calls their sacramental character. By this, he means that all things in the world express a symbolical understanding of something beyond the thing itself. Thus, he does not deny the materiality of things, but "a dimension which transcends the analysis of their physical-chemical components and which makes present in the world and in time the reality of the Transcendental and the Eternal is discovered in them."[11]

For this reason, Boff contends that the entire world is a sacrament, which reveals the self-communication of God. Grace is to be found

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[7]Do Lugar do Pobre, pp. 96-7.

[8]Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time, tr. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 209.

[9]Liberating Grace, tr. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 63.

[10]Ibid., p. 64.

[11]El Destino del Hombre y del Mundo: Ensayo sobre la Vocación Humana, Colección CLAR 25 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1975), p. 121.

everywhere and in everything, even if people are not aware of it:

> While preserving all its own solidity, the world becomes a sacrament, a vehicle for the concrete communication of God. . . . We cannot pigeonhole it [grace] because it surrounds and envelopes us. To experience grace is to experience the atmosphere of saving life that pervades us, to make way for the gratuitousness in which we move. We implicitly experience God and his grace in everything we think and do, but we are not always conscious of that fact. Our ignorance, on the other hand, does not destroy the reality; the latter is greater than the realm of consciousness.[12]

In another place, he is even clearer: "The world, things, men, are penetrated with the generous sap of God, they are doorways of salvation and of Mystery; thus, they are sacramental . . . matter is sacramental."[13] In the dedication to his book, Los Sacramentos de la Vida, Boff makes a most interesting statement which demonstrates his belief that all of nature is sacramental and also gives insight into how this can be. He dedicates his book to the mountain, which, he says, is a sacrament:

> I dedicate this little book to the mountain which always visits me through my window. At times the sun burns her. Other times it dries her out. Frequently the rain punishes her. Not rarely the clouds gently envelope her. I have never heard her complain because of the heat or the cold. She never gets repaid for her majestic beauty, not even a thank you. She simply gives herself, freely. She is no less majestic when the sun caresses her than when the wind buffets her. She is not bothered if people look at her. She is not discomforted when they walk on her. She is like God: She supports all, she suffers all, she accepts all. Thus, the mountain is a sacrament of God. She reveals, she reminds, she prompts, she returns. Because she is thus, I gratefully dedicate this booklet to her. In it I attempt to speak the sacramental language which she does not speak, except that--what is much more--she herself is a sacrament.[14]

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[12] Liberating Grace, p. 89.

[13] Los Sacramentos de la Vida y la Vida de los Sacramentos, Iglesia Nueva 23 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1975), p. 13.

[14] Ibid., Dedication.

If, however, all of nature is revelatory, God is much more revealed in and through the heart of people who are committed to relieving the burdens of the poor and oppressed[15] and the great movements of liberation in the world. These movements turn out to be "theological metaphors revealing God."[16] But they can only be seen by those people who are dedicated to the service of their neighbors. If they are, then they will begin at once to see the dimension "which transcends the neighbor and themselves, the force which calls us into being, which grounds and makes possible the task of social love, or commitment, and of liberation."[17]

Boff's view of the universality of revelation leads him to a radical reinterpretation of the task of the theologian. The task of theology is no longer, as it was in traditional theology, to reveal and make known God's self-revelation in Scripture or in church tradition. God is already revealed salvifically in all things and everywhere. Rather, the task of the theologian is to "see, with the eyes of a theologian and from the experience of faith, the theological relevance" of nature and its movements,[18] and interpret them. The task is to detect the signs of God in history: "God comes to meet us through signals,

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[15] Eclesiogênesa: As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base Reinventam a Igreja (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1977), p. 35.

[16] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, tr. and ed., Robert Faith, Religious Life Series 3 (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1981), p. ix.

[17] Ibid., p. 49.

[18] Nuestra Resurrección en la Muerte, Iglesia Nueva 37 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1978), p. 77.

the signs of the times, which we are meant to detect and interpret as God's revelation."[19]

That Boff conceives of revelation in such a way has important implications for his understanding of Scripture and how he uses it.

Boff's Understanding and Use of Scripture

Boff's Understanding of the Nature of Scripture

According to Boff, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments must be situated within the "vaster horizon of God's permanent, or ongoing, revelation."[20] This means that Scriptures do not constitute revelation in and of themselves, but they are rather "testimonials to God's revelation."[21] In other words, Scripture is the human response to the revelation which always comes, as was seen in the previous section, through man or nature or history. Thus, the accounts of the Gospels and the rest of Scripture are "announcement and preaching," or "mid-rash commentaries" which were taken up and worked over and "put at the service of the truths of faith the evangelists sought to proclaim."[22] The Scriptures are, according to Boff, laden with "an inevitable theological interest."[23] Like any other historical text, the stories of the Bible are "situated within the general hermeneutical structure" of their time and they should be read and interpreted as

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[19]"Images of Jesus in Brazilian Liberal Christianity," p. 11.

[20]Ibid., p. 12. [21]Ibid.

[22]Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 175.

[23]Paixão de Cristo - Paixão do Mundo: Os Fatos, as Interpretações e o Significado ontem e Hoje, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1978), p. 11.

such.[24] The Scriptural accounts are "proclamations of faith,"[25] and their interest was "to convince, to proclaim, to defend, to polemicize and to attest . . ."[26]

In view of this, Boff says that in the Bible one must not expect to find neutral accounts of history:

> . . . we are not dealing with historical biographies about Jesus but with the witness of faith, the fruit of preaching, the pious and self-interested meditation of the primitive community. The Gospels are above all a theological interpretation of the events rather than an objective and disinterested description of the historical Jesus of Nazareth.[27]

The Gospels, then, contain a mixture of "history and theology, story and profession of faith, narration and dogmatic thesis,"[28] about Jesus, as the Biblical writers attempted to "decipher the authority, the sovereignty and the claims that emerged from his mode of being."[29]

Historical criticism, according to Boff, has shown that in their present form the Gospels are the "final products of a long process: the reflection, preaching and catechizing about Jesus elaborated by the community of disciples."[30] The Gospels, therefore, are really the product of the primitive community of believers in the years following Jesus' death and resurrection. The words and acts of Jesus were "filtered" by these early believers, who "took great liberties when

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[24] Ibid. [25] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 158.

[26] Paixão de Cristo, p. 15.

[27] Jesus Christ Liberator, pp. 2-3.

[28] Paixão de Cristo, p. 15.

[29] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 13.

[30] Ibid., p. 33.

confronted with the words of Jesus: it interpreted them, modified them, and created new pericopes,"[31] always in an effort to make Christ and His message present within their lives.

This basic understanding of the nature of Scripture has far-reaching implications for Boff's conception of the nature of the theological task. Since the Scriptures themselves are, in the end, merely the human response to God's revelation through history, the task of theology is not to uncover the meaning of Scripture but rather the meaning of life. This is, after all, what Scripture itself is:

> The task of faith does not reside primarily and basically in interpreting the scriptures, but in interpreting life, in which revelation is given. This is what the scriptures themselves did. When we read the scriptures we are reading human life as the sacred authors saw it through the lens of faith.[32]

Boff's Use of Scripture

The understanding that salvation and revelation are in progress in history and that they are available to all people through nature, has implications for Boff's use of Scripture. Scripture is revelation but revelation is not confined to Scripture. It is also found in life. This requires a certain give-and-take in the handling of Scripture. Scripture and the experiences of one's life must blend together to discover the encounter with God in the concreteness of life, as Boff says, "The reading of Scripture illuminates life and life illuminates the Scriptures."[33]

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[31] Ibid., p. 37.

[32] "Images of Jesus in Brazilian Liberal Christianity," p. 12.

[33] Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 97.

This posture over and against Scripture implies, according to Boff, several fundamental presuppositions. First of all, Scripture must not be understood as an historical document. The Bible, as was seen, is a mixture of fact and interpretation. Thus, the first task of the historian and the theologian is to "distinguish that which probably is from the historical Jesus and that which should be attributed to the theological or redactional work of the evangelist or the community."[34]

Boff's view of Scripture implies also that Scripture can make no claim to a fundamental unity. The books of the Bible are "an accumulation of traditions (at times very divergent and only exteriorly united with one another) . . ."[35] There is no internal unity within the various Scriptural accounts. Within the Bible there is a multiplicity of accents and "theologies." This diversity reflects the various cultural circles of the times in which they were written, such as Jewish, Hellenistic, and others and, thus, are sources of information on "the diversity of life in the primitive communities . . ."[36]

Yet another preunderstanding of the nature of Scripture which is determinative for Boff's use of it concerns its normative character. He says that Scripture is authoritative because "it is the first witness-text of those who were the first witnesses to the Word of

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[34] Eclesiogênese, p. 64.

[35] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 5.

[36] Church: Charism and Power, Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church, tr. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), p. 75.

life."[37] Because of this, the Christian churches granted it authority over "other incarnations of the Christian message" and it became the "indisputable reference for them."[38] For this reason, Boff speaks of the "historical normativity" of the Scriptures.[39] It was normative for the first Christians, but it is no longer normative for us. Faith is linked to the first witnesses, but it is not bound by them. Faith will "continue to read and reread them, interpret and reinterpret them according to the current situations and questions."[40] Boff sees Scripture as the starting point for theological reflection, but only as that. The text of Scripture is to be replaced by a new text which is the product of theological reflection in the context of today. For this reason, the text of the Bible cannot and should not be considered normative for all time. He explains:

> The text [of Scripture] has authority only in the first step of a broader process that gives access to the message. In the later stages of the process, the text must be able to give way to a new text of faith proper to today's world. The text of primitive Catholicism [that is, of the early church] preserves its authority as the first apostolic text, as reference point for all other texts, but it should not be considered as exclusive or as the only possible one in history.[41]

Thus, Scripture, according to Boff, cannot be used as if it possessed intrinsic authority. Nor can the literal meaning of the texts be absolutized. They are to be understood merely as "an

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[37] Ibid., p. 76.

[38] Ibid., p. 75.

[39] "Images of Jesus in Brazilian Liberal Christianity," p. 13.

[40] Church: Charism and Power, p. 76.

[41] Ibid., p. 77.

exemplary apprehension within a specific mode."[42] In other words, the texts had meaning in their original contexts, but the situation today is different to such a degree that a new meaning must be able to make itself heard: "The text ought to be open to other models that grasp reality in a different way and thereby enrich our comprehension of God's revelation in the world."[43] He says that "biblicism," which preoccupies itself simply with reconstructing and systematizing the official declarations of the past, "without the care of rethinking its data within and without the experience of the faith as it is felt today," constitutes one of the great dangers to theology today.[44]

This attitude towards the authority of Scripture follows directly from Boff's estimation of the nature of Scripture. The Bible was not written, according to him, to be the final and normative authority. Rather, it is "a question of faltering speech in the presence of a mystery," and "primarily a human answer which comes from faith."[45] And, as such, what is contained in the Bible is, according to Boff, not qualitatively different from what theologians and pastors of today do. The evangelists interpreted the message of Jesus and, Boff says, "This is exactly what we do in theology, catechesis and especially in homiletics."[46] The task of the theologian today is to put him or herself into the situation of the evangelist of yesterday. The only difference is the context:

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[42] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 42. [43] Ibid.

[44] Nuestra Resurrección in la Muerte, p. 76.

[45] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 18.

[46] Eclesiogénese, p. 65.

> Thus, we situate ourselves, without great pretensions, in the same situation as the evangelists. Like they, we proceed to a theological interpretation of the passion of the Lord. The attitude of faith is the same. The only difference is the Sitz im Leben.[47]

The foregoing summary of Boff's understanding of revelation and Scripture is essential for a proper comprehension of his theological methodology. His concept of revelation and his use of Scripture play a vital role in the way he does theology. With this preunderstanding, it is now possible to continue with a presentation of Boff's theological method.

Boff's Theological Methodology

Boff has given considerable thought to the way he goes about forming his theology. He is very concerned, perhaps more than most other liberation theologians, to justify the results of his theological reflection. For this reason, in many of his writings, he takes great care to explain his methods. This makes him an excellent subject for a study of the theological methodology of liberation theologians. The reason for his attention to method, moreover, is grounded in his belief that liberation theology is really little more than a method. He says that his reflections represent "a special way of constructing a theology and not a special theological theme."[48] Essentially, his method begins with discovering reality by using scientific research. It proceeds to interpret the data from the sociological analysis theologically. It then determines avenues to approach the practice of faith in ways responding to the problems that have been discovered in society.

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[47] Paixão de Cristo, p. 19.

[48] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 211.

Within this method, three basic elements are found, which Boff calls three "mediations." He defines a mediation as "a means with which this theology is endowed for bringing to realization what it proposes to itself as an end."[49] The first mediation is "socio-analytical mediation" that is, "seeing."[50] This is the starting point of liberation theology, which, as Boff says, "begins with an analytical, sociological, and structural reading of reality that is as scientific as possible."[51] The second mediation is "hermeneutic mediation," that is, "judging."[52] Starting from the above reading of reality, liberation theology, according to Boff, then "proceeds to its own theological reading based on the word of God."[53] Within this second mediation, Boff identifies two tasks. First, it must "liberate theology itself from an excessively generalizing or universalizing tendency and from a practice of faith that is completely uncritical" with regard to its economic and political presuppositions.[54] Second, the "hermeneutic mediation" must seek out and identify "the theological perspective present in any authentic process of liberation" even though it may be implemented by people who make no reference at all to the Christian faith.[55] Boff calls the third mediation "the mediation of pastoral practice" that is, "acting."[56] This is the goal of liberation theology and it completes

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[49] Salvation and Liberation, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY and Melbourne: Orbis Books and Dove Communications, 1984), p. 5.

