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The Curriculum Implications of Liberation Theology as a Theory for Social Change.

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THE CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY
AS A THEORY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory
of my mother and father,

CELEDONIA BASISTA ALCAZAR

March 3, 1923 -- May 16, 1999

and

VICTOR FRANZUELA ALCAZAR

March 23, 1921 -- January 16, 1996

who each taught for 35 years and teach me
still today.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1 SELF ON TRIAL: ROOT EXPERIENCES IN LIVING AND LEARNING.....	1
Root Learning Experiences.....	4
Teaching in Community.....	7
Traditional Theological Education.....	13
Freire and Medellin.....	15
Endnotes.....	21
2 HISTORICAL ROOTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	25
Vatican II & <i>Gaudium et Spes</i>	26
Medellin Conference of CELAM.....	37
Basic Ecclesial Communities.....	53
The Papal Social Encyclicals.....	58
Endnotes.....	71
3 THE CHALLENGE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	78
Formulating a New Theological Question.....	78
Doing Liberation Theology: The Hermeneutic Circle.....	90
Liberation Theology and Marxism.....	100
Transfusing New Life into <i>Ecclesia</i>	111
Endnotes.....	117
4 THE BLINDSPOTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	120
Hatred from Philosophy.....	122
Hatred from Theology.....	131
Hatred from Culture.....	136
Endnotes.....	142
5 COMPOSING A CURRICULUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE.....	145
Looking Back through the <i>Currere</i> Lens.....	145
Conscientization Revisited.....	152
Sculpting Shared Learning.....	159
Endnotes.....	163
REFERENCES.....	166
VITA.....	176

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of those in the underside of history, contemporary education has so stagnated that it has lost its capacity to be a force for social change in a world plagued by social cruelties and injustice. Liberation theologians have shown considerable success in redirecting tightly institutionalized and intellectualized religious communities from their weddedness to imperial notions and practices of faith into one solidly aligned with the struggle of the poor and the marginalized. These theologians of the poor make a distinction between Christianity and Christendom – the former being the vision of a Jewish religious reformer named Yeshua and the latter being the result over the centuries of the imperial co-optation of this vision in the fourth century by Emperor Constantine. By reconceiving faith as engaged solidarity with the oppressed in their work against all forms of oppression, liberation theologians turn faith into a powerful force in the social transformation needed as a condition for the possibility of a genuine love for neighbor. This study heuristically employs the key concepts of liberation theology in liberating curricular and pedagogical notions and practices *from* their anchorage in individualistic, consumeristic culture and in the military-industrial complex *for* a landscape of learning and teaching promotive of and conducive to social change. Reconceiving curriculum and instruction as conscientization and shared learning -- grounded in the experience of those marginalized and excluded in the knowledge production process – can both reignite education's emancipatory fire and make teaching and learning powerful non-violent forces for social change.

CHAPTER 1

SELF ON TRIAL: ROOT EXPERIENCES IN LIVING AND LEARNING

Reading most often lures me to a rewriting of my life, such that writing becomes a scene of birth and rebirth, of a “self on trial,”¹ involving grief and joy, gains and losses. Reading the works of community organizers and liberation theologians in the late sixties and early seventies has led me to rebirths and trials which began in college and continue to this day. Thus, this chapter is about reading and writing, and a life caught or thrown in between them. A few confessional notes are needed in order to mark a certain otherness, perhaps, even illogicality to this writing:

First, as an Asian-American (Filipino) viewed by most Asians as the most Latin of the people of the Orient, I seem to have developed a border soul which has always had a sense of dis-ease with both the Oriental cyclical and the Western linear conceptions of time. I have tended to subscribe to time as fused moments in its Augustinian sense. This fifth century North-African theologian and philosopher describes this sense of time well when he says that life almost always involves fusion because humans are constantly dealing with “the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future.”² More recently, this sense of time is beautifully reflected in William Pinar’s words: “the past is not a language lost to the present, not a language sealed off in the unconscious ... it is here and now, in the son I try to father, the friends I cherish, the students with whom I work, the books I read, the papers I write.”³ One of my difficulties in using the English language is its lack of words that can adequately convey a past and/or a future that seeks equal urgency, meaning, and attention with the present. Hans-George Gadamer comes close to capturing this in his concept of

Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein, translated to English as effective (including “affected” and “effected”) historical consciousness. The past shares urgency with the present and the future in understanding a hermeneutical situation: “The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past ... rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves ... as old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.”⁴ Thus, effective historical consciousness means a constant awareness of this “living value” which is affected and effected by our consciousness of the workings of the past and the present, and at the same time effective in our coming to understand the hermeneutical situations we find ourselves in.

Second, Michel Serres has cogently observed that “to know is to kill.”⁵ Most of the knowing presented and practiced in schools slice objects of learning into pieces for investigation, often glorifying fragments and dichotomies, and, at times, even ruthlessly forgetting their original wholeness. Inspired by Ilya Prigogine’s work, William Doll, Jr. points to a new paradigm for learning: “[I]t is not the individual as an isolated entity which is important but the person within the communal, experiential, and environmental frame.”⁶ It is an illusion to think that one can learn in isolation from one’s relationships, context, community and culture. The universe has an interdependent structure and as we conceive others we are conceived by others as well, and if “we understand ourselves as conceived by others, the question ‘who I am?’ becomes ‘whose I am?’”⁷ Teaching and learning, therefore, is a communal and relational responsibility. Further, in this communal way of learning, individual stories of lives lived in communities are accorded

a welcome place. “Words in a story,” say the women in the village of my birth, “guard the wholeness of the lives lived there.”

Third, I have found Julia Kristeva’s version of deconstruction useful, especially her suggestion to “set concepts ablaze” in order to awaken, purge, reveal, reject and include presumptions, assumptions, and prejudices hidden there for years, even centuries. Believing that “our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, anthropologists, and necrophiliacs,” she insists that we must question not only the ways they “seek the truth of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair” but also the ways they “seek the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a sleeping body — a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience.”⁸

The three confessions will frame the rewriting of living and learning that I want to do in this chapter. Education comes from the Latin *ducare* (and its cognate *ducere*) which means “to lead” and a prefix *e*, meaning “out.” At its root, then, education suggests an activity of “leading out.” Three main points are involved in this leading out activity: (1) a point from which, (2) a present situation, and (3) a point in the future towards which the leading is being directed. While this seems to suggest a linear view of time, a dis-ease I pointed out in my first note, I use it here simply as a conceptual tool to reflect on my lived educational experience. In a sense it is a recursion into a learning process taking note of where knowledge might have been and still is killing (in the Serrean sense) and where it might have been and still is the result of “sleeping bodies or bodies in repose.”

Root Learning Experiences

My first root educational experience came from my relationship with my grandmother Lola Mantay. The people in my village knew her as the *manaram* which in my *Waray* language literally means a woman with lighted hands, a figurative name for midwives -- because “they know how to reach into the darkness of the womb and bring new life into the world.” As I watched her use nature for her pharmacy and grocery, I learned which root and fruit to eat, which leaves make great umbrellas and roofing materials, and which ones deaden pain and restore health. Respect nature, she would tell me repeatedly, by discovering its wonders and appreciating its gifts. These were easy enough to understand in the small village of Lope de Vega which was really dots of houses surrounded by a thick growth of massive green and tall coconut trees. But the one thing I continue to struggle with are the words to a song she used to sing to me and my brothers and sisters: *tigamne niyo nga sa sulod san aninipot may busag nga bulawan nga tigaman san may kahulugan nga kinabuhi* (remember, inside a firefly is a white gold you can use to sculpt meaning for your life). I thought to myself: Are we not born with our lives already sculpted for us by the landowners and oligarchs? What can possibly be in those fireflies that can topple a long history of oppression and undo structures of social injustice which have been around so long they are now seen as simply part of an already sculpted reality into which all of the poor were born? I never really had a chance to ask her about this. She died before I was allowed (by Marcos’ dictatorship) to return home.

Perhaps, the perpetual lights of the city, the usefulness of scientific rationality, the cynical strain of the Enlightenment in the university, and the nearby presence of the “cancer alley” along the Mississippi have all coalesced into a “ruthless forgetfulness” of

the root lessons from my first teacher. But nature at times sends in mystical reminders. Three summers ago, I brought my family to visit two friends in Little Rock and I was sitting on the porch sipping red wine when a hundred lightning bugs (the southern name for fireflies) swarmed into the ficus plant beside me. The villager still in me wondered if there might be some language here from a different reality. I remember the words to my grandmother's song. But I took control of myself. Mere coincidence it was.

My second root educational experience came from a community of teachers. All the adults knew every single child in the village because they took turns being teachers depending on what needed to be done in a given week: digging a new well, looking for firewood, rebuilding a damaged house, planting and harvesting rice, preparing for the fiesta, etc. These were daily rituals that connected the lives of the twenty-five or so families in the village. I still vividly recall a test to the connectedness of the lives lived there. One day a fierce storm brought strong winds and hard rain that lasted for days. It drowned the lines that separated the land of the barrio from the water of the river. Adults and children went into action. Everyone got into his or her own *balutos* (wooden outrigger canoes) carrying whatever food was left in the house. Using the *pisi* (ropes made of banana fibers), the men tied both ends of the *baluto* to two coconut trees making sure that loops around the tree were wide enough to move up when the water got higher. The other families did the same until all the families formed a circle connected by the *pisi* to the coconut and to each other's *baluto*. During the four days that followed the water rose so high that only the very tips of the houses were visible. Yet the families survived. Food and water came from the coconuts. This was communal learning at its best for this particular village and it had been passed on from one generation to another. The spirit of

community that came into place during disasters was no different from the one that sustained us for days during the fiesta celebrations. Although the priests who came to say mass for the fiestas would often claim that surviving the worst storm was a miracle -- and many would not deny it -- just as many, myself now included, believed that our survival was due to a tradition of harmony between creature and nature which predates by hundreds of years the advent of the Spanish *conquistadores*.

My third root educational experience came from my father's anguished memory. It was during WW II when the Japanese Imperial Army invaded the Philippines. My father lost his father when he was very young and as a result became part of my granduncle's family of 11 children. When the Colonel Yamamoto, one of the most brutal officers of the Imperial Army, arrived in the town of Catarman where my granduncle had been the *alcalde* (mayor), he was enraged that the *alcalde* was not around to give him a grand welcome but went into hiding instead. He threatened and shot to death several townspeople until he found somebody who knew where my granduncle and his family were hiding. That night Colonel Yamamoto arrived with ten of his soldiers. He ordered them to mount their bayonets and kill the children quietly. My father survived the massacre because he was at the foot of the mountain fetching drinking water for the family. When he arrived all but three of the eleven children were dead. Their parents were shot in front of the town hall the following day. My Aunt Emma died a few weeks later but my Aunts Lina and Millie survived the war. I grew up seeing the grim language of war written all over their bodies.

These root educational experiences lured me to study for the priesthood, to a life that, at the time, I thought offered the best place and freedom to explore the "fireflies"

question, to seek “that freshness deep down things,” and to contribute my share in transforming the language of war into that of peace and social justice.

Twelve years of philosophical (Aristotelian) and theological (Thomistic) education introduced me to a whole other language. Latin, Greek, Spanish, and English were the only languages allowed and severe punishment was meted to anyone speaking the national language. Since obedience was the most revered of virtues, it was often used as a cover for the perpetuation of the colonial tradition in theological schools. I was obedient until the first month of my regency year (one year of teaching following four years of philosophy and two years of theology).

Teaching in the Community

It was my first summer after college in the big city of wealth and extreme poverty called Manila. My first teaching assignment was at a community center in a slum village called Smoky Mountains on the outskirts of the city. It was four hundred feet of trash which smoked all the time due to combustible gases in the huge pile. Several hundred families looked for food in this dump. I had heard about this place in college but had never really actually seen it with my own eyes. It was worse than I had imagined. Women and children of all ages walked up and down the sides of this “mountain” using the middle part of broken umbrellas to dig for whatever they could eat or sell. Their houses were made of scraps of metal and wood tied together with wire hangers. Their source of drinking water was straight from the Pasig River, which was a hundred times more polluted than the Mississippi. Life expectancy was forty-three years and three of five babies born died before their first birthday.

My teaching shift was from 3PM until 8PM. I was supposed to teach reading and writing, and praying the rosary to both the children and adults that came to the center. There were over thirty mothers and about forty-five children on my first day. I was the only teacher for seventy-five people. For the first time, I saw and smelled the difference between the rural and the urban poor, and I just wanted to run back to my old room in the seminary, even to the poverty of my village. I tried very hard to sound confident as I welcomed them and introduced myself. I had just finished explaining my teaching responsibilities and my plans to recruit more volunteers when one of the mothers stood up and said: “We are not interested in *your* reading nor in *your* writing and least of all in *your* rosary if you are not interested in *our* hunger, in *our* illness, in *our* safety, and in *our* rights. We need clean drinking water, we need medicine, we need you to help us stop the *agentes* from “stealing”⁹ our children. So, go back to whoever in the university sent you and you tell him all this. For years you have talked about love of neighbors. We are not just your classroom, we are also your neighbors. Well, when are you really going to begin loving us?” No one else spoke that afternoon. When Aling Juana finished talking, she left and so did everyone else. So, my first day in class as a teacher was really my first day as a student.

There was something in the way Aling Juana talked about these entertainment agents who came to steal their children that bothered me. I had heard similar complaints from some families in the villages close to mine in the islands. Six hundred miles separated my island and the city of Manila and I heard the exact same complaints about the activities of the agents, complaints which were expressed with almost the same intense anger. Remembering the Jesuit Fr. Pedro Arrupe’s words about building bridges

with people through understanding, and inserting oneself into, what “breaks the heart”¹⁰ of the community, I decided that I needed to break my own heart on this issue if I were going to be a credible teacher in this community.

At the university, I explained to my pastoral supervisor what I needed to do in order to build a trusting relationship with the Smoky Mountain community (SMC, hereafter). I told him that I would undertake a series of *lakad pang-unawa* (literally, journeys of understanding), which meant traveling to the islands, and observing how these agents went about their business. I asked for a small amount of travel money for this task. He flatly turned down my request and went into a long sermon on the distinction between the “temporal” and “spiritual” needs of people. He made sure I understood that we were in the SMC not as social workers but as spiritual teachers concerned not about the secular city but mainly about bringing souls into God’s “perfect society,” (so called because “outside the church there is no salvation.”)¹¹ Furthermore, he assured me that there would be dangerous consequences if I were to get involved in researching and following the activities of the agents because they had wide and strong political connections. “Be faithful,” he said as I left his office, “to our spiritual learning program which has been effective for years and everything will be fine.”

The temporal and the spiritual, the secular imperfect society and the perfect society (of God) were dichotomies that played no part in my root educational experiences before my Western education (philosophy and early theology years) in the seminary. It was assumed by the Philippine hierarchy -- and most hierarchies in the Third World -- that theology was something one learned from Europeans and it was further assumed that the pastoral and religious needs of Filipinos could be adequately served by the continued

importation of European theologies. I was beginning to understand the incongruence between the “spiritual learning program” I found myself in and the needs of the community I was assigned to serve. In the Aristotelian metaphysical scheme of things, essence has priority over existence. Human beings actualize this essence through their existence. Thomas Aquinas borrowed these ideas and applied it to form his own spiritual anthropology. The soul, humanity’s sharing of the divine, is the universal essence of every human being and care of the soul takes priority over the care of the body, which is simply the soul’s temporal vehicle. Religion, then, became a program of saving souls and theology was a science that sought to justify this program. This was the theology that undergirded the mission at the SMC. This separation of body and soul was never a part of the language and practice of Yeshua nor of the early church.¹² It only began to be injected into the fourth century Constantinian church as it made justifications for the temporal affairs of the empire and the spiritual works of the church. This dichotomy developed through the Middle Ages when theologians began talking about the perfect society as the only way to salvation and became entrenched in the later part of the 19th century with the dogma of the infallibility of the pope. Our task at the SMC, as explained by my pastoral supervisor, was to offer hope for eternal salvation through the church which had done this for centuries. Because she is led by a someone who could not make any mistake, the church itself needed no changing and salvation very simply meant recruiting souls into the church where through her sacraments a complete transformation (salvation) of the soul would occur.

That first day experience at the SMC and the words of Aling Juana started a thin fracture in my theological thought. It would lead me to my first pastoral disobedience.

Against the advice of my supervisor, I went on several trips to the islands to follow several agents and to talk to families in the towns where they visited. Because of limited funds, I traveled by boat, which was the cheapest and longest route to the islands. My knowledge of church Latin helped me earn free lodging at the residence of the parish priest, as I could serve the special Latin masses for the wealthy's baptismal, nuptial, and funeral liturgies.

The journeys of understanding I began also led to journeys into Philippine ancient history. When the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan wandered into the *Maharlika* Islands (former name of the Philippines), he immediately saw a fertile source of resources for his royal employer, King Philip of Spain. The land had to be made productive so he instituted the *encomienda* system, which in actual practice was no different from the practice of slave labor farming. Vast tracts of farming lands were assigned to selected native families who were in charge of "employing" locals to farm the land. This system was in place for over three hundred years. When Spain lost to the United States in 1898 in the Battle of Manila, the *encomienda* system continued with one change: the families that had managed the land for the Spaniards became the new owners of the land. The local workers continued to stay on the land on the condition that they would become permanent tenant farmers. As the new landowners, these managing families received the lion's share of the harvest while the tenant farmers merely got enough to keep them from starving. Thus, while the landowners could send their children to the best schools all the way to college and graduate schools, the children of the farmers could barely finish elementary school. It would only be a matter of time before the children of the managing families became the economic, political, and social elite of the country. Several uprisings

were organized by tenant farmers opposing this *tuloyang pagnakaw ng bayan* (literally, continuing thief of country) but these were swiftly put down first by the superior arms of the Spanish occupying forces and later by the American “liberators.” Superior arms and a religion that justified the enslavement of a whole nation by “saving their heathen souls” gradually created a culture of subservience.