[50] Ibid. [51] Liberating Grace, p. 79.

[52] Salvation and Liberation, p. 8.

[53] Liberating Grace, p. 80. [54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid. [56] Salvation and Liberation, p. 11.

the circle. Boff says: "Liberation theology culminates in a new praxis of the faith that aids human beings in their liberation process."[57]

This, says Boff, was the method which was consecrated at the Third Conference of Latin American Bishops (Puebla, 1978). But it had already received unofficial sanction based upon the practice of the base ecclesial communities and upon the current theological reflection of the South American continent.[58] This three-fold method, seeing analytically, judging theologically, and acting pastorally, will be the subject of the rest of this chapter. Each "mediation" will be taken up and investigated in greater detail. As this is done, however, it is necessary to keep in mind that this is more than an academic exercise. Boff has much more in mind that merely to propose a new way of doing theology. His desire is to discern some purpose in the great suffering and poverty under which he sees his people laboring:

> The age-old suffering of the Latin American people must have some meaning. It should be paving the way for a major turning point in history, for a more fraternal and humane type of human being. It cannot be totally without meaning.[59]

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[57] Liberating Grace, p. 81. Boff discusses this three-part methodology many places. In addition to the above references, see also Saint Francis, pp. 86-8; Lectura del Documento de Puebla desde América Latina Creyente y Oprimida, Iglesia Nueva 50 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1980), pp. 31-3; and "Puebla: Logros, Avances, Interrogantes," in Leonardo Boff et al., Estudios Sobre Puebla, Iglesia Nueva 45 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1979), p. 22.

[58] Lectura del Documento de Puebla, p. 31.

[59] Liberating Grace, p. 83.

The Socio-Analytical Mediation: Seeing Analytically

The first, and most important, step in Boff's methodology is an analysis of the social, economic and political situation in society. This priority of social analysis stems from Boff's conviction that theological reflection cannot start off from itself and elaborate its thinking on the basis of the Bible, tradition or the ecclesiastical magisterium. The theologian is rooted in the cultural reality in which he or she is immersed and inevitably reads and interprets that reality from that context. As Boff readily acknowledges, "my theological reading here is mediated by a cultural reading grounded primarily on sociology, economics, and political science . . ."[60]

For Boff, this is the critical point of his entire method. He says it is from the analysis of reality that divergencies in theology derive. When social analyses differ, different theological readings (the second mediation) will result and different types of action (the third mediation) will be adopted. Thus, this first mediation is the crucial one: "Tensions within the church are not typically the outgrowth of problems of faith. Much more often they are generated by problems connected with different stances taken up vis-a-vis social reality."[61] Since, moreover, this first step is the critical one, liberation theologians, including Boff, have directed a great deal of their effort toward the education, or consciousness-raising, of the people. One of the primary tasks of liberation theology is to educate people in a methodology of the analysis of reality. This is one of the primary

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[60] Ibid., p. 66.

[61] Ibid., p. 13.

emphases in the base ecclesial communities, and it is one of the favorite themes in the writings of liberation theologians.[62]

Just what is the analysis of reality which Boff adopts? It is one that is located, not at the center of the prevailing social systems, but at the periphery and its posture is one of criticism and non-acceptance:

> . . . the starting point for our theological reflection is of particular importance. Our hermeneutic locus is situated on the periphery of the prevailing system rather than imbedded within it. Our reflection derives from a locale which is regarded as critical and rebellious, which does not accept the prevailing regime and the kind of society implanted here. This nonacceptance is not due to any *a priori* position. It is due to a close analysis of reality on the most relevant terms possible.[63]

The social reality from which Boff begins his theological reflection is "the context of oppression and dependence on all levels of life . . ."[64] This situation, according to Boff, is caused by the phenomenon known as "underdevelopment" which he describes as a "global, dialectical process that results from the capitalist system which has been established in the West over the past four centuries."[65] But underdevelopment is not to be conceived of as a condition which will lead ultimately to development. Rather, Boff conceives of it as a systematic attempt on the part of the developed countries to keep the underdeveloped countries in a constant state of dependence. Boff explains this in the following way:

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[62] *Lectura del Documento de Puebla*, p. 33.

[63] *Liberating Grace*, p. 65.

[64] *Jesucristo y Nuestro Futuro de Liberación*, Iglesia Nueva 32 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1978), p. 11.

[65] *God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World*, p. 212.

> In order to sustain its scientific and technological progress as well as its growing affluence, industrial capitalism must create a central seat of power and a periphery around it. In the latter it fosters dependence, economic stagnation, social imbalances, and political tensions from which there is no internal way out. Thus development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. They always come together, and there is an intimate relationship between them. Underdevelopment at bottom is not a matter of technical backwardness; it is not simply a phase preceding development. Underdevelopment is a political problem, a consequence of the development taking place in the capitalist system.[66]

Boff goes on to describe in considerable detail three kinds of dependence caused by the capitalist system: economic, socio-cultural and political.[67] But, more than dependence, the prevailing system causes real oppression, the margination of the great majorities of people in Latin America and what Boff calls "the culture of silence," by which he means that the people on the periphery have no say in determining their own social, political and economic systems. Everything is dictated by the centers of power: "The voice of dependent societies is no more than the echo of the voice of the metropolitan centers."[68]

Boff is sensitive to the accusation that the underdevelopment of Latin America is due to other historical causes and, to a large extent, to the Latin American way of life in general. He rejects this idea categorically as a way of escaping the problem. It is true, he says that the penury and inequality of the Western world have historical roots. But this is aggravated by the methods of capitalistic production, by private, elitist, and exclusive ownership, which have given

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[66] Liberating Grace, p. 66.

[67] Ibid., pp. 68-72.

[68] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 214.

rise to "the system of modernism, nationalism, domination, and repression of the capitalist world."[69]

Economic and social growth are not the criteria for determining whether a country is dependent or not. The relationship between the developed and the underdeveloped countries is not dependent upon the relative rate of development. It is determined by structural relationships of oppressor and oppressed:

> . . . it seems evident that underdevelopment is not self-caused. Its cause lies in the development of the leading countries of the rich Northern Hemisphere. These countries and societies exist for their own sake; their dependencies are societies that exist for the sake of others. The system of underdevelopment can be marked by a tremendous economic and social development, yet the structure of dependence is preserved. The countries in question thus remain underdeveloped. The structural relationships are those of oppressor and oppressed.[70]

This is, very briefly, Boff's analysis of the reality in which he and his people live. The brevity of this treatment should not be misunderstood to imply that the very serious problems in Latin America are unimportant. They are very complex and their causes are multiple, and Boff has devoted a great deal of study to them. However, for the purposes of this study, it is enough to state that the situation in Latin America, as Boff has defined it, forms the starting point of his theological reflection. It is from the perspective of dependence and oppression that Boff takes up the next task, that of producing a new theological reading of Scripture and the Christian belief-system.

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[69] Saint Francis, p. 49.

[70] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 212.

The Hermeneutic Mediation: Judging Theologically

The second step in the methodology of liberation theology follows upon the social analysis of reality. The socio-analytical data must be interpreted theologically. The situation, which Boff has diagnosed as social and political oppression, is presented by him as "a privileged hermeneutical locus" for a rereading of Scripture and the traditional dogmas of the church.[71] This theological rereading or judging involves two principal tasks. First, liberation theology attempts to emphasize the liberating aspects that are present in the Scriptures and in the traditions of the church,[72] and also to liberate theology itself from any generalizing or universalizing tendencies. Second, liberation theology attempts to point out the theological relevance of historical freedom movements.[73]

This judging, however cannot be neutral. Boff says that it is "epistemologically impossible for the theologian to be total neutral, uncommitted, and purely theological . . ."[74] This is because no theologian can avoid "being guided by a horizon of interst," he or she always "enters with his models, paradigms and categories . . ."[75] Thus, from whatever perspective the theologian may approach the task, he or she will always come with a point of view: "Every point of view

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[71]"María, Mujer Profética y Liberadora," in Jorge Gómes, et al., Evangelización en América Latina, Colección CLAR 37 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1978), p. 30.

[72]Saint Francis, p. 84. [73]Ibid., p. 85.

[74]Church: Charism and Power, p. 13.

[75]Paixão de Cristo, p. 11.

is a view from a point."[76] Boff summarizes his view in the following way, speaking specifically of Christology:

> The theologian does not live in the air; he is a social agent, he is situated within a determined place and in society. He produces knowledge and meaning using instruments which the situation offers and permits, and he has defined addressees. Thus, he finds himself inserted into a global, social whole. . . . In this sense, we must affirm that there is no neutral Christology, nor can there be. Everything is "partisane" and "engagee."[77]

By stressing this point, however, Boff does not just mean to state the inevitability of approaching theology with some precomprehension of the faith. This is, of course, the way it is. But, according to Boff, this is also the way it should be. The theologian should approach the Scriptures with a predisposition in favor of the poor and oppressed. This is the only way to avoid falling into an ideology which supports the prevailing system of injustice. He says that either theology will adopt a critical attitude toward reality and thus be liberative or it will not. In the latter case, "it will cease to be a real theology, joining ranks with the ideological forces that seek to maintain the status quo and upholding the latter as more equitable and just."[78]

Thus, on the basis of his social analysis, with a critical posture towards the prevailing systems of culture and theology, and unabashably in solidarity with the poor, Boff proceeds to "reread hermeneutically" the sources of the Christian faith.[79] The present situation is the beginning place for theology, according to Boff, because, "If we are

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[76] Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 9.

[77] Jesucristo y Nuestro Futuro, p. 10.

[78] Liberating Grace, p. 67.

[79] Nuestra Resurrección en la Muerte, p. 60.

to gain any meaning out of the past, we must energize it in terms of the present."[80]

Rereading Scripture with an eye toward seeking the liberative aspects of the Gospel involves, first of all, asking the right questions. Boff phrases this question in the following way: "What meaning does Christ's liberation have in a context where people are yearning for liberation and suffering from oppression?"[81] With this question as the starting point, Boff then approaches the Scriptures in a selective way, ignoring large portions of the Bible, in order to discover those passages which seem to answer the question best. Boff says:

> . . . our interested eyes bounce around, taking out from the totality of the scriptural texts those which seem to be the most relevant in our situation. Such texts are underlined with red ink, their contexts are indicated in the margin with the observation: very important.[82]

With this type of exegetical method, Boff is able to make the Scriptures say whatever he wants, and he is able to get the answer which he sees as being most applicable to his situation. In fact, he readily acknowledges that, when he asks about Christ's liberation in the Scriptures and its meaningfulness in terms of the situation in Latin America, he is "already pointing the response in a certain direction and setting

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[80] The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation, tr. Theodore Morrow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 7.

[81] "Christ's Liberation via Oppression: An Attempt at Theological Construction from the Standpoint of Latin America," in Rosino Gibellini, ed., Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, tr. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 101.

[82] "María, Mujer Profética," p. 29.

up a viewpoint through which we will scan the words, life, and historical journey of Jesus Christ."[83]

Boff's rereading of Scriptures not only attempts to highlight the liberative aspects of the Gospels, it also attempts to liberate theology from excessively generalizing and universalizing tendencies which would rob theology of its critical posture. "Universal statements are not enough," he says, "they must be verified in the very texture of human life."[84] With this as his guiding principle, then, Boff proceeds to reinterpret many of the Christian doctrines in a way that lends itself to a more concrete application. For example, he says that heaven is not the product of difficult speculations about the future life. It is "the potentialization of that which we already experience on earth," or "life moments," which contain within them the "germ of heaven."[85] Likewise, hell is not the place where the sinner is thrown and "where there is fire and devils with enormous pitchforks to roast the condemned over the coals," but it is the "state of the man who identified himself with his egotistical situation, who became petrified in his decision to think only about himself and about his affairs and not about others and of God."[86] Or, again, the Antichrist is not something in the distant future but forms a present reality, who is "active in the manipulation of political and religious power,"[87] and who has a name: "he is the

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[83]"Christ's Liberation via Oppression," p. 101.

[84]Ibid.

[85]La Vida más allá de la Muerte, Perspectivas CLAR 6 (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Reliogosos, 1977), p. 76.

[86]Ibid., p. 86.

[87]Ibid., p. 99.

Capitalism of private property and the Capitalism of the state."[88]

The second aspect of the hermeneutic mediation is a reinterpretation of nature in terms of its theological significance. The church occupies a place within society, it has made its decisions and presents itself in terms of certain actions and reflections. Society, in turn, confronts the church with serious challenges that must be taken seriously by theologians. Thus, one of the tasks of theology is to "develop a theory of faith that takes into account the challenges of socio-historical reality."[89] Since, as was seen in the above treatment of Boff's concept of revelation, God reveals Himself in everything and through everything, the job of the theologian is to uncover the theological meaning and message of nature and history. Using all the sociological tools at his or her disposal, the theologian makes a theological judgment on the course of historical events. This, as always, is done in view of social analysis. The analysis may reveal the presence of structural injustice and evil as Boff explains:

> The socio-analytical data presented here with their own rationale must be interpreted theologically. Dependence, oppression, margination and the culture of silence are phenomena detected by analysis, yet not merely that. They embody a structural injustice; they concretize the arrogant egoism of a small elite and imply great inhumanity . . . we live in a situation of social and structural evil, which offends God and his children.[90]

On the other hand, the social analysis may reveal the presence of the liberating work of God in all liberative movements, including those that are not explicitly Christian and even those that may be

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[88] The Lord's Prayer, p. 119.

[89] Church: Charism and Power, p. 13.

[90] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 218.

anti-Christian. Boff explains that this perspective permits the theologian to see,

> . . . the presence of the Kingdom and its gifts in realities which by themselves are not called Kingdom or divine. All secular activity, like political activity, the struggle of the oprressed, the commitment of those allied to the poor . . . can be bearers of the cause of God in the world (Kingdom) and generators of the gifts of the Kingdom (justice, overcoming discrimination, more pertinent forms of popular participation).[91]

Once liberation theology has completed this second step, theological reflection and judgment, it proceeds to the next and final part of the method, which is also the goal of the entire process: action.

The Mediation of Pastoral Practice: Acting Pastorally

Liberation theology culminates in a new praxis of the faith that aids human beings in their liberation process. Motivated by the analysis of society and the rereading of Scripture and history, this theology then utilizes the human and social sciences to call forward pastoral activities calculated to foster the progress of the oppressed.[92] The principal interest of liberation theology is to generate activity on the part of the church that will aid the poor efficaciously. Boff says, "Everything must converge toward practice (love)."[93] Good will is not enough, activity must follow.

The emphasis on practice in Boff's theology stems from his conviction that reflection in general is derived from action: "Practice precedes theoretical systematizing; always reality first and reflection

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[91] Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 91.

[92] Salvation and Liberation, p. 13.

[93] Ibid., p. 4.

later. Reality is the reflected experience of the community."[94] The decisive thing is not the theology, but the life. Theology exists in relation to life: "It is life that will judge the value of all theology."[95] It is this that gives rise to Boff's emphasis on orthopraxis over orthodoxy.[96] Boff puts it very simply: "Life is more important than reflection."[97]

According to Boff, his own emphasis on orthopraxis is modeled upon the example of Jesus. Jesus was not as concerned about teaching doctrines as He was about acting savingly on behalf of human beings. Jesus' emphasis was not on understanding the nature of things but on praxis. Thus, Boff says of evil, for example, that ". . . for Jesus evil does not exist in order to be comprehended, but to be taken over and conquered by love."[98]

But there is more involved than merely following the example of Jesus. Boff believes that action on the part of humans is necessary in order to bring about the Kingdom of God. God, he says, does not work salvation by Himself. He uses and requires the efforts of people in order to bring about social transformation:

> The coming of the Kingdom is not automatic, with no collaboration on the part of human beings. The Kingdom is of God, but it has to be appropriated by us. God does not save the world and humanity by himself. He involves the human race in this messianic project in such a way that one person becomes a sacrament of salvation for

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[94] Church: Charism and Power, p. 131.

[95] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 266.

[96] Ibid., p. 211.

[97] Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 157.

[98] Ibid., p. 119.

> another. And this cooperation is of such a decisive nature that our eternal salvation depends upon its fulfillment.[99]

In the end, everything in Boff's theological system is directed toward action on behalf of the poor. The specific action required for the alleviation of poverty and oppression will be dictated by the results of the first two steps of his method, social analysis and theological judgment. The actions will vary according to the situation. In the case of Latin America, Boff is convinced that the only way to liberate the oppressed is to overthrow the corrupt capitalist system and replace it with one that is more humane. Although Boff does not speak of it as often as many other liberation theologians, he suggests that socialism is closer to the Christian ideal than capitalism.[100] Nevertheless, Boff is not satisfied with a reformation of the existing structure. It is evil of itself and it must be replaced if there is to be true liberation.

> Liberation, by definition, involves a qualitatively new society. Reformist measures are only tactical steps, not strategic goals. These measures, these steps, must point to, and serve, liberation. Liberation is never merely a matter of intention, aspiration. It is the fruit of a process, in which all must participate; it is not the result of a single stroke of the will.[101]

Praxis is the beginning and the end of Boff's theological methodology. Theory is derived from praxis and it must also serve to promote praxis. This, says Boff, is the Biblical approach and it stems directly from the cross of Christ Himself: "The cross is not there to

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[99] The Lord's Prayer, p. 67.

[100] See, for example, Salvation and Liberation, pp. 10-11.

[101] Ibid., p. 12.

be understood. It is there to be borne and to walk the road of the Son of Man who bore it and who, by it, redeemed us."[102]

Summary

The above presentation makes it clear that Boff's theological methodology represents a special way of constructing a theology. It begins with an analysis of reality, using scientific research. It proceeds to interpret the data from the sociological analysis theologically. Then it determines avenues of practice which will bring about concrete liberation from the oppression uncovered by the social analysis. This method involves, as Boff is quick to point out, a hermeneutical circle. The starting point of the circle is the social, political and economic reality. This reality raises questions, which are then addressed to the Scriptures and church dogma. The latter are read and interpreted in such a way that a response is found that applies directly to the situation. The answers, in turn, bring about specific actions designed to alter the situation as analyzed. The beginning and end of the circle is the historical situation in which the theologian finds him or herself. The Scriptures form the middle part of the circle. Into them is read the analysis of society and from them are derived the answers to modern problems. The Scriptures are not absolutely normative. They are human, culturally conditioned writings and contain no more than human reflections on the experience of the divine in history. The following citation, though lengthy, mentions many of the above points and, therefore, serves as a fitting summary of this discussion of Boff's method:

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[102] Paixao de Cristo, p. 144.

> The biblical meaning cannot, therefore, be totally fixed or anchored in the past. In the Bible there is a virtuality of meanings which are explicated in contact with new socio-historical situations. We are, therefore, enclosed within a hermeneutical circle: we read the sacred texts with our actual out-look and, for that reason, when we read we are always interpreting. These same sacred texts send their message in the direction of our historical hearing and are captured in the sound waves of our time. Thus, they receive an interpretation; there is always a mutual complicity. In this way Scripture does not emerge as a cistern of dead water, in which are gathered all the possible meanings, but rather as a fountain of living waters from which flow new meanings in accordance with the temporal variations in which men live, suffer and search for answers. The circle is not vicious, nor does it destroy the original meaning of Scripture. It is potent; it reveals the richness of the meanings potently present in the texts, but redeemed by means of the questions which irrupt from the socio-historical situations.[103]

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this study of Boff's theology and methodology, it is appropriate to indicate briefly Boff's own estimation of the course which liberation theology has traveled over the past fifteen years, where it is and where it is going. At the very beginning of this study mention was made of the pluralism which exists in the liberation theology movement. Boff is very much aware of this plurality and, as was seen, he has put forward some effort at providing some unity.[104] He acknowledges that there are differences of emphasis within the liberation movement, but he will not permit one to use that argument in order to "exempt oneself from any obligation to answer the questions that this type of theology raises, and thus to write off its validity

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[103] "María, Mujer Profética," p. 30.

[104] This was seen, for example, in his attempt to include women's liberation themes within his more general appeal for political liberation.

and legitimacy."[105] He says that from among the various, often diverse, liberation movements in the world today an "Ariadne's thread" may be detected that unifies them and makes them a whole: "The concern to detect the living presence of the Risen One in the concrete, historical setting" of today and "to hear the voices and demands which he causes to be raised in this setting so that it may at last be freed from anything that enslaves and alienates it . . ."[106] More fundamentally, however, the various accents within the theology of liberation are united by their method of doing theology: "I must insist that there is one, and only one, theology of liberation. There is only one point of departure--a reality of social misery--and one goal--the liberation of the oppressed."[107]

Finally, Boff has something to say about the future of the theology of liberation. It is not a new addition to a long series of theological movements which arise, only to disappear again as quickly as they arose. It is a new way of doing theology which, he says, will remain as long as there is inequality and injustice in the world:

> The theology of liberation is not a fad, because to be poor and exploited has never been a fad. Would that it were one and that it would pass away like all fads. Then there would be no poor, only persons participating in a just and fraternal society.[108]

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[105] Salvation and Liberation, p. 25.

[106] God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. x.

[107] Salvation and Liberation, p. 24.

[108] Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 11.

CHAPTER V

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONAL HERMENEUTICS: THE DIVINUM AND HUMANUM OF SCRIPTURE AS HERMENEUTICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was seen that Boff made it clear that no one may approach the task of theology with complete neutrality. The theologian does not live in a vacuum. He or she always approaches the task from a perspective which is determined by the situation in life: "Every point of view," he said, "is a view from a point;"[1] "Everything is 'partisane' and 'engagee.'"[2] This forms a point of agreement between Boff's theological methodology and the methodology of the Lutheran Confessions. For example, Herbert Bouman notes that, ". . . any approach to Scripture . . . represents a return, a response to its message. . . . In the circle of the church's use of Scripture it is always a Herauskommen and a Hinzukommen."[3] The statement by

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[1]Leonardo Boff, Do Lugar do Pobre, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1985), p. 9.

[2]Leonardo Boff, Jesucristo y Nuestro Futuro de Liberación, Iglesia Nueva 32 (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1978), p. 10.

[3]Herbert J. A. Bouman, "Some Thoughts on the Theological Presuppositions for a Lutheran Approach to the Scriptures," in Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics: Confessional Principles and Practical Applications, Concordia Theological Monthly Occasional Papers, no. 1 (1966), p. 3.

Boff which was quoted in the previous chapter, "The reading of Scripture illuminates life; life illuminates the Scriptures,"[4] is a point on which both he and confessional Lutherans can agree.

Thus, for both Boff and the Lutheran Confessions, the first question which must be addressed, before proceeding to the matter of the proper methodological approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures, is to inquire into the presuppositions with which one faces the task. And this will necessarily involve a determination of the nature of the thing to be interpreted. In other words, what is Scripture? Is it a human work, like any other ancient writing subject to the same scrutiny and judgment of the interpreter as any other writing? Or is it something else? Samuel Nafzger has phrased the question very well:

> What is this book that is to be interpreted? Is it the very Word of God in the words of men, or is it only the fallible witness of human beings to God's revelation of Himself in history through which he somehow continues to speak? Is Scripture itself revelation, or is it only the occasion for revelation to take place once again?[5]

The answer to these questions plays a determinative role in the choice of the proper hermeneutical approach to Scripture. Boff has given a very clear answer to this question. For him, Scripture represents the human response to divine revelation which the writers of the Bible perceived through history. It is human documents, conditioned by its Sitz im Leben like any other literary document, and it contains a diverse mixture of fact and interpretation. These presuppositions have

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[4]Boff, Do Lugar do Pobre, p. 97.

[5]Samuel H. Nafzger, "Scripture and Word of God," in John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 122.

had a determinative effect on his hermeneutical approach to Scripture, as was seen.

The Lutheran Confessions also have some very clear presuppositions about what the Scripture is and from whence it has come. For the Lutheran Confessions, Holy Scripture is the product of the unique and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit upon His chosen prophets and apostles whereby He spoke His Word in their words, so that He is the true Author of their every word. Because of their divine authorship, the Scriptures are qualitatively different from every other form of human expression in every age. At the same time, however, because God's authorship of Scripture was accomplished through human authors living and writing at various times and places as men of their times, the Confessions teach that it must be read as an historical literary document in order to discern its intended meaning.

Thus, the Lutheran Confessions teach a clear divinum and a clear humanum in Scripture: God's Word in man's words. By this, of course, they do not intend to say that Scripture is part God's Word and part man's word and that the job of the interpreter is to determine which is which. Scripture is, according to the Confessions, God's Word in man's words in one unified whole. Nevertheless, recognition of this fact has serious implications for the Confessions' understanding and interpretation of Scripture.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the hermeneutical presuppositions of the Lutheran Confessions. This presentation will be built around the two basic presuppositions mentioned above: the divinum and humanum of Scripture. The Lutheran Confessions attempt to take

seriously both sides. In affirming the divine origin of Scripture the Confessions attempt to do full justice to Biblical inspiration, authority and infallibility, as well as to Scripture's organic unity of doctrine. On the other hand, in affirming the human side of Scripture, the Confessions intend to bind themselves to the plain, literal meaning of the text, asserting its fundamental clarity and, thus, doing full justice to the incarnational aspect of divine revelation. This study will show that the Confessions teach both these aspects of Scripture and also the hermeneutical conclusions which necessarily follow from each. It is the view of the Confessions that only by affirming both the divinum and the humanum of Scripture can one, under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, hear the message of God's reconciliation of all people through Jesus Christ, who Himself was divine and human, clearly and liberatingly revealed in God's Word.

The purpose of this exposition is not, of course, to show that Boff is not a confessional Lutheran. Rather it is to establish the criterion against which to judge Boff's theological methodology. For Lutherans who take their confessional heritage seriously and voluntarily bind themselves to the Confessions of their church, the Lutheran Symbols (and, of course, the fundamental assumption that the Confessions are faithful expositions of Scripture) offer the only valid criterion for judging any theology or any theological method.