The economic gap between the tenant farmers and the landowners became so wide that the former would be almost under total control of the latter. Barely able to support their families, tenant farmers would often borrow from the landowners to make ends meet especially during health emergencies. The entertainment agents would present themselves to these heavily indebted tenant farmers promising their families a different life. They would select those with large number of girls and promised them a job up north where they could begin a new of life. After a few months up north, they would run into the problems in big cities. Jobs were difficult to come by especially for those with only elementary school education. The agents would return and promise better jobs for the children farther up north in the restaurant business around the American bases. Seeing dollar signs and even the faint hope of making it into the USA, the parents would let their girls would go with the agents to the more lucrative jobs around the bases. It would only be a matter of time before the girls would realize that there was really no money in waitressing, that the real money was in being a “hospitality woman,” a euphemism for a prostitute who catered to the special needs of foreigners.

This was the *modus operandi* of the agents in the islands. Lay church leaders and some members of the clergy began first a *kamatuuran* (real intentions) campaign that was effective in discouraging these agents from recruiting in the islands. However, this did

not completely stop them, they simply began recruiting in the slum communities. This was what Aling Juana meant by *agentes* stealing their children. This issue was the bridge I needed to convey to the SMC that I was serious about my work there as a teacher. But before I could proceed with my work, I had to present my case to the pastoral committee in charge of the “program of learning” for pastoral education. Needless to say, I was again turned down and given a long lecture on the unreality of my “idealistic dreams.” The thin fracture in my theological education would widen as I prepared for this task. This meant a decision to immerse myself in the issues affecting the SMC, to develop skills in community organizing as part of teaching (theology), and a questioning of the assumptions of my theological education at the time.

Traditional Theological Education

The philosophy and theology professors in the pontifical (Vatican-affiliated) seminary I attended at the University of Santo Tomas were all Spanish Dominican priests with the exception of one Filipino Dominican who was fresh from a doctorate at a university in Salamanca, Spain. Feeling like the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal who was executed by the Spanish colonial authorities in 1896 for questioning church authorities, the question I asked my supervisors at the seminary was a variation to the question already asked by Rizal: “If we are honest and serious about following the way of Yeshua, why do we continue to close our eyes to the suffering of our brothers and sisters at the SMC?” Again, there were explanations given about our “spiritual mission” and about leaving the job of changing people’s hearts to the “power of the sacraments” and not through “political power.” It was at this juncture that I realized for the first time how thick and deeply entrenched was the gap between the knowledge which came from

the colonizers' experience of privilege and that coming from the experience of native or indigenous peoples. Parker Palmer's distinction between "knowing truth" and "truthful knowing," though simplified to highlight the contrast, might be used to describe this gap. The former has the following characteristics: 1) Western colonizers tended to look for the facts, and because *facere* had to do with making something, they saw themselves as makers of the world or master builders who took pride and ownership in the facts they built, often forgetting the sources of the building materials (factual knowing); 2) influenced by the Greek society's concept of *theoroi* which meant "spectators," they preferred to view things to be known from a distance, away from the scene of the event and from the players who sometimes got killed to please the spectators (theoretical knowing); 3) having divided the subject from the object, they insisted on the "objective" which in its Latin root means "to put against" or to stand over and against the world, often placing themselves in an adversarial relationship with others in the world (objective knowledge); 4) they also tended to view reality as a *res*, Latin for "thing" or "property" to be manipulated and controlled thus equating the pursuit of knowledge with the quest for power and domination (controlling knowledge). In contrast to the above, "truthful knowing" means: 1) viewing the world as a gift given and received (receptive knowing); 2) preferring to engage the world as an organic whole and participating fully in this wholeness (participative knowing); 3) acknowledging the in-betweeness of truth which means it is found in dialogical relationship between knowers (relational knowing); 4) allowing the thought and practice of knowing to draw the knower and the known into a sense of belonging to each other in a collaborative search for understanding (shared knowing).¹³

Ten years of seminary education — four years in high school and six years in college — were in reality a prolonged and structured submersion in the “knowing truth” mode of education that was on its way to further development until it was “arrested” or more exactly until I arrested myself and began a journey of unlearning to free myself from a “program of learning” that had not only made me appear as a foreign teacher to my own people but also estranged me from the prophetic tradition of my faith. My pastoral disobedience, which was the first big step in this unlearning or relearning process, resulted in a recommendation for an “extended regency period”— a euphemism for a seminary student no longer fit to return to the pontifical seminary. It was during this extended regency period that I and a small group of college students and former seminarians organized *Samahang Laban sa Agenting Kawatan* (SALAK), a group against exploitive entertainment agents. We first came together to stop agents from coming to the SMC and to other poor communities in rural and urban areas and, after our success with this issue, we went on to address other issues affecting poor communities. It was these solidarity and advocacy activities that led to our arrests and eventual exile under the Marcos dictatorship. The irony was that we were accused of being “foreign-led and paid agents” at a time when we were questioning our “foreign education” which made us silent in the face of abject poverty and severe exploitation.

Freire and the Bishops of Medellin

I first heard of Paulo Freire in the summer of 1970 from Fr. Pastels, a Belgian-Brazilian priest who gave a workshop to seminary students on community organizing using ideas from Freire and Saul Alinsky. I still remember him opening to the very first pages of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, where Freire used the metaphor of a woman giving

birth to convey the idea that liberation work is often a painful one.¹⁴ Further, he referred to Hegel's words also quoted in the book: "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained.... The individual who has not staked his life may, no doubt, may be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness."¹⁵ I also still remember him saying that if we were not serious about our vocation to the priesthood, we should not get into this kind of work "because you might get so frustrated and end up as a guerrilla in the mountains." Reading Freire's work was, for me, an experience in what Palmer called "truthful knowing" and helped me in a significant way in the process of unlearning and relearning. It was his ideas about the power of education that led to reconstituting or putting my self on trial, as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. As I listened to the stories of the women and children in the SMC, I knew early on the pain and complexity attendant in the work of liberation. But at the same time, I agreed with Freire that it was a worthy price to pay for the task of humanizing both the oppressor and the oppressed in the context of the urban village.

I found the following three interrelated assumptions, which formed the matrix of Freire's philosophy of education, extremely helpful in rethinking the program of learning I had been part of up to that point in my education. First, humanization is the basic human vocation. But this vocation is constantly being thwarted by a multiplicity of cultural and social oppressions that dehumanize people. Second, human beings have the capacity to transform their reality. Despite the many forms of oppression that we experience, human beings can still be creators of their culture and subjects of their history instead of simply being creatures determined by them. Third, education is always laden with interest and is therefore never neutral. Whose education is it and in whose interest is

it being done? These were crucial questions which a “problem-solving” (problem-awareness raising) approach to education must include in order to reveal political intentions and at the same time counter the silencing effects of the “banking approach” to education.¹⁶

It was at this point that I realized what kind of philosophical and theological education I had been exposed to. It was a banking approach to theology. Everything had been decided in Rome and the teacher was simply a delivery vehicle to be used in making the deposits. The theological banking system itself was not to be questioned because its leader was protected from error through the doctrine of infallibility. It was a factual, objective, theoretical, and controlling system -- all done in the name of religion. I had to look for an alternative. I knew that by immersing myself in the lives of the poor at SMC, I was doing real pastoral ministry and no theological banker could convince me otherwise.

I had heard from friends of the *Institute for Church and Social Reform* (ICSR) at the Ateneo de Manila, a Jesuit university where some local community leaders with a few Filipino and North American Jesuits (Francisco Claver SJ, and John Carroll SJ, were two I still remember) were doing Medellin-inspired community work in the poor neighborhoods surrounding the university. I went to visit the Institute and bought a book of the Medellin documents. Medellin, Colombia was the place where CELAM or the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (Council of Bishops of Latin America) met to apply to the Latin American context the (largely European) documents of the Second Vatican Council. The meeting produced sixteen documents one of which was on “*Paz*.”¹⁷ This document used words like “class tensions,” “internalized colonialism,” “sinful disparity

between the rich and the poor,” “structural and institutional violence,” which is used against anyone working on “systemic change.” There were strong words for those responsible for this sort of violence: “those who have greater share of wealth, culture, and power” perpetuate an *already violent* situation and “if they jealously retain their privileges and continue to defend them through violence, they are responsible to history for provoking explosive revolutions of despair.” The document also discussed “international tensions” resulting from the industrialized countries’ “exploitive relationships” with developing nations. The document concluded with a concrete and practical call to clerics and lay pastoral workers to “defend the rights of the oppressed,” to develop “a healthy critical sense of the social situation, to encourage “grass-roots organizations,” and to denounce the unjust actions of world powers that work against the self-determination of weaker nations.

Here was a gathering of bishops articulating in powerful language what Aling Juana was asking me to help her do in her community. I remember the warm rush of hope that ran through me at the time. These were bishops from countries with similar histories to the Philippines. I knew then that this was the new path for me. Later, I would learn that the writer of that document was a priest named Gustavo Gutierrez who lived and continues to live in one of the slums of Peru. He would later expand on his thoughts in a pathbreaking work entitled A Theology Of Liberation, (1972) a book that has radically changed the direction of theology and reconnected it to its original partner, spirituality—the living out of the transformative dimension of faith.