The "Divinum" of Scripture According to the Confessions

The Lutheran Confessions teach that Scripture is divine, that is, that God is the Author of all its parts. They do this primarily by

their direct identification between Scripture and the Word of God and by their insistence that Scripture be the only source and norm of Christian faith and life. For the Confessions, moreover, the divinum of Scripture implies several fundamental hermeneutical assumptions which must be brought to the task of biblical interpretation. First of all, because Scripture is of divine origin, it is absolutely authoritative. Secondly, because it has one divine Author, Scripture is fundamentally unified in its theological content.

Scripture Is the Word of God

The Confessions teach that Scripture is the Word of God in a number of ways. This can be seen, first of all, in the fact that the confessors sought to do nothing other than present a summary of Christian doctrine which "is drawn together out of the Word of God."[6] The importance of this fact is seen in their desire not to put forward "any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth" (AC Conclusion I, 1. p. 47). It is for this reason that they pledged themselves "to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated" (FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 3. pp. 503-4).

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[6]FC SD, Rule & Norm, 1, Book of Concord, transl., ed., Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 503. Hereafter, all references to the Confessions will be placed in parentheses following the citation or allusion in the text of this study. The page numbers in Tappert's edition of the Confessions will also be included for convenience. Please consult the list of abbreviations on p. v at the beginning of this study.

This means that the Confessions are really nothing more than exegesis of Scripture. Robert Preus, speaking about the Formula of Concord, says that this was a deliberate attempt on the part of the confessors:

> The authors' formula for concord is to illustrate systematically that the position embraced relative to all the controverted articles is not only Lutheran (as they frequently cite Luther) and in accordance with the previous symbols but above all biblical.[7]

Fred Kramer applies this to the whole Book of Concord when he says that all the Confessions "profess to be and are exegesis, interpretation of Scripture, in the best sense of the word. They are a correct summary of the passages of Scripture which concern the particular doctrines which were under discussion in the debate."[8] Scripture held special authority for them, above all other writings.

It was a constant working assumption for the confessors that Scripture is the unique product of God Himself. They show this in their frequent application of the apellation "divine" to Scripture, such as "The Holy Scriptures of God" (Pref. to the Book of Concord, p. 12; SD V, 3, p. 558), or "the words of Jesus Christ" (SD VII, 50, p. 578), or that the Holy Spirit spoke "through the mouth of the holy apostle" (SD X, 15, p. 613), or "the Scripture of the Holy Spirit" (AC Preface, 9, p. 99). That they believed that the Holy Spirit was the Author of Scripture can be seen very clearly also in such statements

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[7]Robert D. Preus, "The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," in Arnold J. Koelpin, ed., No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemmoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord 1580-1980 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), p. 312.

[8]Fred Kramer, "Sacra Scriptura and Verbum Dei in the Lutheran Confessions," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (1955):95.

as: "Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?" (Ap IV, 108, p. 122), or when they say that "the Holy Spirit warned against" the doctrines of the devil (AC XXVIII, 49, p. 89).

Many other passages could be cited, enough to justify Ralph Bohlmann's conclusion that "The confessional writers work from the 'that,' the 'given,' of a divinely authored Scripture."[9] Thus, for the confessors, God is the ultimate Author of Scripture. It is possible, as A. C. Piepkorn says, to speak of the Holy Spirit as "the principal Author" of Scripture[10] if this is properly understood. As shall be seen, the confessors also believed that God authored Scripture in the words of men so that it can also be spoken of as the product of this or that biblical writer. But, if this is meant to imply that human error is present in Scripture, or that the part that God authored must somehow be separated from what man wrote, then the use of that term cannot be reconciled with the view of the confessors. For them, God is the Author

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[9]Ralph Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation: Some Basic Principles," in John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 192. This article is basically a summary of Bohlmann's greater work, which has become a standard work on biblical hermeneutics in the Confessions, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions, revised edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983).

David Lotz, "Sola scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," Interpretation 35 (1981):236, indicates that Luther also worked from a "given" of a divinely inspired text of Scripture. He says: "Scripture for Luther is God's Word since it has God the Holy Spirit as its ultimate author." He contradicts himself, however, on the same page when he attempts to say that Luther designated Scripture as Word of God, ". . . because it witnesses to Christ the Word who is in Scripture as its matchless content and because it contains the gospel through which the risen and exalted Christ still speaks and acts redemptively on behalf of his church."

[10]Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" Concordia Theological Monthly 36 (1965):582.

of Scripture; God spoke His Word in their words so that He is the true Author of their every word.

The confessors also indicate their belief in the divine authorship of the Bible by their direct identification between Scripture and Word of God. This is something that many theologians are hesitant to admit since they wish to drive a wedge between Scripture and Word of God, as, for example, does Barthian Neo-orthodox theology. The confessors make a simple identification between Scripture and the Word of God many times. Herbert Bouman has shown that this identification is made at least seventy-seven times in the Confessions.[11] In the title to the Book of Concord, for instance, they indicate that their doctrine is "Firmly Founded on the Word of God as the Only Norm." Again, the German version of the Rule and Norm section of the Solid Declaration reads that "the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine," (FC SD Rule and Norm, 9, p. 505) while the Latin translation uses the words sacra litera. The list could easily be expanded well beyond the boundaries of this study. The point is clear, however, that, for the confessors, Scripture is the Word of God.

This is not, however, to say that only Scripture is the Word of God. The Word of God also comes through preaching and through the Sacraments. Herman Preus refers to these three vehicles of the Word as the "Written, Spoken, and Signed Word."[12] But often far too much is

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[11]Herbert J. A. Bouman, "Source Material on 'The Word of God' in the Lutheran Confessions," unpublished manuscript (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, n.d.)

[12]Herman A. Preus, "The Written, Spoken, and Signed Word," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (1955):641-56.

made of the distinction between these three. The Word which comes through these three means is the same Word. One can never be used in opposition to another, nor can they be separated from one another. Through all three comes God's own Word of promise. And the confessors make it very clear that the right use of proclamation and of the sacraments depends on their conformity with Scripture. Thus, H. Preus speaks of the written Word as the Urkunde, the source of the others:

> The written Word must be called the Word of God in a unique and basic sense. It is indeed Urkunde. It is the original source, the Word of God as God Himself wanted it expressed and recorded. In this respect it is different from the spoken Word, where God permits men to express His thoughts in their own way and where they are not under the compulsion of the unique "inspiration" by which men wrote the Scriptures.[13]

This, of course, must not be understood as if Scripture merely contained the Word of God. For the confessors, Scripture is the Word of God. But it means that, for the confessors, the preaching of Christians today can never be put on a level with Scripture.

Yet another indication that the confessors believed Scripture to have come about by divine inspiration is when they use the terms mandatum Dei or ius divinum. In speaking about vows of celibacy, for example, Melanchthon writes that vows cannot nullify God's order and command. Then, referring to a specific Bible passage, he says, "God's command in I Cor. 7:2 reads . . ." (AC XXVII, 19, p. 73). In other words, although it was written by Paul, God commanded it. The same can be seen with reference to the Gospel. Referring to John 3:17-18, Melanchthon says, "Here mercy has God's clear and certain promise and his command" (Ap IV, 345, p. 160; compare also Ap. XII, 88, p. 195). The same is

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[13] Ibid., pp. 642-3.

implied by the confessors' use of ius divinum (see, for example, Ap XXIII, 3, 6, 7, pp. 239-40; Ap XI, 6, p. 181, note that in this letter case, the German reads "Holy Scripture," where the Latin reads ius divinum).

This is enough to demonstrate that the confessors held that Scripture is the product of the unique and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit. This, they say, is the basic presupposition with which one must approach the hermeneutical task. But this has raised questions among some. Werner Elert, for example, maintains that the doctrine of divine inspiration cannot provide the basis for faith.[14] It is, of course, true that the proper object of a Christian's faith is not the inspired Scriptures but rather Jesus Christ. But the demand of the confessors that faith in Christ be based upon what God has revealed in Scripture in no way conflicts with that. It was for the sake of the precious message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that they laid such emphasis on the inspiration of Scripture. In fact, the Confessions want to say that everything in Scripture somehow serves the Gospel teaching, as Luther says at the end of the Creed section in the Large Catechism (LC, I, 70, p. 420).

However, this belief in the inspiration of Scripture is not, as Elert and others allege, due to an improper desire to replace faith with certainty. The belief in the divine authorship of the Bible, according to the Confessions, is an expression of their faith in the One Whom God has graciously revealed in His Word.

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[14] Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, tr. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 196.

Hermeneutical Implications of the *Divinum* of Scripture

Because Scripture was authored by God there are certain fundamental conclusions which necessarily follow. According to the confessors, Scripture addresses man as God's own infallible, powerful, and authoritative speech. As such Scripture is the only source and norm for all doctrine in the church. This implies, first of all, that Scripture is authoritative. For the confessors, however, Scripture was not authoritative because it somehow is authenticated by faith, but rather simply because it is God's own Word. The *divinum* of Scripture further implies the unity of theology within Scripture. Both these implications of the *divinum* of Scripture will be taken up in the following pages.

The Authority of Scripture

The Confessions speak of the authority of Scripture in a twofold sense. First of all, Scripture has causative authority, that is, it is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit by which He, through Word and Sacrament, bestows His saving grace. The confessors state that God does not deal with us except through His external Word and Sacraments (SA III, VIII, 10, p. 313). This applies both to Law (SD VI, 10-13, pp. 565-6) as well as to Gospel (SA III, VIII, 10, p. 313). Furthermore, they indicate specifically that God's causative authority resides in the written Word. For example, they say that the preaching in their churches, which has the power of the Holy Spirit, is authoritative because it is in conformity with the written Word (AC Preface, 8, p. 25). Perhaps even more significantly, Luther, in the Small

Catechism, indicates that the Word of God which is effective in Baptism is the Word which is written in Scripture, in this case Mt. 28:19 (SC IV, 3, p. 348). The causative authority of Scripture is related to the soteriological function of Scripture. (Although these terms are not used in the Confessions, the doctrine communicated by them is.)

There are those, however, who say that only the proclaimed word has causative authority, that is, that only the preached word has the power to create faith and bestow the benefits of salvation.[15] It is true, as was seen, that God works through the spoken Word for His soteriological purposes. But, as the above passages indicate, this in no way militates against the confessors' contention that He also works through His written Word (as well as through His "signed Word").[16] The above citations also show that God bestows grace through the spoken Word only insofar as it is in conformity with the written Word.

Scripture also has normative authority for the church. The confessors teach this especially in the Rule and Norm sections of the Formula of Concord, but it is also found throughout the entire corpus of the Confessions, as they seek to do nothing other than present an exposition of the Scriptural teaching on controverted articles. This can be seen, for example in the heading to the Rule and Norm which reads, "The summary formulation, basis, rule, and norm, indicating how all doctrines should be judged in conformity with the Word of God and errors are to be explained and decided in a Christian way" (SD Rule

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[15]See, for example, Foster R. McCurley, "Confessional Propria as Hermeneutic--Old Testament," in John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 236.

[16]Herman Preus, pp. 642-45.

and Norm, p. 503). In other words, Scripture is "the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated" (SD Rule and Norm, 3, p. 504. See also AC XXIII, 8, p. 52; Ap XXI, pp. 229-36. Ap XV, pp. 215-22).

Thus, for the confessors, Scripture is normative for faith and life. In carrying out its normative function Scripture is infallible, not, as Bohlmann points out, merely in matters of salvation, but in all matters of faith.[17] The Confessions do not teach, as Elert, for example, believes, that the authority of Scripture is Christocentric.[18] It is true that the content of Scripture is Christocentric, that Christ is the center, the heart and core of Scripture. This must never be forgotten. Nevertheless, Scripture is not authoritative because of its contents. It is authoritative because it is God's Word and because He chooses to work by His Holy Spirit through it. Ultimately, of course, Scripture is not authoritative because of some external compulsion or because men have arrived at that conclusion on the basis of an intellectual conviction. Scripture is authoritative for Christians because they have been set free by the power of the Gospel to submit themselves to the authority of Scripture in all its parts. According to the Confessions, the object of faith is the Incarnate Word who convinces believers of the authoritativeness and infallibility of His Word, by which He reveals Himself to them.[19]

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[17]Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," p. 200.

[18]Elert, p. 191.

[19]See, Walter R. Roehrs, "Inspiration and Authority," Concordia Theological Monthly 25 (1954):748-9.

Closely connected with their conviction of the authority of Scripture is the confessors' belief that Scripture cannot err. This is a conclusion drawn directly from their belief that Scripture is the Word of God. Thus, for example, Luther maintains that God's Word (Scripture) "is not like some empty tale," but is "indeed, the power of God which burns the devil and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort and help" (LC Long Preface, 11, p. 360). And this should not be understood as if it applied only to the major or theological contents of Scripture. Again, Luther says, concerning the Catechism, that it should be related to "all that they learn in the Scriptures, and thus advance and grow richer in understanding" (LC II, 70, p. 420). All of Scripture is profitable, even the so-called trivial details.

The inerrancy of Scripture, as envisioned by the confessors, cannot be understood as some have attempted to understand it. For example, Harold Ditmanson attempts to reinterpret the words inerrant and infallible, contained in the Constitution of the American Lutheran Church to mean "truthful" and "reliable" respectively.[20] Of course, Scripture is truthful and reliable, but the confessors intend more than this. Nor does Piepkorn do justice to the confessional view when he interprets inerrant as "poetic metaphor."[21] which came about as a result of historical developments.[22] Paul Bretscher, who, in denying totally any claim to Scriptural inerrancy, considers the whole topic

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[20]Harold H. Ditmanson, "Perspectives on the Hermeneutics Debate," in John Reumann, Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 82.

[21]Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" p. 580.

[22]Ibid., p. 578.

to be an infection which must be surgically removed,[23] is even further from Luther, who said, "My neighbor and I--in short, all men--may err and deceive, but God's Word [Scripture] cannot err" (LC IV, 57, p. 444).

However, it is worth noting at this point that the Lutheran confessional understanding of the inerrancy of Scripture is significantly different from that found among many Reformed or fundamentalist theologians. For the latter, Scripture is perceived to be inerrant because of an a priori decision concerning the nature of God's Word. Carl F. H. Henry, for example, says that ". . . only a sure and intelligible Word of God is the raison d'etre of revealed religion . . ."[24] This implies that certainty of faith and the truth of the Gospel are dependent upon a certain and inerrant Scripture and it runs the risk of making the Bible, rather than Jesus Christ, the object of faith. The process is reversed for confessional Lutheranism. They would affirm, of course, that, as God's Word, Scripture cannot contain errors because God cannot err. But the Confessions view the Bible as inerrant, not because of an a priori decision, but because of an a posteriori conclusion which forces upon the believer the conviction that the Word of the Lord, who is and always remains the object of faith, does not and cannot err. The inerrant Bible, therefore, is not the object of faith, but Jesus Christ and His vicarious satisfaction are the object and the source of certainty of faith. It is therefore from the perspective of faith that the Confessions view Scripture as being without error. The

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[23]Paul G. Bretscher, "The Log in Your Own Eye," Concordia Theological Monthly 43 (1972):645-86.

[24]Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1979), 4:384.

following citation expresses the view of confessional Lutheranism very well:

> When Lutherans argue for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures . . . it is not their intention to establish some premise on the basis of which they deduce and attempt to prove the truthfulness of the Gospel in order to compel a mere intellectual persuasion that the Good News is worthy of all acceptation. Lutherans recognize that a conviction resting on such a foundation could well be a human logical conclusion (fides humana) which is hazardously dependent upon rationally satisfying evidence for the reliability of a doctrine about the Bible instead of a faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit (fides divina) which clings to the voice from heaven heard in the Bible. . . . Accordingly, our view of the Bible is a result of our faith in the Gospel; our faith in the Gospel is not a result of our view of the Bible. Because we have come to know the voice we hear in the Gospel taught by Scripture is truly God's voice, we treasure these sacred Scriptures as the only source and norm of this precious Gospel.[25]

The Unity of Scripture

A further implication of the confessors' affirmation of the divine authorship of Scripture is the unity of Scripture. Because the same God speaks the same message of Christ and salvation throughout Scripture, Scripture presents an organic unity of doctrine. This unity is found both within and between the Old and New Testaments. Bohlmann indicates that the unity of Scripture is rooted in three elements: that all Scripture has but one divine author; that Scripture has one central content, Jesus Christ; and that Scripture has one fundamental purpose, namely, eternal salvation.[26]

The organic unity of Scripture has important hermeneutical

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[25]"Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (1972), pp. 15-16.

[26]Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," p. 206.

applications, which the confessors consistently applied. First of all, they assumed that any part of Scripture is and must be related to any other part. This is what may be called the integrating function of Scripture's unity. For example, Melanchthon relates what Paul has to say in Romans 4 about the relationship between faith and justification to what he has to say on the topic in other places (Ap IV, 88-90, p. 120. See also what Luther does with the Fourth Commandment in LC I, 167, p. 388). In addition, according to this integrating function, obscure passages are to be explained in the light of clear ones, as, for example, in the case of the doctrine of predestination (SD XI, pp. 616-31). Finally, Old and New Testament texts are related to one another and explained in view of one another (See, for example, Ap II, 18, 20, pp. 102-3; Ap XII, 66, 73, pp. 191-2; Ap XXIV, 54-5, p. 259).

There is also a negative function of hermeneutics related to the unity of Scripture. This means that Scripture cannot be interpreted against itself, that there are no contradictions in Scripture. Therefore, the task of the interpreter is to discover the underlying unity of Scripture and not, as is so common today, to seek out contradictions. For example, one passage is not to be rejected because of another passage, or one passage is not to be interpreted against another passage (see, for example, Ap IV, 244-53, pp. 141-3). However, one passage must not be distorted in order to reconcile it to another one. All passages of Scripture, because they are the Word of God, are to be accepted, even if they seem to contradict one another. This the confessors did when, for example, they dealt with the apparent contradiction between eternal election and universal grace (SD XI, pp. 616-33. See also SC VII, 45, p. 577).

The unity of Scripture means that the ultimate context of every passage in Scripture is the entire Scripture. This is what is known as the analogia fidei, and it means that Scripture must be allowed to interpret itself. The Latin title to the Rule and Norm section of the Solid Declaration indicates that what follows is "in conformity with the Word of God (analogia Verbi Dei)" (p. 503), that is, the analogy of Scripture, implying the entire Scripture. In other words, the context for interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself, not anything behind or above Scripture.[27]

The confessional view of the theological unity of Scripture cannot easily be reconciled with the current view that Scripture contains diverse and often conflicting "theologies." But to say that Scripture is unified does not imply that it is uniform. As Horace Hummel points out, one of the benefits of historical criticism is its reminder of the manifold forms of literature contained in the Bible.[28] Indeed, the rich diversity of concepts and pictures and forms, of accents and emphases

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[27]The much discussed question of the role of Law and Gospel as hermeneutical tools, and the consequent argument over Law/Gospel reductionism is beyond the scope of this study. The literature is great on this topic. For an excellent, brief discussion of the locus of biblical authority, see, Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," pp. 201-4. For a more detailed treatment, see Bohlmann, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions, especially chapter 7, "The Hermeneutical Function of Law-Gospel and Justification," pp. 99-111. For more information on the relationship between Scripture and Gospel, see, "Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology," a Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1975. For a discussion of the role of extra-canonical sources in the study of Scripture, see, Horace Hummel, "The Influence of Confessional Themes on Biblical Exegesis," in John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, pp. 221-3.

[28]Hummel, p. 220.

found in the Bible is a great blessing,[29] and was recognized as such by the confessors (See, for example, Ap IV, 72, p. 117). Their insistence on the unity of Scripture in no way implies that this diversity should be smoothed out and flattened.[30]

Nevertheless, the unity of Scripture, as taught by the Confessions, cannot be reconciled with the current view that Biblical unity consists simply in the fact that Scripture relates one salvation history, or that it consists in a scholarly consensus on its meaning[31] or because it is approached with a unified, ecumenical hermeneutic.[32] For the Confessors, the unity of Scripture consists simply in the fact that Scripture has one Author, one central content and one salvific purpose.

The "Humanum" of Scripture According to the Confessions

The Confessions, as noted earlier, teach very clearly that Scripture is the Word of God. But they are also just as clear in teaching that the Bible is the words of men. There is a humanum of Scripture which, for the confessors, is also determinative for their handling of Scripture. That the Bible is also the words of men implies that many of the historical and grammatical tools and techniques used for any other literary document must also be used in determining the meaning

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[29]The hermeneutical implications of this diversity will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

[30]Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," p. 205.

[31]Karlfried Froehlich, "Problems of Lutheran Hermeneutics," in John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 140.

[32]Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Confessions and Their Influence upon Biblical Interpretation," in John Reumann, Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 186.

of Scripture. Implied in this is the assumption that the text has a meaning, that the meaning can be determined through the use of the grammar and syntax of the original languages, and that its message can be understood. It further implies that what the Bible relates is historically true.

Scripture is the Words of Men

The confessors believed that because God's authorship of Scripture was accomplished through human authors living and writing at various times and places as men of their times, they must be read as historical literary documents. Thus, their primary task was to discern God's intended meaning. That meaning, however, was to be sought in the text itself, not behind it or apart from it. This meant that careful literary exegesis was not an option but a necessity for the Christian interpreter.

The foremost task of the Christian exegete, according to the Confessions, is to search for the sensus literalis, the literal, simple meaning of the text of Scripture. The Confessions are replete with examples of how the confessors repeatedly warned their opponents against finding mystical or moral meanings in the Scripture texts, quite apart from the words themselves, which was so popular in the medieval church.[33] In a particularly powerful statement, for example, Solid

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[33]Raymond F. Surburg, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," Concordia Theological Monthly 24 (1953): 241-61, shows how this was one of the essential elements of Lutheran hermeneutics left to the church by Luther. Surburg shows Luther's gradual disavowal of the medieval four-fold interpretation of Scripture. Robert Preus, "Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," p. 311 makes the same point. See also, Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," p. 197 and Hummel, p. 221.

Declaration, Article II spells out the effects of sin on man's free will, based upon a number of passages from the New Testament (such as, 2 Cor. 3:15; John 8:34; Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:26), to the effect that man can in no way cooperate in his conversion. Then, acknowledging that this runs contrary to reason and philosophy, the confessors state their intention to base their arguments solely on Scripture because, "it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced" (SD II, 8, p. 521). The confessors also state their intention to seek only the sensus literalis when, in defending the doctrine of the Real Presence, they say:

> We shall not, can not, and should not permit any clever human opinions, no matter what appearance or prestige they may have, to lead us away from the simple, explicit, and clear understanding of Christ's word and testament to a strange meaning different from the way the letters read, but, as stated above, we shall understand and believe them in the simple sense (SD VIII, 92, p. 586).

Earlier they had said that Jesus' words must be accepted in "simple faith and due obedience in their strict and clear sense, just as they read" (SD VII, 45, p. 577). Again, in their defense of their use of the term sola fide, they state that "this is St. Paul's intention," in using the exclusive term "without works" (SD III, 36, p. 545; see also SD VI, 5, p. 564).

Hermeneutical Implications of the Humanum of Scripture

The Intended Meaning of Scripture

The humanum of Scripture also has hermeneutical implications which are essential for understanding the Bible. The primary task is to search for the sensus literalis, but, as the previous citations implied, the intended meaning of the author may not always be literal.

In other words, the confessors recognize that, quite often, the Bible uses figurative or allegorical language which cannot be taken in a literalistic sense. The confessors were very careful to observe the rich diversity of literary expression found in Scripture and to do it full justice. Thus, the authors of the Formula of Concord realized that the biblical term "right hand of God" is figurative language for God's power and majesty and in no way is to be understood in a physical sense or as if God's right hand were in a specific locale (SD VIII, 28, p. 596). Again, Melanchthon, in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, interpreted "rock" (of Matt. 16:18) to mean "the ministry of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God" (TPPP, 25-9, pp. 324-5).

Nevertheless, while the confessors recognized that the Bible contained figures and allegories, they insisted they be avoided, whenever possible (compare SD VII, 48-51, p. 578), and that they be limited to the use for which the biblical text intended them (SD II, 19, p. 524). But in either case, allegories cannot be used to prove doctrines: "Our opponents will really achieve something if we let them defeat us with allegories, but it is evident that allegory does not prove or establish anything" (Ap XXIV, 35, p. 256). The intended meaning of the biblical author was decisive for the confessors.[34]

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[34]Walter C. Kaiser, "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?" Concordia Theological Quarterly 46 (1982):167-80, shows how modern exegetical techniques have led back into a type of multiple level of meanings strikingly similar to the results of medieval theologians. He lists no less than nine separate levels of meaning (to which one could, no doubt add more) which have led to nothing other than a flight from the sensus literalis (p. 175). He re-comments, rightly: "A fortiori, we have no access to the Word of God in the Bible except through the words and the minds of those who claim

Biblical Realism

The confessors' constant search for the sensus literalis has an important corollary which is essential for understanding their attitude towards and their approach to Scripture. This may be called their firm belief in biblical realism.[35] Contrary to many modern theologians who flee from the historical rootedness of the biblical accounts to modern-day equivalents of allegorization (such as etiological saga, didactic tale, symbolic history, faith event, midrash, and so forth), the confessors were firmly convinced of the real, historical, ontological reality underlying biblical records. This is something which can be seen from the first to the last page of the Confessions. The Augsburg Confession stresses the realism of Scripture when it says that the Trinity is not only called God but is God (AC I, 2, p. 27) or when it insists that original sin is truly sin, vere peccatum (AC II, 2, p. 29). The same realistic understanding of theology pervades the Formula of Concord. God Himself dwells ontologically in the believer (SD III, 65, p. 550), the body and blood of Christ are distributed in the Lord's Supper even when they are distributed by a wicked priest (SD VII, 24, p. 573), and it is truly received even by those who are unworthy, manducatio indignorum (SD VII, 8, 18, 33, pp. 570-75).

It is, of course, obvious that the divinum of Scripture excludes the possibility of conceiving of Scripture as a pious fraud or

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to speak in his name. We may disbelieve them, that is our right; but if we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the author intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's" (p. 178).