In this chapter I have tried to put my history in review by considering my educational experience within the perspective of human temporality -- as expressed in

Augustine's organic sense of time, and through the interplay of time, consciousness, and tradition in Gadamer's concept of effective historical consciousness -- in order to make a decision (judgment) on which educational path to leave (e-ducere) or follow (in-ducere). I recalled my root experiences of living and learning, beginning with my relationship with a mystical village leader who was also my grandmother, through an experience of communitarian survival strategies where it was simply a habit of the mind to think that we survive *as a community*, and on to the darker side of history in the space of my father's anguished memory. Years in the seminary and lengthy immersion in the curriculum of a European-run university introduced me to a way of being different from *the way of being-together* which my root learning experiences sculpted within me. This difference came to a gashing point at the slum community where I was sent as a religion teacher. It was there where I deeply realized the need to break out of that repressive interpersonal and intersocial experience carefully protected in the seminary. I began to search for a program of learning and a way of doing theology that spoke to the socio-historical context of my people and the particular experiences of the people in the SMC. It was there that I gathered the courage to stand up to what I believed religious education should be, that theology and theological teaching is a relational and collaborative undertaking. Theology as solely an intellectual pursuit was and is a distortion. It was and is a reflection of faith for the sake of being faithful to that faith, and must be anchored in the experience of the community of believers. The people I have met and the theological works I have read have pointed me to a way of doing theology that fits well with my own sense of faith, one that is inextricable from the pursuit of social justice and solidarity with the marginalized and the powerless. I understand fully that this is a

complex undertaking and that openness and dialogue must be the constant characters of the endeavor.

Chapter two is an historical exploration into the sources of liberation theology: its emergence from about a hundred years of Catholic social thought as seen through Catholic social encyclicals, its symbiotic relationship with poor communities which have become empowered through their formation of, and participation in, “basic ecclesial communities,” its inspiration from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, and its application of the themes from Vatican II to the Latin American region at the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Colombia.

Chapter three discusses liberation theology and the challenge it brings to traditional theology. It describes the attempts of liberation theologians to reconceive a new way of understanding and doing theology, and includes the justifications for their desire to restore spirituality to its original place alongside theology. It examines the role the life and work of Karl Marx plays in what liberation theologians call the hermeneutic spiral, and concludes by indicating the practical and conceptual changes liberation theologians want to introduce into the life of the Catholic faith community.

Chapter four unveils a serious omission of liberation theologians and liberation theology. It begins with an acknowledgement of the interconnected and interrelated nature of working for social liberation. It briefly discusses the need to be vigilant so that the liberation work undertaken in one area does not lead to oppression in another. It concentrates on the question of who are the poor whom the liberation theologians so passionately speak about. The blind spot or omission of liberation theologians and liberation theology is this: they have only assumed a male face of the poor. This chapter

listens to the analysis of feminist theologians whose work examines the horrendous consequences of this blind spot or omission of women.

Chapter five is a composition of a curriculum for social change from the perspective of liberation theology and discusses three main points. First, it uses the method of *currere* in order to construct a sense of self as agent. Second, it explores the implications in the learning process of what liberation theologians call conscientization or the first act, which is thinking and acting effected and affected by an ongoing experience of grassroots work for social justice. Finally, it concludes with a participatory teaching narrative where multiple combinations of *currere* and *conscientization* are created for a learning journey that is emancipatory.

End Notes

- 1 Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language (English translation of the theoretical part of her seven hundred page doctoral dissertation), trans. Myrna Bergman Ramos, New York: Teachers College, 1993, p. 15. Kristeva's work along with the work of many feminists have questioned the concept of a permanent and unitary sense of self. Of particular interest to me, as a person of color educated in intercultural contexts and different languages, is her critique of the self as it emerges from the languages of social sciences which often treat the self as if it could be removed from its imbrication in socio-historical contexts. In a very real sense, I put my self on trial as I write this chapter and attempt to signify my self, a process which includes engaging my self in various metamorphoses as I move through a complex set of imbrications. Kristeva deals with this point particularly in the first hundred pages of this book.
- 2 St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. John Ryan, Garden City, New York : Doubleday, Image Books, p. 293. Augustine seems to have understood the act of confession as a way of transgressing the traditional linear understanding of time. It is in confession that one becomes intensely aware of the now of the present as sharing equal importance with the nows of the past and the future.
- 3 William Pinar, Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality, New York: Peter Lang, 1994, p.266. Influenced both by Heidegger's sense of time (where it is not an objectified reality but that within which we move and live our being) and Dwayne Huebner's application of this concept of time in curriculum thinking, Pinar

understands curriculum not merely as a noun but as a verb (*currere*= to run), a verb of being, living, and learning in time. As I write this chapter I am acutely aware of Pinar's remembered time of loss (of his father) during which these words were written because I, too, am remembering and still grieving the loss of both my father and mother. Again, it is a case of a past that is enfolded in this present.

- 4 Hans-George Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald Marshall, New York: Crossroads, 1992, pp. 300-307. The translators of the book writes in the translators preface (p.xv) that "effective historical consciousness" may also be translated "historically effected consciousness" and admits the difficulty to trying to convey "Gadamer's delineation of a consciousness that is doubly related to tradition, at once affected by history.... and also itself brought into being -- effected -- by history and the consciousness that it is so."
- 5 Michel Serres, Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy, eds. Josue Hatari & David Bell, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p 28. Serres' words, it seems to me, call our attention to the fact that our theories of knowledge and the institutions founded on them especially since the 17th century have followed somewhat the Hollywood version of martial arts, always ready to strike and often "calling for executions" at the "critical tribunals."
- 6 William Doll, Jr., A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum, New York: Teachers College, 1993, p. 180. In constructing a transformative post-modern curriculum matrix (recursion, relations, rigor, richness), Doll wants to open up the tyranny, rigidity, and individuality of the vast majority of modernist curriculum theorizing to the sheer richness of the chaos and indeterminacy enfolded in much of our human experience. Thus, he shares the concerns of Serres and Kristeva regarding the proclivity of many scientists towards isolating the individual from his or her embeddedness in an ecology of relations and neglecting or "downsizing" the effects of these relations in the construction of an identity and in the signifying process.
- 7 William Pinar, Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality p.244. This question points me to, at least, a couple of directions as a learner and a teacher: backwards, in gratitude to those whose action and imagination have enriched my life; and forward, to those whose lives will be conceived in one way or another by what I consciously or unconsciously do in my various pedagogical contexts. Between these directions, Pinar warns that because "we are what we know and also what we do not know... if what we know about ourselves -- our history, our culture -- is distorted by deletions and denials, then our identity -- as individuals, as Americans -- is distorted."
- 8 Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 13. She continues this line of thought by saying that because "the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the *process* pervading the body and the subject ... we

must break out of our [repressive] personal and intersocial experience if we are to gain access to what is repressed in the social mechanism: the generating of significance.”

- 9 I put the word “stealing” in quotes to describe a *modus operandi* of some entertainment agents who are really pimps and take advantage of the extreme poverty of the family by offering jobs to the children who, culturally, would do everything to help their starving parents.
- 10 Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ was the beloved Superior General of the Jesuit order who made this phrase a litmus test for discerning the genuine Jesuit spirit.
- 11 A phrase used by the ecclesiastical authorities in the Middle Ages to refer to the Church. It supposedly is an *ergo* following another church dictum, “outside the church there is no salvation.” Although the documents of Vatican II do not use phrase, the document on the Church entitled *Lumen Gentium* continues to claim that “outside the church, there is no salvation.”
- 12 I use the original Hebrew throughout this study -- unless, of course, I am quoting someone else -- because I want to avoid the many slanderous uses of the name “Jesus” in much of our US culture, e.g., the Aryan “Jesus” of the Neo-Nazis’ Identity Church, the nuclear submarine named after Jesus’s body (Corpus Christi), the “Jesus Heals” trinkets marketed by many televangelists and faith healers to those in desperate need of healing, the triumphalistic “Jesus” proclaimed by many churches who is forced to disown his ancestors by declaring himself as the only savior and condemning other faith traditions, etc.
- 13 Parker Palmer, To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey, San Francisco: Harper, 1983, pp.21-58. I have changed the context here. In this section of the book Palmer wants to contrast Enlightenment epistemology (knowing truth) with hermeneutical understanding (truthful knowing). Palmer believes that we in the academy have been so conditioned into an Enlightenment thinking which proceeds through “methodological doubt” that “belief” instantly becomes a pejorative word. For him, to “know truth is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter ours,” and without belief -- not unquestioning assent but trust -- entering into the life of the other is virtually impossible.
- 14 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myrna Bergman Ramos, New York: Seabury, 1970, p. 33. While the metaphor is powerful, it is interesting to note that this is the only place in the book where Freire mentions the experience of a woman and yet the woman is never mentioned, only the “new man” being born.
- 15 Georg Hegel, quoted in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 20. It might be helpful to recall that Hegel used the term *recognition* as a birth process, as a way of creating

and marking an identity. Risking one's life moves the risker from the ordinariness of being a "person" to the loftiness of being an "independent self-consciousness." In the biblical language of the New Testament of which Hegel was not unfamiliar it goes something like this: "whoever loses her/his life for my sake will find it."