[35] See, Robert Preus, "Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," pp. 332-3.

reflections of the primitive community. According to the Confessions, Scripture is the Word given by God. But in stressing the humanum of Scripture the confessors also want to affirm that Scripture does not claim to be saga or myth or midrash, but by many statements and indications claims to be a document in realist language. And by doing this, they put into practice their principle of taking Scripture as the words read.

The denial of biblical realism results, according to the Confessions, in the denial of the incarnation itself, that is, that God has taken upon Himself human form and has acted, for us and for our salvation, in this world in a truly ontological sense. This is a point that Kurt Marquart makes when he says, "Any retreat from facts and history as such is of course a retreat from the incarnation. The divorce between facts and faith, between history and theology, is deeply antiincarnational . . ."[36] The confessors avoided this error by devoting themselves to the search for the sensus literalis, by binding themselves to the text, with all that that implied. They paid close attention to the grammar, the vocabulary, the historical and theological contexts of the text of Scripture because they were firmly convinced that God had acted in human history and had spoken in human language. Thus, while they affirmed the divine authorship, the divinum of Scripture, they also affirmed the human dimension, the humanum, and showed no trace of fleeing from the text to some higher, "theological" meaning.

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[36]Kurt E. Marquart, "The Incompatibility between Historical-Critical Theology and the Lutheran Confessions," in John Reumann, Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics, p. 236.

The Ministerial Use of Reason

The foregoing discussion of the sensus literalis makes it clear how seriously the confessors took the human dimension of Scripture and how important they considered the use of enlightened reason in the study of Scripture. Indeed, the confessors considered the use of Christian reason imperative. The essential question for them was, for what purpose is reason to be used? Is it to be used to pass judgment on Scripture or to interpret it in the light of human reason? Or is it to be used in order to understand what Scripture says? The answer, for the confessors, is to be found in the very helpful distinction between the magisterial and the ministerial use of reason. For them, reason was not to be used to judge Scripture, or, in modern terms, to judge what in Scripture is revelation. Reason had a very proper place in service of the right understanding of what Scripture says. Of course, the reason for their rejection of the magisterial use of reason is based primarily on their understanding of the divine authorship of Scripture. But it is also rejected on the basis that the interpreter has the duty of recognizing the limits of one's mental endeavors.

The confessors were very clear in their rejection of the magisterial use of reason. Perhaps the classical reference is in the Solid Declaration, when they discuss the person of Christ. They indicate that the task of theologians is simply to state what the Bible says and pass no judgment on it based upon human reason:

> Since the Holy Scriptures call Christ a mystery over which all heretics break their heads, we admonish all Christians not to pry presumptously into this mystery with their reason, but with the holy apostles simply to believe, close the eyes of reason, take their intellect captive to obey Christ, comfort themselves therewith and rejoice constantly that our flesh and blood have in Christ been

> made to sit so high at the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God. In this way they will be certain to find abiding comfort in all adversities and will be well protected against pernicious errors (SD VIII, 96, pp. 609-10).

Another example of this is in the Epitome in the article on Election. The confessors say that whoever cannot find comfort from this doctrine "is not teaching the doctrine according to the Word and will of God, but in accord with his reason and under the direction of the devil . . ." (Ep. XI, 16, p. 497). Again, the doctrine of justification is contrary to reason, but reason must be made subject to Scripture (Ap IV, 230, p. 139; 265, p. 146; 393-4, p. 167).

The ministerial use of reason is particularly important when it comes to controversies concerning articles of faith. It is necessary that disagreements among Christians be reconciled on the basis of the Word of God and enlightened reason in order that Christians be spared error:

> . . . necessity requires that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God's Word and of approved writings in such a way that anybody with Christian intelligence can see which opinion in the controverted issues agrees with the Word of God and the Christian Augsburg Confession, and so that well-meaning Christians who are really concerned about the truth may know how to guard and protect themselves against the errors and corruptions that have invaded our midst (SD, Preface, 20, p. 503. See also Ap IV, 117, p. 123).

In the end, then, the view of the Lutheran Confessions is that the role of the interpreter of Scripture is merely to hear the Scriptures of God as they convey God's message of Law and Gospel to him. The duty is not to judge, but rather to allow oneself to be judged by Scripture, to be open to the scandal of Scripture, so that one might thereby hear God's Word of grace through the Gospel. It is only by strict adherence to the words of Scripture that one can hear God's

Word to humans. As Bohlmann says, careful exegesis is carried out not merely because it is the scholarly or customary thing to do but "ultimately because of our theological conviction that careful exegesis helps us--and those we serve--to hear God speak in the words of Holy Scripture."[37] This means taking human reason captive, assuming the role of the humble hearer, and refusing attempts to flee the sensus literalis by harmonizing Scripture with human reason or any other criteria which people may set up. It means, as Robert Preus says, that Lutheran theology, Scriptural theology, will manifest many lacunae, apparent paradoxes, mysteries which cannot be probed or harmonized, but which must simply be accepted and affirmed.[38] Nevertheless, the confessors' insistence on the sensus literalis insured that the Christian message, which is firmly grounded in history, which is the story of One who broke into history, Who lived and died and rose again in history, that this message not be allowed to vaporize into fideism or existentialist mysticism,[39] but that it be allowed to stand on its own.

The Clarity of Scripture

That Scripture is fundamentally clear is another working assumption of the confessors which follows directly upon their adherence to the sensus literalis of the text. This can be seen, first of all, in the fact that they repeatedly make reference to Scripture passages without any need for clarification (See, for example, SD II, 25-6, p. 526).

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[37]Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation," pp. 195-6.

[38]Robert Preus, "Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," p. 324.

[39]Hummel, p. 216.

They explicitly state that Scripture is clear many times (Ap VII, 37, p. 175; Ap XII, 83, p. 194; SD II, 87, p. 538). Specifically, it is clear with regard to its salutary purpose (LC 1, 98-101, p. 378-9; Ep II, 4, p. 470). Thus, it may be understood by anyone with the intellectual capacities necesary (Ap IV, 33, p. 111), and it forms the basis for the Christians' clear confession of faith (Preface to the Book of Concord, p. 6). Therefore, Scripture is fundamentally clear in its language, that is, externally.

This does not mean, however, that the message of Scripture can be understood by unenlightened people in its fullness. For this, the confessors maintain, the Holy Spirit is necessary. The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is necessary, first of all, because the mind of natural man, even the most gifted and educated of men, cannot perceive the things of God (SD II, 9, pp. 522-3), and it is only by the working of the Holy Spirit that he can be brought to understand the knowledge of God (SD II, 26-7, p. 526). Although natural man "can hear and read this Word externally" (SD II, 53, p. 531), the Spirit is necessary because "he opens the intellect and the heart to understand the Scriptures and to heed the word" (SD II, 36, p. 526). Martin Franzmann very beautifully explains this principle:

> Under the afflatus of the Spirit the interpreter sees ever more clearly, with the eyes of the heart enlightened, that these writings are indeed the "fountains of Israel," from which God's people may drink and live, and that the prophetic and apostolic writings are to be "received and embraced," that the interpreter is in no position to judge them but is judged by them, as every teacher and all teaching must be.[40]

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[40]Martin Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermenutics," Concordia Theological Monthly 40 (1969):245.

Nevertheless, it is basic to the confessional hermeneutical approach to Scripture that Scripture is externally clear in all its fundamentals. The importance of this for the hermeneutical task is stated very well by Erling Teigen:

> No hermeneutical system can be sensible which does not start from a perspicuous Word of God. Any that does not start from that point will lapse into a reborn scholasticism of destructive criticism or fanciful enthusiasm. Any hermeneutic worthy of the name must be simply a public accounting of how we treat the sacred writings. Luther was not afraid to account for his method, nor were the confessors bashful about practicing that exegesis.[41]

Conclusion

In conclusion the Lutheran Symbols affirm a divine and a human aspect of Holy Scripture: a *divinum* and a *humanum*. As divine, Scripture is the product of the unique and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit upon his chosen prophets and apostles whereby He spoke His Word in their words, so that He is the true author of their every word. Because of their divine authorship, Scripture is qualitatively different from every other form of human expression in every age. This means that Scripture is authoritative, infallible, inerrant, and unified. At the same time, because God's authorship of Scripture was accomplished through human authors living and writing at various times and places as men of their times, it must be read as an historical, literary document in order to derive the true, literal sense of the words. This means that the interpreter is bound to the text of Scripture, that Scripture is fundamentally clear, and that man must use his enlightened reason

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[41] Erling T. Teigen, "The Clarity of Scripture and Hermeneutical Principles in the Lutheran Confessions," Concordia Theological Quarterly 46 (1982):164.

in a ministerial way. That God has spoken His Word in the words of men requires that Scripture be studied in a way which befits the subject. According to the Confessions, only that approach which takes both aspects, the divine and the human, seriously does full justice to this great gift which God has given to His church in Holy Scripture.

It will have become obvious, during the course of this presentation, that the Lutheran confessional view of Scripture and its consequent theological methodology stands in sharp opposition to that of Boff on many fundamental points. It should also be clear that the reason for any differences in theology is the result of the very different methodologies. These differences, as well as an evaluation of Boff's methods will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

EVALUATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide an evaluation of Leonardo Boff's theological methodology in the light of the Lutheran Confessional approach outlined in the previous chapter. However, before proceeding to this, it will be helpful to survey a few of the many criticisms and cautions which have been brought forward with regard to liberation theology. It should be clear from the previous pages that liberation theology, though it has had many vocal proponents, has received its share of criticism. This will form the first part of this chapter. The second part will compare Boff's methodology with the Lutheran confessional methodology. The third part of this chapter will take due note of the contributions of Boff and the liberation theologians to the work of theology today. Liberation theology offers not only challenges to theology but also opportunities. Any study of liberation theology would be incomplete if it pointed out only its weaknesses without also acknowledging its obvious contributions.

Many criticisms have been leveled against the theology of liberation,[1] which, while covering a wide range of topics, are of differing

[1]Liberation theologians are generally aware of these criticisms and have attempted to address them. For example, Robert McAfee Brown,

values. The presentation which follows is not intended to be exhaustive. The purpose here is to indicate some of the areas in which liberation theology has been criticized and to mention some of those who have been critical.

Peter Berger has leveled a serious challenge to liberation theology's widely-used practice of "consciousness-raising." He calls it "elitist" and "paternalistic" that many liberation theologians in Latin America presume that a certain group of people is dehumanized "to the point of animality, is unable either to perceive this condition or rescue itself from it, and requires the (presumably selfless) assistance of others for both the perception and the rescue operation."[2]

Others have criticized liberation theology, especially that emanating from Latin America, for its socio-political analysis of reality as well as its consequent revolutionary proposals. Generally, this

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Theology in a New Key: Response to Liberation Themes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 101-10, lists eight categories of criticisms leveled against liberation theology and attempts to answer them. The eight are:

1) defensive critiques
2) total rejection critiques
3) oversimplified critiques
4) pseudo-issue critiques
5) reductionist critiques
6) methodological critiques
7) co-optation critiques
8) dialogical critiques

Juan Gutiérrez's book, The New Libertarian Gospel: The Pitfalls of the Theology of Liberation, tr. Paul Burns (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977) is really little more than a refutation of Gustavo Gutiérrez's A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, tr. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), exclusively from a Roman Catholic point of view.

[2]Peter L. Berger, "The False Consciousness of 'Consciousness Raising,'" in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds., Mission Trends No. 4 (New York and Grand Rapids: Paulist Press and Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 100.

implies a critique of Marxism, rather than a critique of liberation theology itself. One such treatment is that of Michael Novak. Remarkably, he attributes Latin America's lack of development to the "Catholic aristocratic ethic" of Latin America which views wealth in static terms such that "what is given to one is taken from another."[3] He then goes on to extol the virtues of capitalism above socialism. James Schall adds that liberation theology is itself "a cause of continued underdevelopment" and that the continued growth of this theology would "institutionalize in Latin America a life of low-level socialist poverty enforced by a rigid party-military discipline in control of economic enterprise and the movement of peoples."[4] Clark Pinnock is critical of many liberation theologians' identification of socialism as the God-appointed political and economic system, saying that it is a mistake to link socialism with the Scriptures.[5]

This represents only a small sampling of the criticism that have been leveled at liberation theology on economic or political

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[3]Michael Novak, "A Theology of Development for Latin America," in Ronald Nash, ed., Liberation Theology (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984), p. 32.

[4]James V. Schall, "Liberation Theology in Latin America," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 89. This judgment, of course, would be rejected categorically by liberation theologians, who would level identical charges against capitalism.