- 16 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed p. 59. This approach to education has been discussed and criticized *ad nauseam* but the students (of all races) I see and hear from everyday especially in the undergraduate levels continue to experience this banking approach in the classroom.
- 17 Second General Conference of Latin American Bishop, Medellin, Colombia, "Peace," The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Second Vatican Council. Washington, D. C.: US Catholic Conference, 1973.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The first chapter of this study discussed in an autobiographical manner my formative living and learning experiences in the Philippines before my exile to the United States. I concluded the chapter in search of a theological framework that would resonate with these experiences. Further, I alluded to the “family resemblances” I recognized in the liberative, religious ideas coming from the documents of the Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano (CELAM), one of whose theological experts was Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest who still today lives and works in the slums of one of its cities. In the latter’s work entitled A Theology of Liberation (1972), I found both a praxical and conceptual matrix for my own ideas and work.¹ Gutierrez contends that:

Theology in Latin America today will be a reflection in, and on, faith as liberation praxis. It will be an understanding of faith from an option and a commitment. It will be an understanding of faith from a point of departure in real, effective solidarity with the exploited classes, oppressed ethnic groups, and despised cultures Latin America, and from within their world. It will be a reflection that starts out as a commitment to create a just society, a community of sisters and brothers, and that ought to see that this commitment grow more radical and complete. It will be a theological reflection that becomes true, veri-fied, in real and fruitful involvement in the liberation process.²

Liberation theology’s point of departure is the experience of exploitation and oppression of the people of Latin America. In traditional theology one begins with revealed truths as interpreted by the *magisterium*, teaching authority of the church. Christian theology -- faith seeking understanding -- was originally intended for the practical purpose of advancing a believer’s spiritual life. But beginning in the early fourth century with the conversion of Emperor Constantine (280-337 CE) and culminating in the late Middle Ages theology became a purely intellectual discipline, especially through the work of Scholastic theologians who attempted to turn it into a (rational) science using Aristotelian

philosophical categories.³ Under this conception, which continues today in the hierarchy, the role of the theologian is not to question Church doctrines but to make people understand how it is consistent with human reason. Because of the highly intellectual nature of the task, theologians do not have to get involved with the lives of people, much less poor people.

This chapter will re-view four main historical sources of liberation theology -- the Second Vatican Council, the Medellin Conference of the Consejo Episcopal de Latino Americano, the Basic Ecclesial Communities, and the Social Encyclicals -- and describe how liberation theology challenges and attempts to move the Catholic church in Latin America from a preferential option for the rich to a preferential option for the poor. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the attitudinal and praxical shifts which emerged from within these four sources, ones which I believe become essential elements in the creation of liberation theology as a theory of social change from the perspective of religious faith.

Vatican II and *Gaudium et Spes* (Joys and Hopes)

The Catholic Church periodically gathers bishops throughout the world to deliberate on pressing matters affecting the life of the church. Early in his papacy, John XXIII decided it was time for another gathering which he called the Second Vatican Council and the overarching theme of this Council, which lasted for four years (1962-1965), was *aggiornamento* -- an Italian word which means "opening the windows to let fresh air in." Pope John was convinced that changing the image people have of the Catholic church was a key element in the quiet revolution he would undertake. His choice of this particular word to describe the gathering implied the notion that the church was

running out of oxygen within the tight walls of its early and late Middle Ages conception of itself as the “City of God” and the “Perfect Society.” These were common appellations during this period, and were often used by both clergy and laity to refer to the church all the way into the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ The first one, the City of God, came from a book bearing the same title of the fifth century North African theologian Augustine of Hippo who described two basic allegiances of the people of the world -- those who pledged their loyalty to the city of mortals and those who committed their whole lives to the affairs of the City of God. The second, the Perfect Society, originated from the late Middle ages when scholastic theologians portrayed the church as the visible presence of God on earth. Because of divine perfection, the society in which God is recognized as the true infallible head must also be perfect. This divine prerogative of perfection and infallibility was formally attributed to the pope in 1869 during the First Vatican Council.

The theological explication of the dogma of papal infallibility made a clear distinction between infallibility -- freedom from doctrinal error when invoking the teaching authority of the church -- and impeccability -- freedom from sinfulness. But in the minds of many, laity and clergy alike, the pope and the rest of the church hierarchy were perceived as both infallible and impeccable; for, if the spiritual leader could not make mistakes whenever he invoked the teaching authority of the church, it must indeed be God’s city on earth, and to be part of it would in effect meant belonging to a perfect society. This view resulted in ecclesiastical policies that treasured permanence, and perceived change as a sacrilegious and heretical concept because it would mean compromising divine perfection. It engendered a negative view of the world and rejected

as belonging to mere worldly affairs anything that had to do with the economic, political, and social lives of its members.

But a series of soul-changing events were occurring in the city of men and women, which simply failed to register in the consciousness of the church. The Enlightenment, the two world wars, various civil wars and revolutions, colonial genocide, to name only a few historical social traumas, cumulatively formed a wave that swept the church away into insignificance and irrelevance vis-à-vis the real struggles of ordinary people. By the middle of the 20th century the world moved on and left the church far behind. The renowned Anglo-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead might have had the Catholic church in mind when he remarked 30 years before Vatican II that “to be a pure conservative is to fight against the essence of the universe.”⁵

It may, therefore, be said that *aggiornamento* was not just an opening of the windows to let the fresh air in, but was also a looking out into the world to see what was happening to the people of God. It was at this time (1960s) that the metaphor would begin to change *from* “City of God” and “Perfect Society” *to* “Pilgrim Church” and “People of God.” It was also at this time that the Church began to awaken to the structural causes of the misery of the vast majority of peoples -- Christians and non-Christians -- living under inhuman conditions and all types of oppression. A strong resurgence of biblical studies in the decade before Vatican II resulted in a richer and more accurate understanding of the biblical sources of the faith, particularly the mission of Yeshua (Jesus) to preach the good news to the poor.⁶ Faced with an overwhelming consensus among biblical scholars about Yeshua’s life, many theologians began to ask: “Can we really continue to call ourselves Christians and be silent to the plight of the poor

and the afflicted?”⁷ The Second Vatican Council produced and promulgated 16 documents which dealt with issues affecting the life of the Church *ad intra*, i.e., within itself as an institution, and *ad extra*, i.e., as an embodiment of Yeshua’s mission to the outside world. While each of these documents addressed particular issues in the Church, there was recognition in all of them that changing times called for changes in attitudes and practices especially towards “the least of our brothers and sisters.” Thus, this question from contemporary theologians became the focus of *Gaudium et Spes*, the document that had the most significant impact on the development of liberation theology. It begins with these words. “The joys (*gaudium*) and hope (*spes*), the grief and anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the people of God.”⁸

These words are especially significant when one recalls that the last official statement on the same *ad intra* and *ad extra* issues prior to *Gaudium et Spes* had been Pope Pius IX’s (1792-1878) extremely dogmatic and authoritarian “Syllabus of Errors” which condemned those advocating for changes in the Church as agents of the “devils in the world.”⁹ This First Vatican Council’s (1869-1870) negative attitude towards the world originated from the theologies of St. Augustine (354-430) who was heavily influenced by Plato’s philosophy which disparaged anything material, and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who -- although he acknowledged the significance of the material -- accepted Aristotle’s distinction between “substance” and “accident” which he applied to the soul (as substance) and the body (as accident). The *Gaudium et Spes* statement quoted above is followed by another which rejects this matter and spirit or substance and body dualism, and expresses a different perception of the world: “Indeed, nothing truly

human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” Not only is there an acceptance of the world but also a willingness to learn from that very world: “The church has the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times ... of interpreting them in light of the gospel ... of recognizing and understanding the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.”¹⁰ Five sections of *Gaudium et Spes* are relevant to liberation theology into five subheadings: 1) private to public spirituality, 2) person-centered socio-economic order, 3) church and politics, 4) peace through justice, and 5) dialogue and collaboration.