[5]Clark H. Pinnock, "A Pilgrimage in Political Theology," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 115. Although he is critical of liberation theologians for identifying socialism with Scriptures, the bulk of his argument is that capitalism is Scriptural. After some hesitation, he is able to admit that capitalism is not taught in the Bible. Perhaps a final book deserves to be mentioned here: Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, Liberation Theology: The Church's Future Shock (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 1984). As its revealing title implies, this work is really little more than an attack on Marxism and a vigorous defense of capitalism.

grounds. These arguments have their place. Since liberation theologians spend so much time on political analysis, it is only right that their critics do the same. Nevertheless, criticisms of this type, while necessary, fail to grasp completely the challenges with which liberation theology confronts the church. It must always be remembered that every political system, far from being absolute, is relative, imperfect and temporary, and is always subject to change. This must serve as a corrective both to liberation theologians and their critics. Emilio Núñez C. is certainly correct when he says that all political systems are relative and subject to criticism in the light of the Word of God:

> Within the scope of those human matters that are relative, political systems have their place in society; but the Christian is not called to confer on any of those systems the quality of the absolute, because that which is absolute is found only in God. Furthermore, without pretending to have a false political neutrality, the Christian should always reserve the right to criticize any political system, whether of the left or of the right, in the light of the Word of God.[6]

Thus, more to the point are those theologians who have criticized liberation theology on the basis of its theology. Liberation theology is, after all, a theology and it is as such that it must be evaluated by theologians. Once again, the criticisms cover a wide range of topics. First of all, several theologians have been highly critical of liberation theologians' failure to take seriously the consequences of sin for man and the world. For example, Harold Brown says that

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[6]Emilio A. Núñez C., Liberation Theology, tr. Paul E. Sywulka (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 13. This book represents the best critical evaluation of liberation theology to come off the press. Núñez's argument is especially compelling because he comes from Latin America and has experienced firsthand the social, political and economic situation with which the liberation theologians are struggling.

liberation theology has obscured if not denied the fact that only one kind of liberation deserves being called salvation, because only one kind of oppression is so totally beyond mere human correction that it requires divine conquest: "We speak of bondage not to the powers of this world, the powers of politics and of the marketplace, but to the power of sin and death."[7] Carl Henry adds that liberation theology is inadequately aware of the imperfection of all human efforts to achieve justice in a fallen world history: "To restate the fall of man in terms of private property and economic disparity caricatures the depth of human sin."[8] James Schall says that placing most of the faults and sins in the First World, as liberation theologians do, "means that there is really no drama in the confrontation of 'good' and 'evil' in Latin America," since the causes of both lie elsewhere.[9] This, in effect, is a denial of their own sin.

Carl Braaten's criticism is particularly cogent. He says that liberation theology, by its emphasis on praxis, tends to "legalize the Gospel"[10] and that it is basically synergistic.[11] Donald Bloesch

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[7]Harold O. J. Brown, "What is Liberation Theology?," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 15.

[8]Carl F. H. Henry, "Liberation Theology and the Scriptures," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 201.

[9]James V. Schall, p. 85. Clark H. Pinnock, "Liberation Theology: The Gains, the Gaps," Christianity Today, 16 January 1976, p. 14, rightly says that liberation theology does not completely overlook sin. But he maintains that when they say that God works through history and that history has been indwelt and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, this is "unbiblical and unrealistic foolishness."

[10]Carl E. Braaten, "The Gospel of Justification Sola Fide," Dialogue, 15 (1976):208.

[11]Ibid., p. 213.

says that it runs the risk of being works-righteousness oriented:

> The gospel, which tells us what God has done for us in Christ, is reduced to ethics -- what we are commanded to do in the name of Christ. Liberation theology thereby falls into a new kind of works-righteousness in which the struggle for justice is seen as a necessary preparation for faith.[12]

Richard John Neuhaus, directing his criticism primarily against Gustavo Gutiérrez, says that he is guilty of the cultural captivity of the Gospel and he warns, "many sides can play the game of taking Jesus culturally captive."[13] These criticisms are particularly important and liberation theology, for the most part, deserves them.

W. Dayton Roberts, quite rightly, is critical of the liberationists' understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. He says that they often stretch the Gospel accounts to the point of portraying Jesus "as a political revolutionary and an advocate of violence," which "seems to fit Judas Maccabeus better than Jesus of Nazareth."[14]

Another area in which the theologians of liberation have received criticism is in their view of the Kingdom of God. Bloesch says that liberation theology "confuses social change and the coming of the Kingdom, and can therefore be accused of utopianism."[15] And in opposition to the claim of liberation theologians that the Kingdom of God

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[12]Donald G. Bloesch, "Soteriology in Contemporary Christian Thought," Interpretation, 35 (1981):138.

[13]Richard John Neuhaus, "Liberation Theology and the Cultural Captivity of the Gospel," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 220.

[14]Dayton W. Roberts, "Where Has Liberation Theology Gone Wrong?," Christianity Today, 19 October 1979, p. 28.

[15]Donald G. Bloesch, p. 138.

must be brought about by the cooperative efforts of man, Schall warns that:

> . . . the Kingdom of God cannot be coerced into existence by any amount of social or political efforts. It remains the gift of God and of the returning Lord to a world that cannot perfect itself by its own efforts.[16]

Roberts adds his criticism that the liberation theologians' conception of salvation, "which is defined in collective terms to the virtual exclusion of individual redemption," is unacceptable.[17]

Roberts is also critical of liberation theology's neglect of the church, which, he observes, tends to "ignore, neglect, or marginalize the church."[18] He says that such theologians must be more willing to listen to the church as well as speak to it. Otherwise they may fall into "the trap of setting up a 'magisterium' -- Roman Catholic style -- which negates the univeral priesthood and prophethood of all believers."[19]

Finally, several theologians have criticized liberation theologians for neglecting the transcendental nature of the Christian religion. They say that liberation theology conceives of the faith in a way that is too this-worldly. For example, Bloesch says that liberation theology "neglects, if it does not deny, the transcendent and supernatural aspects of the faith." Worship of God "tends to be equated with the service of humanity," and prayer becomes "nothing more than reflection upon what God is calling us to do to alleviate the suffering

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[16]James V. Schall, p. 97.

[17]Dayton W. Roberts, pp. 27-8.

[18]Ibid., p. 27.

[19]Ibid.

of the dispossessed."[20] Roberts also has a similar criticism:

> In most expressions of liberation theology the active presence of the Holy Spirit is not acknowledged -- nor is the supernatural. Personal devotion, mysticism, the disciplines of piety, prayer and meditation are also incidental to the thrust of liberation theology.[21]

The above represents merely a sampling of the many criticisms which have been leveled against liberation theology. Although they are varied in terms of their significance, all of them are important and deserve to be noted well. However, none of them, as significant as they are, penetrates to the heart of the matter. Since, as has been shown, liberation theology is really a method, rather than a theology, it is as a method that it must be evaluated. Unless the way liberation theologians "do" theology is evaluated in the light of the confessional standards, any criticism of the results of their method will have little impact.

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[20]Donald G. Bloesch, p. 138. This is also the sentiment of Richard John Neuhaus, "Liberation as Program and Promise: On Refusing to Settle for Less," Currents in Theology and Missions, 2 (1975):90-9, 152-8. In this article he is often stridently critical of liberation theology on many points. But he says that liberation theology's emphasis on this world, "uncritically endorses, in the name of the Christian tradition, the answers that emerge from sources that are alien, if not hostile, to the Christian faith" (p. 158).

[21]Dayton W. Roberts, p. 27. There is some validity to Roberts' claim here. Nevertheless, this criticism cannot be applied to liberation theology in general. Leonardo Boff, as has been amply demonstrated in the previous pages, offers an excellent exception. He, among others, has taken great care to incorporate transcendental and supernatural elements into his theology and this includes a significant role for the Holy Spirit. Boff's aim has been to correct what he perceives to have been an over-emphasis on other-worldly aspects of the faith, not to make it entirely this-worldly.

An Evaluation of Boff's Methodology

Any assessment or evaluation of Boff's theology, or the theology of any liberation theologian, must be done in the most tentative terms. The reason for this is that the theology of liberation is, for those who practice it, an unfinished task. Núñez's statement is correct: "It is a theology whose chapters have to be written in the midst of the process of social change. It is a theology of the way, progressive and variable."[22] Therefore one cannot speak of a definitive theology of liberation, and it would be naive to attempt a definitive evaluation of this system. Nevertheless, as a method, liberation theology lends itself much better to analysis and evaluation than it would as a theology. Furthermore, if it is remembered that the following comments pertain primarily to the methodology of one theologian, Leonardo Boff, and that these are made fully cognizant of the great variety which obtains generally within the theology of liberation, the charge of generalization will be much more easily avoided. Moreover, the theology of Boff and others demands to be heard and assessed. Both the urgency of the situation of poverty from which this theology issues and the stridency with which it is put forward make it imperative that Christians investigate it and critically evaluate it. This will be the subject of the remainder of this study.

It should be clear from the foregoing presentation of Boff's methodology and that of the Lutheran Confessions that there are significant differences between them. They conflict with one another on nearly every point and, thus, are fundamentally incompatible. One of

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[22] Emilio A. Núñez C., p. 165.

the primary reasons for this can be found in the fact that Boff and the Lutheran Confessions have a different view of revelation. For Boff, as was seen, God reveals Himself in and through history, all of history, including the historical events of today. This is why he believes that theology is progressive and relative. God is constantly revealing Himself and His will and salvation, newly in every age.[23] For the Lutheran Confessions, however, God has promised to reveal His salvation only through the Word and the sacraments. God indeed reveals much about Himself through history and nature. Through His created works, by His continued operation in nature and history and through His divine Law written in the heart of men and women, God reveals that He exists, that He is powerful, just, righteous and perfect. But this knowledge of God is not sufficient to secure human salvation. The Confessions maintain that God reveals Himself salvifically only through the Gospel promise which is contained in Scripture. The Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace remains a major obstacle to the kind of universal revelation advocated by Boff.

This leads to the next point of conflict between the view of Boff and that of the Confessions: the fundamental incompatibility of their views of Scripture. It was pointed out in the last chapter that both Boff and the Lutheran Confessions teach that the proper approach to the study of Scripture involves the interpreter in a hermeneutical circle. No one living in a predominantly Christian society can approach Scripture with a completely neutral attitude, either about life or about

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[23] Dayton Roberts, p. 28, is correct when he says that most liberation theologians' concept of revelation closely parallels that of Roman Catholicism. This is certainly true in the case of Boff.

Scripture itself. Yet, while they both affirm the necessity of a hermeneutical circle, they advocate circles which are fundamentally different because they have different starting points. For Boff, the circle begins with an analysis of the social, political and economic context in which the theologian does his or her task. It is this analysis which, in turn, influences the questions which are addressed to the Bible and also the answers which are derived from it. The circle is completed when appropriate action is suggested on the basis of a rereading and reinterpretation of the text of Scripture. Thus, for Boff, the hermeneutical circle begins and ends with the situation of the theologian, and it is that situation which is determinative of the resultant theology.

The hermeneutical circle of the Lutheran Confessions has a different starting point. Because the Confessions consider Scripture to be the source of all theology, its circle begins with Scripture itself. It attempts to take Scripture on its own terms and to avoid interpreting it on the basis of presuppositions that are at variance with its own self-understanding as the Word of God. Scripture then sheds light on the social, political and economic context of the interpreter. It convicts the interpreter of his or her sin and offers the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This, in turn, establishes the perspective with which the interpreter continues the task. Scripture is again studied, this time from the perspective of faith in the God Whose Words it is. Thus, for the Lutheran Confessions, the hermeneutical circle begins and ends in Scripture and it is Scripture which is determinative of the resultant theology.

The Lutheran Confessions attempt to take Scripture on its own terms. It is simply not valid, as Boff says, to approve of liberation theology by using the excuse that orthodox theologians also come to Scripture under the influence of an ideology. The solution to the hermeneutic problem is not found in exchanging one ideology for another, nor in giving in to the idea that it is impossible for the Bible to speak to us here and now under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, without recourse to the current historical situation. Núñez, speaking also from the context of Latin America, says:

> We must continue to believe in the fact that the Bible is the Word of the living and true God, and that in the hands of the Holy Spirit it is capable of communicating its message to us for our life and for the Latin American people . . . the interaction in the theological task between the biblical text and the social context is only valid as long as Scripture is allowed to speak for itself, without imposing on it the meaning that according to the exegete is the most convenient for contemporary society.[24]

The basic difference with regard to the role of Scripture in theology has implications also for the uses that are made of Scripture. And this, again, demonstrates a fundamental incompatibility between Boff's approach and that of the Lutheran Confessions. First, Boff denies the normative authority of Scripture. For him, the Bible has only historical authority -- it was authoritative only for the early Christians. Since God continues to reveal Himself in contemporary events, no writings and no theology may be considered absolutely normative. Boff's view directly conflicts with the view of the Confessions. For them, the Bible is absolutely authoritative and normative for

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[24]Emilio A. Núñez C., p. 168.

theology because it is God's Word, given through His prophets and apostles. Therefore, it is normative not only for the early church but for the church for all time.

Carl Henry is correct in his criticism of liberation theology for relativizing the Bible and using it merely for illustrative purposes. Although he is writing about liberation theology in general, his words apply equally well to Boff:

> Biblical teaching has merely an illustrative and supportive role; only political reflection is considered 'scientific' or authentic theological engagement. The consequence is that scriptural teaching is relativized, while contemporary sociological concerns are absolutized. It is clear that whatever profession of biblical fidelity such theology of liberation may make, in practice it disavows Scripture as the normative authority.[25]

Boff's approach not only denies any normative function to Scripture but it also denies the universal applicability of the contents of Scripture. For him, the only norm is the historical situation in which he lives, which is not really a norm at all because his situation like all historical situations, changes. Roberts notes that theology must be contextualized, but he adds, we must "not allow context to usurp the authority or universality of God's Word."[26] Even J. Emmette Weir, who is otherwise very favorable towards liberation theology, says that "the possible consequences of a hermeneutic in which the historical situation is normative probably represents its [liberation theology's] greatest danger."[27]

Boff's approach to Scripture also stands in opposition to the

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[25]Carl Henry, p. 199. [26]Dayton Roberts, p. 28.

[27]J. Emmette Weir, "The Bible and Marx: A Discussion of the Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology," Scottish Journal of Theology, 35 (1982):348.

Lutheran confessional view of the unity of Scripture. For Boff, as was seen, the Bible is a collection of diverse, often conflicting, "theologies" which were brought together by editors and redactors into their present state. Furthermore, because Scripture lacks theological unity, it should not be disturbing that modern theology also lacks such unity. Diversity of theology is not only inevitable but it is desirable because the ultimate norm is not what is in the text of Scripture but the historical situation. And these are, obviously, diverse. The confessional view, on the other hand, holds to the organic theological unity of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are one because they have one Author, God the Holy Spirit; one content, the Gospel message of salvation by grace for the sake of Jesus Christ; and one purpose, to bring all people to faith in Christ and salvation.

Yet another area of conflict between Boff and the Confessions is in their respective handling of the text of Scripture. Because the starting point for Boff's theology is the historical situation, he is forced to read into the text of Scripture a meaning which is dictated by that situation. Consequently, when he hears Scripture, he hears not the voice of God or even the voice of the biblical writers, but he, with all those who adopt his method, "hear only the echoes of their own voice."[28] The approach of the Confessions is very different. Because they view Scripture as God's Word in man's words, they maintain that the first and primary task of the biblical interpreter is to discover the literal meaning of the text (sensus literalis). The

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[28]Edward Norman, "The Imperialism of Political Religion," in Nash, Liberation Theology, p. 135.

Confessions teach that, if people are to hear God's saving message to them through the Scriptures, they must find it in the text itself and not impose a meaning on it which the words will not bear. Walter Kaiser says it well:

> A fortiori, we have no access to the Word of God in the Bible except through the words and the minds of those who claim to speak in his name. We may disbelieve them, that is our right; but if we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the authors intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's.[29]

That Boff does not limit himself to the sensus literalis of the text of the Bible means that his exegesis is selective.[30] By his own admission he approaches Scripture, after his analysis of the historical situation, with the express purpose of answering certain questions. He pays special attention to those passages which seem most applicable and ignores the rest. Weir says that this is a weakness of all liberation theology: "Working in a situation of destitution and injustice there is a tendency to read or go to those texts which have to do with social justice and to neglect the rest."[31] Henry adds that this selective exegesis subverts Scripture:

> By appealing to the present historical milieu as the only legitimate context for theological reflection, liberation theology thus readily colors, limits and even subverts the scripturally given

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[29]Walter C. Kaiser, "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?," Concordia Theological Quarterly, 46 (1982):178.

[30]This is the criticism which Clark Pinnock, "Liberation Theology: The Gains, the Gaps," p. 14, levels against Gustavo Gutiérrez. It could be applied to most liberation theologians.

[31]J. Emmette Weir, p. 348.

revelation even while it does not necessarily displace it.[32]

The Lutheran Confessions, however, seek to bind themselves to the text of Scripture as it appears (textgebundenheit). The goal is not to inject a meaning into the text which it does not have but to draw out the meaning which it already possesses and to relate it, without distortions, to the needs of the people in the historical situation. The text already has a meaning of its own and there is no need to distort its meaning in order to apply it to a new context. According to the confessional view, if the message of Bible seems to have little relevance for the historical milieu of the people, the answer is not to instill it with new meaning but, as Núñez says in reference to his Latin American situation, to "bring back into focus those biblical elements that we have forgotten."[33]

Finally, a word must be said about Boff's use of the social sciences in the formation of his theology. He uses social analysis, generally Marxist, as an integral part of his theological methodology. The results of his social analysis is the basic hermeneutical tool with which he reads Scripture and they are determinative for his theology. The point here is not that his use of Marxist analysis is objectionable. It certainly is, but it is not of concern in the present study. What is of concern, however, is that he uses social sciences, of whatever type, to determine his theology. This is directly contrary to what the Lutheran Confessions have to say about the role of reason and human philosophies (including social philosophies) in the theological task. For Boff, the sciences are determinative both for

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[32]Carl Henry, p. 197. [33]Emilio Núñez C., p. 285.

understanding what Scripture is saying and what theology is saying. In that sense, theology becomes the handmaid for the social sciences. For the Confessions it is the opposite. Human reason has a purely ministerial function (usus ministerialis). The sciences are important for analysing society, but not for determining what Scripture says. Obviously, reason is important for determining how the biblical teaching is to be applied in a particular context. But, according to the Confessions, it is never to be used to determine what theology teaches. Neuhaus, using particularly strong language, says that, "the idea of theology as handmaiden to the hopes of secular culture is repugnant."[34]

In summary, it may be said that the theological methodology of Boff, and of liberation theology in general, is incompatible with the Lutheran Confessions. The reason for this is that Boff, while he recognizes the human aspect of Scripture, denies its divine side. The confessional view of Scripture takes both sides seriously. Herbert Bouman has said that the Lutheran Reformation represented "in very truth a hermeneutical revolution."[35] This is certainly true in many respects, but not least in the Lutheran recognition of the divinum and the humanum in the Scriptures. In recognizing these two aspects, and in drawing their hermeneutical methodology from them, the Lutheran Confessions must be considered genuinely Christian symbols. In contrast to any other hermeneutical system, which does not take Scripture on its

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[34]Richard Neuhaus, "Liberation as Program and Promise," p. 158.

[35]Herbert J. A. Bouman, "Some Thoughts on the Theological Presuppositions for a Lutheran Approach to the Scriptures," in Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics: Confessional Principles and Practical Applications. Concordia Theological Monthly Occasional Papers No. 1, (1966), p. 9.

own terms, but interprets it on the basis of presuppositions which are at variance with its own witness about itself, the Lutheran Confessions adopt an approach to Scripture which is in harmony with Scripture's own testimony. They simply affirm, without any hint of self-contradition, both the divinum and the humanum of Holy Scripture.

As divine, Scripture is the product of the unique and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit upon His chosen prophets and apostles whereby He spoke His Word in their words, so that He is the true author of their every word. Because of its divine authorship, Scripture is qualitatively different from every other form of human expression in every age. This means that Scripture is authoritative, infallible, without error and fundamentally unified in its theology. At the same time, because God's authorship of Scripture was accomplished through human authors living and writing at various times and places as men of their times, the Bible must be read as an historical, literary document in order to derive the true, literal sense of the words. This means that the interpreter is bound to the text of Scripture, that Scripture is fundamentally clear in its teaching, and that there is a very proper place for the use of human reason in understanding Scripture and applying its teachings to life.

That God has spoken His Word in the words of men requires, according to the Confessions, that Scripture be studied in a way which befits the subject. Only that approach which takes both aspects, the divine and the human, seriously does full justice to the Word of God. But more importantly, only such an approach will preserve, undiminished and unperverted, the universal message of God's reconciliation of the

world through the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ, which alone offers true liberation to a world held captive by sin.

Conclusion

The foregoing criticism of Boff's methods must not be misunderstood to mean that he and his fellow liberation theologians have no contribution to make to confessional Lutheran theology. In the formation of their theology liberation theologians have taken many positive steps and it would be wrong to ignore them. The first of these is that Scripture has played a much more prominent role in the theology of liberation than in many of the other theological trends of modern times. This is a point made by John Goldingay, when he says: "In the work of many liberation theologians, indeed, the Bible has a more important place than it often has in contemporary theology."[36] This is a very significant point, especially in view of the fact that, at least in the case of the Latin American liberation theologians, they have come from a milieu that is predominantly Roman Catholic. Many of these theologians, especially Boff, have shown a clear predilection for the biblical teaching, even against the teachings of their Church. And, despite the fact that their methodology, which shows great affinity with many of the tenets of historical criticism, often distorts the text of Scripture, it is always a good thing when Christians turn to Scripture for answers to the pressing questions of the day.

This leads to the second positive contribution that liberation theologians can make. They have sought to make their theology applicable

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[36]John E. Goldingay, "The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology," Horizons in Biblical Theology, 4, nos. 2-5 (1982-3):133.

to the historical situation. The criticisms which the church frequently hears -- that theology is not relevant to the most urgent issues of our times -- is often true. Many Christians complain, often with justification, that the teachings of the church are not applicable to life and have very little to do with them in their current situation.[37] Liberation theology has attempted to make its theology concrete; to make the effects of faith germane to their historical circumstances. Their charge that traditional theology attempts to escape the pressing problems of life by fleeing into the "hereafter" is not totally unfounded and it should be heard by all theologians who believe that the faith is relevant. It is true, of course, that the historical context must not be allowed to usurp the authority of the Word of God. It is not the historical context that determines theology, but Scripture. And the task of the theologian is not to make the Bible relevant. Scripture is already relevant. The task is to discover and make known its relevancy. Nevertheless, theology must be made applicable to each new situation and the theologian must come to grips with the problems, the burning issues which are the concern of people in the particular situations in which they live. Liberation theology challenges all theologians to make their theology relevant. It is a challenge that should be accepted.

Another positive contribution of liberation theology is related to the above. In attempting to forge a new theology for Latin America, or the Third World in general, liberation theologians have been forced

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[37]Emmette Weir, p. 348. See also Christopher Rowland, "Theology of Liberation and its Gift to Exegesis," New Black Friars, 66 (1985): 157-72, who makes the same point, especially with regard to historical-critical exegesis.

to face their own particular set of problems. This has led them to develop a theology which is, to a great extent, their own. Of course, theologians have no right to create a theology. Theology is given in Scriptures. The liberation theologians must be much more willing to listen to the Scriptures and the church. Nevertheless, the tremendous amount of literature which has been produced in Latin America and the Third World in the last decade shows beyond doubt that these theologians have come into their own. They have gained the hearing and, to some extent, the heart of the world. They have earned the respect of theologians from the great theological centers. For the first time in history, European and North American theologians are looking to the Third World as a theological trend-setter. This is good for the church in the Third World. Just as they seek to become more self-sufficient politically and economically, they are attempting to become more self-sufficient theologically. And it can be good for theology in general because the First World has a great deal to learn from the Third World.

And this leads to the final and, perhaps, the most important contribution of liberation theology. They have alerted the First World to the urgency and, at times, hopelessness of the situation in which much of the Third World lives. It may well be that their analysis of the situation is faulty and that thir proposed solution is misguided, but liberation theologians have issued a challenge both to theology and to Christians in general. This is something that some North American Christians, who live comfortably ignorant of the incredible poverty and despair in which many people live, may not want to hear. But, as Christians, we cannot help but be moved by their plight. It would be wrong to allow the theological controversy

surrounding liberation theology to hide what is the real driving force behind it: the betterment of the poor and oppressed. Emilio A. Núñez C., who struggles with this sad situation daily in his home country of El Salvador, has a message for all caring Christians:

> I have, therefore, personally experienced the sad economic and social reality that faces the great majority of Latin American people. I know firsthand the anguish, frustrations, and hopes of those people, of whom I feel a part and on whom I have not wanted to turn my back in the theological and ideological controversy that surrounds liberation theology.[38]

Because of its bold reference to the situation of extreme poverty in which millions of people live, and because of its vocal exhortation for the church to assume its Christian responsibility in that context of spiritual, moral, and material destitution, liberation theology has captured the attention of many Christians around the world. And it is precisely for this reason that this new way of doing theology cannot be easily brushed aside. If its method is easy to refute, it is not easy to overlook the painful social and economic reality which liberation theology points out. The proper response to the theology of liberation is not only to reject its theological methodology, which certainly must be done, but also to hear its call for justice and to act on behalf of the masses of people throughout the world who live without the barest necessities.

Liberation theology has offered the church many serious challenges, all of which, in time must be met. Much more study must be done in order to give an effective response. There are many questions which must be answered, questions which touch the heart of Christian theology

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[38]Emilio Núñez C., p. 7.

and the mission of the church. Nevertheless, if Lutheran confessional theology is to be heard in a world that is asking these questions, it must be willing to deal, effectively and practically, with the problems of poverty, justice and dependence. Carl Henry's statement is to the point:

> We must stand firmly for a championing of the gospel's irreducible relevance for oppressed multitudes, and in places of human exploitation and oppression we must actively identify evangelical Christianity with the justice that God demands. . . . If evangelical Christianity is to rescue the perception of the dire needs that plague masses of men on every continent from secular ideologies or radical theologies, then we must aggressively cope with injustice and immorality, sin and starvation, pride and prejudice in a principled and practical way.[39]

The theology of liberation will surely continue to refine itself, or to evolve, or to diversify and it is likely that its methodology will continue to influence the development of Third World theology for a long time to come. At least it will not be possible to return to the days when theology in the Third World was simply a copy of a theology formulated in a different social context. Although, from a Lutheran confessional perspective, the hermeneutics of liberation theology is objectionable, it has pointed out dramatically the importance for our theology of taking into account the social reality of which we are all a part.

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[39]Carl Henry, p. 202.

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