Understanding spirituality in the Christian tradition has often involved looking at the tension between its individual/private and communal/public components. Healthy spirituality means a constant search for, and an ever-renewing practice of the creative play or weaving between these two components and their multiple combinations in differing social contexts. For liberation theologians, the privatization of spirituality developed from a passive and almost magical understanding of the power of sacraments. The perfect-society and city-of-God views of the church engendered such passive and magical understanding of the effects of the Sacraments of the Church. The sacraments -- Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Eucharist, Matrimony, Healing, Holy Orders -- were meant to be a special celebration of God’s affirming presence at these significant moments of life. However, as the administration of the sacraments became concentrated in the hands of clergy, and as Latin replaced the language of the people, sacramental rituals became more like magic shows. Bishops and priests would perform esoteric signs using words (Latin) that people could not understand. The active role -- responsibilities -- of those receiving the sacraments began to fade in importance as the “magical words” of

the priest and bishops became the center of attention at the sacramental rituals. Spiritual life became a passive and private waiting for what the clergy, with their words and formulas, could do for a believer searching for salvation. He or she did not have to do anything else because the priest's words were enough to make the magic work. Spiritual life consisted simply in the individual's reception of the graces made available through the administered sacraments. Despite the call for participation in the social justice mission of the church by several popes through their social encyclicals long before Vatican II, being a Catholic continued to mean having a private and individual relationship with God.¹¹ The bishops of Vatican II wanted to change this highly passive and individualistic view of spiritual life. What was ignored in past social encyclicals would now be given a central place in *Gaudium et Spes*. Thus, a different anthropology is presented:

Our social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other. For the beginning, the subject, and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person, which for its part and *by its very nature stands completely in need of social life*.¹²

The strong language is meant not only as an antidote to privatized and individualistic ways of following Yeshua but is also a powerful call to make the plight of the neighbor “especially the poor and those in any way afflicted” constitutive of a genuinely Christian spirituality: “In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves *the neighbor of absolutely every person*.”¹³ The Second Vatican Council also recognizes that in the contemporary world, helping one's neighbor means knowing how to effectively deliver that help:

In order for persons to deliver with greater effectiveness the obligation of their conscience toward themselves and the various groups to which they belong,

they must be carefully educated to a higher level of sophistication through the use of the immense resources available today to the human race. Above all the education of youth from every background has to be undertaken, so that there can be created not only men and women of refined talents, but also generous and courageous persons for they are so desperately needed by our times.¹⁴

For the writers of *Gaudium et Spes*, education must not only transmit knowledge and refine talents but must lead to the creation of generous and courageous persons (*magnanimorum hominum*) who would support and advocate for the common good by transforming unjust socio-political institutions so that they may “provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.” This concern for the coming generations and the insistence on honoring the dignity of the human being as created in the image and likeness of God compel the bishops of Vatican II to devote several sections of this document to reflecting on the economy, politics, world peace, and the international community.¹⁵

2) The section on socio-economic life begins by declaring that human beings along with the welfare of society as a whole is “the source, the center, and the purpose of all socio-economic life.” In times when economic activity has increased considerably, many more people should have been given ample opportunities to share in its benefits in order that they might improve the condition of their lives. But instead of economic inequalities diminishing, this increased economic activity “serves only to intensify the inequalities so much so that in some places it even results in a decline in the social status of the weak and in contempt for the poor.” Thus in order that economic development might benefit everyone and diminish inequalities, *Gaudium et Spes* presents “principles of justice and equity as they apply to individuals, societies, and international relations ...

worked out in the light of the gospel and demanded by right reason.” Eight principles are provided:

a) Economic productivity should be placed in the service of the real needs of human beings “of whatever race and from whatever part of the world”; b) economic development should not be left to the sole judgment of a few who possess excessive economic power nor to a certain group of especially powerful nations, but must be shaped by the largest number of participants whether individuals or nations; c) as conflicts are likely to arise, care must be taken so that the solutions do not inflict any violence on the dignity of the human person, nor on the “natural characteristics of each country”; d) because work is the way human beings share in the divine work of creation and redemption, it must be viewed and respected above and beyond a mere paid commodity; e) workers rights to gather and organize unions must be respected ; f) property is a divine gift and must be shared to benefit all such that “in *extreme necessity*, people have the right to take from the riches of others what they need”; g) economic decisions should take into account “the necessities of a decent life on the part of the individuals and of the whole community and must establish “a proper balance between the needs of present-day consumption ... and the needs of the coming generations; h) those who work for a just economy participate in the church’s redemptive work.¹⁶

These principles, pervasive in the thoughts of liberation theologians, have also been used by the Catholic bishops of the United States of America in their pastoral letter on the US economy issued in 1981. This pastoral letter called for structural changes in the economy keeping in mind the interest of the poorest members of our society. This met with virulent opposition from most religious fundamentalist and business groups both

within and without the Catholic community. Underlying their opposition is the well-known contention of these groups that religion is a private matter and that, in the capitalist world, there is an absolute distinction between spirituality and the market.

3) This section of *Gaudium et Spes* describe what the bishops of the Council believe should characterize a Christian political community. Changes in the politics of the modern world are recognized especially in the way they affect universal rights and responsibilities both in the exercise of civil liberty and in the work toward the common good. There is a strong emphasis on protecting the rights of minority communities and an unequivocal rejection of governments that hinders civil or religious liberty, increases the victims of business and political crimes, wrenches the exercise of power away from pursuing the common good to serving and preserving the greed of leaders of political dynasties and factions. While still following the conciliar tradition of giving general principles, the Council now recognizes the complexities of political life and leaves room for “particularities”:

No better way exists for the attaining of truly human political life than by fostering an inner sense of justice, benevolence, and service for the common good, and by strengthening basic beliefs about the true nature of the political community, and about the proper exercise and limits of public authority but the practical ways in which the political community structures itself and regulates public authority *can vary according to the particular character of a people and its historical development.*¹⁷

And precisely because of the complexities and particularities of the “art of politics,” the Council encourages Christians, in solidarity with followers of other faith traditions, to pursue civic and political education. It acknowledges the strength of character required of those political leaders who can remain honorable and upright despite the constant temptations of power, greed, and fame; it encourages these brave

men and women to devote themselves to the welfare of all by actively participating in the risky but essential task of building truly democratic societies.

This section ends with a caveat. According to the bishops of the Council, the role of the Church in the political order must never be identified with any political system or ideology because it must be free “to speak the truth” against any political practice that violates the dignity of the human person. There is no doubt that the Church and the political community can work together because there are “close links between earthly affairs and those aspects of the human condition which transcend this world ... and both communities can uncover, cherish, and ennoble all that is true, good, and beautiful in the human community”; yet, as the symbol and protector of the transcendent in the human person, it must remain outside of any political affiliation.¹⁸

The penultimate section of this document discusses the urgency of fostering peace not only among church communities but throughout the community of nations and addresses the “acute hardships and anxieties” which deeply trouble the human family as they are confronted by the cruel realities of “ongoing wars or the threat of them.” The responsibility of building for the human family a world free of violence and war will not be possible unless every person -- believers and non-believers alike -- commit themselves persistently in their personal and communal lives to the pursuit of peace. According to the Council writers, this is a most urgent common task today as humanity lives and moves in a world always under the threat of annihilation through stockpiles of nuclear arms. Because of this, peace has to be understood differently. On one hand, peace is not merely the absence of war nor the maintenance of a balance of power between powerful

countries and enemies; on the other, peace comes forth from the work of men and women who “thirst after ever greater justice.”

Making peace the result of the work for justice is a radical departure from the usual admonition to pray for the conversion of violent “hearts of stones” to peace-loving “hearts of flesh.” With the recognition of structural and institutional violence, *Gaudium et Spes* adds a new dimension to the task of peacemaking. Inner conversion is still needed, but converting or dismantling structures of violence is just as important. This latter is where justice work becomes integral to peacemaking. The bishops of the Council definitely take sides in the bread and butter debate: war making takes bread and butter from starving children and their families. This section concludes with the words of the prophet Isaiah: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another nor shall they train for war again.”¹⁹

In this final section the bishops of the Council acknowledges through *Gaudium et Spes* the intricacy and complexity of the work of justice and peace-making. Thus, it concludes the document with a passionate plea for dialogue and collaboration in several areas: dialogue within the churches always recognizing diversity; dialogue with “those brothers and sisters and communities not yet living with us in full communion”; dialogue with “all who acknowledge God”; dialogue with those “who cultivate the beautiful qualities of the human spirit but do not yet acknowledge the source of this qualities”; dialogue even with those who “oppress the church and harass her in manifold ways.”

Gaudium et Spes is the longest document of the Second Vatican Council because it attempts to do difficult, complex, nearly impossible tasks: it acknowledges the sheer

necessity of change after centuries of clinging to a paradigm based on permanence and perfection; it tries to shed its triumphalistic and arrogant attitude toward the world; it begins a new attitude of willingness to listen to, and learn from, the world instead of condemning the evils in it; it admits that doing right by the word of God (orthopraxy) is just as important as thinking right by the word (orthodoxy); it definitively sees the justice component of spirituality; it accepts the constitutive significance of the economic, political, and social dimensions of the preaching and living of the gospels; and it has taken the side of the poor, not in an exclusive way, but as the definitive place to begin the work of incarnating the divine reign within the human community, always in eager hope for a complete and final fulfillment in eschatological times.²⁰ Briefly, *Gaudium et Spes* has committed the church — more than ever before in the centuries since Constantine — to the love of neighbor through those neighbors who suffer the most and live in misery as a result of oppression and exploitation. It is in this light that the philosopher-theologian John Cobb noted: “The greatest event in the twentieth-century church history was the Second Vatican Council ... the greatest achievement which this event has made possible is the liberation theology and praxis of Latin America.”²¹ While I agree with Cobb’s remark, I believe the second CELAM conference in Medellin, Colombia which brought Vatican II to Latin America also needs to be mentioned. Thus, I want to include this significant event in addition to Vatican II as generative of liberation theology.

Medellin Conference of CELAM (Catholic Bishops of Latin America)

This conference was in reality an attempt to bring the insights of Vatican II, particularly the vision of *Gaudium et Spes*, to the Latin American region. There were about six hundred Latin American bishops in attendance at the Second Vatican Council

but very few, if any, had been called upon to work in a significant way on any of the 16 documents that the Council produced. Many of them saw the Council as mainly dealing with issues affecting Europeans and North Americans. The majority of the theologians that prepared the first drafts of the documents were Europeans and North Americans, namely, Karl Rahner, Hans Kung, Johannes Metz, Edward Schillebeeckx, Yves Congar, Avery Dulles, John Courtney Murray, to name only a few. Nevertheless, when the Latin American bishops returned home, they took to the task of applying to their own situation the documents of the Council, especially *Gaudium et Spes*. Following the example of the Council, Latin American bishops began to reflect on the situation and condition of the people of God in their region, particularly “the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men and women” in Latin America “especially those who are poor and in anyway afflicted,” the majority of the people in that part of the world. To their delight, the bishops discovered that there were already Latin American theologians who had been doing just the kind of reflection on faith they were looking for.

In 1964 at a meeting in Petropolis, Brazil, Gustavo Gutierrez presented a scripturally based way of doing theology with particular attention to the experience of the poorest peoples of the earth. In June of 1966 in Geneva, at the World Council of Churches’ Conference on Church and Society, Richard Shaull, a theology professor at the Princeton Theological Seminary who would later collaborate with Gutierrez and other liberation theologians, challenged the participants of the conference to come up with a radical new theology that could be applied to the urgent needs of people in Latin America. These theologians and others like them would later be called upon to draft the documents to be discussed at the Medellin conference.

The Concejo Episcopal Latino Americano (CELAM) was organized in 1955. The bishops first gathered that year and discussed topics that were not outside of the devotional and sacramental issues of traditional Latin spirituality. While nothing out of the ordinary happened at that first conference, an essential structure had been created where they could begin to dialogue about issues common to their part of the world. It was their second meeting in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia that shook the foundations of the Church in Latin America. The bishops drew up sixteen documents, equal in number to the ones at the Second Vatican Council. I will limit myself to the two CELAM documents that, in my view, had the most significant impact on liberation theology: *Justicia and Paz*.

The Hebrew prophetic concept of injustice is related to the Greek word used to describe sin in the New Testament is *hamartia* which literally translates as “missing the mark.” The followers of Yeshua both in their individual and communal lives were constantly using their memory of their teacher’s life as the “mark” on which to aim or pattern their own lives. Discipleship then had a double dimension, individual and communal.

These two dimensions of discipleship converged in the commandment to love one’s neighbor and was used as the basis for judging whether the community was “on target” or “missing the mark” in the way they related with each other. The gospels not only related the crucial events in the life of Yeshua but also included his experiences with the human frailties of his followers. His disciples knew through their own experiences that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Although lacking the nuances of the sociology of knowledge or the social construction of reality, Yeshua’s followers had already

recognized that a group's decision could influence that of the individual's and vice versa. This was clearly evident in the early Christological controversies when individuals and groups found themselves on opposite sides when it came to understanding the person of Yeshua and formulating his teachings.

When Christianity became the official religion of Constantine's empire around 325, C.E., the great emperor along with the leaders of the Church determined and guarded right doctrine (orthodoxy). They took control of any opposition and dissolved those structures in society not in keeping with the teachings of the official Church. The concept of social sin -- from the perpetrators of social injustice -- waned as "missing the mark" gradually became an individual phenomenon. Thus, for instance, most Christian slave owners throughout the world felt guilty about mistreating their slaves but never saw slavery itself as a structure of sin. The erasure of the social dimension of sin reached its completion in the adoption of individual confession as one of the sacraments of the Church.²² Communal reconciliation service, which had been a sacred venue where perpetrators of social injustice could ask forgiveness for sins against the community, were eliminated as the priest became the sole representative of the community in individual confessions.

The drafters of the CELAM documents described the conditions that led to this erasure and forgetfulness. It had to do with several factors but its common denominator was the sheer desire of the rulers of the empire and the leaders of the Church to maintain the infrastructure of Christendom. Communal transgression would have meant failure on the part of the authorities to control the affairs of the world. In a situation where Church and State were one, a political or ecclesiastical structure that missed the mark or led

others to miss the mark was an indictment of its creators. Even when slavery and genocide clearly resulted from these structures, the Church simply justified them as collateral damage for its mission of converting a pagan world or as tolerable casualties of a justly waged war (just war theory). Another explanation often used was a spiritualistic notion of the church's mission: only the salvation of souls. What happened to people in their temporal affairs must be left to the civil and secular authorities. To the vast majority of the Latin American bishops at the Medellin conference, this dualistic view of the Church's mission was closer to Gnosticism than to Christianity.

The bishops at CELAM made it very clear that the mission of the church was to the neighbor, "the least of the brothers and sisters" not in another world but in the here and now of human historical time and space. The history of the world was not divided into a spiritual history to be influenced by the Church, and a secular history to be left to secular authorities to manage and control. This holistic view of history was the very foundation of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation that conveyed God's desire to be with humanity in the flesh. The temporal and the spiritual are enfolded into each other in the same manner that the human and the divine are enfolded in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Latin American bishops saw the misery and exploitation of the poor in Latin America not as an accident of history but as a result of a political decision or policy. The extreme poverty of its people was a result of "structural injustice" which began in colonial times and is continued and maintained by neo-colonial economic and political systems today.

The word "liberation" was not mentioned at all in any of the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council. Instead, the word "development" was used to describe the

most effective way for the suffering people of the “underdeveloped” countries of the world to break the yoke of poverty. To express continuity with the Vatican II documents, the bishops of CELAM initially used the word “development” in the *Justicia* document but attached “liberation” either next to it or replaced it altogether in some areas. Thus, “in the economy of salvation which sees divine work as an action of integral human development and liberation, and which has love for its motive ... change will be essential in order to liberate an authentic process of Latin American development and integration.”

²³ It is not, therefore, corporate sponsored *development* that will bring the poor out of exploitation and misery but *liberation* from unjust social structures achieved by the poor themselves with support by and advocacy of multiple solidarities. According to the *Justicia* document of CELAM, there are two main structures of injustice in Latin America. The first is internal colonialism and the second is neo-colonialism. These two oppressive structures are in reality not that different from each other; they are only distinguished by space in historical time and by the sources of dominating power. Internal colonialism simply means colonialism done from within: the direct descendants of *conquistadores* from Spain and Portugal have now carved their own *spains* and *portugals* in the former colonies, and pushed the native populations into the slums and shantytowns through an economic and political system that keep them impoverished. Neo-colonialism is the name the CELAM bishops gave to the (capitalistic) world economic system that conducts business with internal colonialists in Latin American countries.²⁴

Mexican historian Alonzo de Zorita suggests that Spain and Portugal had simply carved out Latin America among themselves and established huge farmlands called “colonies of settlement” and used forced, cheap native labor to make them profitable.

The bishops acknowledge that it took years before this external colonialism (from Spain and Portugal) became embedded in the countries and cultures of Latin America but their historical origins, they believed, were fairly uniform throughout the region:

The high tribute and heavy labor demands of the Spanish settlers, the Crown, and the Church far exceeded the relatively small exactions of the Aztec rulers, nobility, and priesthood. The more advanced European economy demanded a huge increase in the supply of labor; the *conquistadores* and their children became capitalist entrepreneurs with visions of limitless wealth to be obtained through gold and silver mines, sugar and cacao plantations, cattle ranches, and wheat farms. But the Indians, their bodies enfeebled by excessive toil, malnutrition, and the hardships of work in mines and plantations, their spirits anguished by the loss of ancient symbols and beliefs which gave meaning to their lives, were easy prey to disease, both endemic and epidemic, to local maladies, and to scourges imported by the Europeans: smallpox, influenza, measles, typhoid, malaria.²⁵

The consequence of the combination of these cruel exploitive practices and imported diseases on the native populations was a genocide of frightful proportions: the native populations declined from seventeen million in 1522 to a mere one million by 1608. This historical fact might seem so remote and far away into the past that it would be difficult to conceive of its continuing relevance today. In Latin America, like the rest of the formerly colonized world, history might seem remote and hidden indeed to an elite group -- the children of the *conquistadores* -- who control the economy and politics of the land, but to the native populations this historical trauma, though it happened hundreds of years ago in the past, is still written raw on their bodies.

When the bishops of CELAM talked about internal and neo-colonialism, they included the current manifestations of this trauma among the very poor in Latin American society. The Spanish *conquistadores* and their children gained titles to the “colonies of settlement” which later became part of the *hacienda* system. In such a system, these wealthy descendants became landlords to hundreds of poor tenants whose

lives and futures depended on the whim of their *patron* who functioned as virtual feudal lords. The Quaker social justice scholar, Corson Finnerty, cites a 1979 landholding study in Latin America where the landless and near landless made up 70% of rural households in Brazil, 75% in Ecuador, and 85% in Guatemala, to name only a few countries.²⁶ With the increase of agribusiness in the last three decades, the picture is even worse today as even those owning small parcels of land had to sell — often due to death squad intimidation and “taxations” levied by the military during the day and by the rebels during the night — to real estate developers and agribusiness owners only to find themselves later in shanty-towns and slums surrounding the cities.

The development processes as currently practiced in Latin America have not changed the situation of the poorest majorities. Internal colonialism and neo-colonialism were systems which benefited, and continue to benefit, only the political and economic elites of the land. These systemic injustices must be transformed before the poor can have a real exodus from their world of poverty and exploitation into a world of dignity and decency. At the same time, the bishops also called for a conversion of hearts because they believed that ultimately “hunger, oppression and ignorance ... have their origin in human sinfulness.” Authentic liberation included both tasks for “we will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new men and women who know how to be truly free and responsible according to the light of the gospel.”²⁷

This “Justice” document did not simply engage in rhetoric but sought serious results. Thus, it concluded with fairly detailed plans for the implementation of the changes they wanted to see. Participation of the working and non-working poor in the

economic life of their nation was a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the liberation process:

Latin American families ought to organize their economic and cultural potential so that their legitimate needs and hopes can be taken into account on the level where fundamental decisions are made, which can help or hinder them. In this way they will assume a role of effective representation and participation in the total life of the community. ²⁸

The bishops of CELAM also recognized that in Latin America transforming economic structures was simply not possible without at the same time corresponding changes in the region's political structures. They lamented the fact that major economic and political decisions "frequently support systems which militated against the common good or which favored only privileged groups." In light of this situation, CELAM bishops urged in strong language every Christian to exercise personal political responsibility: "The lack of political consciousness in our countries makes the educational activity of the church absolutely essential for the purpose of bringing Christians to consider their participation in the political life of the nation as a matter of conscience."

The above duties and responsibilities -- economic and political -- were included in a process called conscientization, a concept the Latin American bishops borrowed from Paulo Freire who studied the social impact of colonization on oppressed peoples in Brazil and other parts of Latin America. The bishops concluded the *Justicia* document by describing the formation of Commissions of Justice in each of the Latin American countries to implement the recommendations of the document on the national levels, and by laying out a process for organizing Pastoral Action groups that would apply national strategies to regional or local situations. ²⁹

In the *Justicia* document, the bishops of CELAM made a connection with the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* by starting with the concept of development which they eventually supersede with the concept of liberation. Similarly, in the *Paz* document the bishops began by affirming the words of Paul VI that "development is the new name for peace" and proceeded to show how these structures of injustice led to institutionalized violence which plagued the lives of the poor in Latin America. If development was indeed the new name for peace, then underdevelopment was the new name for systematic violence, a phenomenon the "Peace" document referred to as "tensions that continually conspire against peace." In Latin America these tensions came in three main forms: class tensions, international tensions, and regional tensions.

All the CELAM bishops agreed that it is fairly easy to classify Latin American society. The *creoles* are the pure and direct descendants of *conquistadores* whose families never intermarried with native populations; the *mestizos* are descendants of *conquistadores* who intermarried; and finally, there are the native Indian populations. In a land-based economy, the *creoles* who own vast tracts of fertile land receive the most profit. As a result, they can send their children to the best schools, can afford the best medical care, and move on not only to strengthen their grip on economic structures already constrictive on the lives of the vast majority of the population but also to control the political power which maintain and protect their privileges. The *mestizos* constitute the middle class whose minor positions in the governmental and economic structures of the nation offer minimal opportunities for substantive change. The poorest native Indian populations are relegated to the remotest and often barren parts -- the outskirts or slums

of the cities -- of the land where survival is a major portion of their daily lives, and where educational opportunities and medical care are almost nil.

According to the bishops, this social, political, and economic hierarchy create internal tensions because their respective systems “favor those who helped establish them in the beginning and exclude the masses of native populations who are almost always left at a subsistence level of existence and at times mistreated and exploited harshly.” While the vast majority of the poor have felt powerless and resigned themselves to their oppressive lives, there were always leaders in the past who challenged this reality. But this latter group was seen as a threat by those who benefited from these hierarchies. Thus, “it is not unusual to find that the upper classes, with the exception of an enlightened few, characterize as subversive activities all attempts to change the social systems which favor the permanence of their privileges.”³⁰

The international economic system operates on a center/periphery model. Those on the periphery are the poor and underdeveloped countries of the Third World, and the center are usually the members of the industrialized world, more specifically the G7 nations. Those on the periphery are often excluded in any major decisions affecting the economy made by the center nations. “For this reason,” according to the bishops, “Latin American nations frequently do not own their goods, or have a say in any economic decisions affecting them.”³¹

A concrete historical example might help explain what the bishops had in mind in this statement. In the 1920s two U.S. mining companies, Anaconda and Kennecott, bought control of all copper reserves in Chile which immediately brought wealth to the *creole* minority that controlled the economic and political machinery of Chile. The

mestizos and the native populations had no participation in this major economic decision affecting an essential factor in the economy of their country. The economist Al Gedicks described several consequences of these foreign controlled economic transaction: 1) The loss of considerable income potential because taxation never returned more than 38 percent of the copper's value to Chile -- the rest went to the companies and their foreign stockholders. Even when Chile increased taxes, the country as a whole continued to lose because the two companies subtly retaliated by cutting production and investing their profits in more favorable countries willing to lower taxes "to attract foreign investments."

2) The loss of control over marketing because Kennecott and Anaconda made decisions on where to sell their Chilean copper. As US companies, they followed US regulations especially when it favored their business interests. During the Second World War, therefore, when the United States declared a twelve cents a pound ceiling on copper prices, Chilean copper had to be sold at that price and could not be sold to powers hostile to the United States. Yet in the ten years prior to WW II Chilean copper had been treated as a foreign commodity and was subjected to heavy US tariff. After WW II, Kennecott and Anaconda continued their control of Chilean copper and prevented Chile from selling its copper to any communist country. The loss to Chile from being dragged into the WW II and the Cold War economics was in the billions of dollars. 3) The loss of employment and entrepreneurial potential because raw materials had to be fabricated into products in the two companies' US plants. A company owned by Chilean citizens might have been more likely to look for or start fabricating plants in Chile which could have created related industries and offered more job opportunities to its citizens.³²

The question, of course, is why did Chile sell its copper reserves to Kennecott and Anaconda? From the bishops' perspective, the reason was that the political elite who controlled the country did not consider the impact of this sale on the vast majority of Chileans who are poor. They were only thinking of their own business interests and were not really concerned about the consequences of their decision on the rest of the nation. In this business transaction, the vast majority of the people of Chile were essentially pushed to the periphery in a decision about their most precious raw material. Other than the small powerful minority who benefited from the sale of the copper reserves, the rest of the people were left with rusted equipment and large holes in the grounds, and because of denuded forests and polluted rivers, native populations would have to struggle against floods and toxic water in addition to fighting hunger and disease.

This historical economic phenomenon occurred not just in Chile but also in many other countries in Latin America. This was the context of the bishops' insistence that development should be the new name for peace, and when they spoke of development they had in mind a development that was shared by all its citizens and not just by the few who are powerful. In addition to class and international tensions, the bishops in the "Peace" document also discussed regional tensions. Concern was expressed over the heavy emphasis placed on nationalism by some Latin American countries. The reason this was a concern was due to the existence of a powerful and organized (European and North American) international economic block that gained and continues to gain considerable economic benefits from the "underdevelopment" of, and competition among, Latin American countries. So, an international company dealing with, say, Chile could easily move its company's operations to another Latin American country if it did

not get the tax breaks and economic concessions it required from Chile.³³ Nationalistic practices and policies of one country that negatively impacted another country in the Latin American community of nations have led to regional tensions. “An exacerbated nationalism,” warned the bishops, “eventually will hurt Latin America especially on matters where national economics requires a union of efforts.”³⁴

The Bishops of CELAM also decried the arms race in some countries in Latin America. They believed that a “fictitious need” was being created by the military industrial complex and was being believed and responded to “beyond the limits of reason” by military officials who made considerable financial benefits from the purchase of arms and other war-making equipment. Reiterating the words of Paul VI they declared: “When so many communities are hungry, when so many homes suffer misery, when so many men and women live submerged in poverty and ignorance ... any arms race becomes an intolerable scandal.”³⁵

Within the tensions described above how does one begin to work for peace? This question led the bishops to the second part of the document which they called “doctrinal reflection.” Here characteristics of the work for peace are given. 1) Peace is the result of justice work. It is not simply the absence of violence and bloodshed but involves the creation of a just order “where men and women can fulfill themselves as human beings, where their dignity is respected, their legitimate aspirations satisfied, their access to truth recognized, their personal freedom guaranteed and where they are not objects but agents of their own history.” 2) Peace is not a permanent achievement but is the “result of continuous effort and adaptation to new circumstances, to new demands and challenges of a changing history ... it implies constant change in structures, transformation of

attitudes, and conversion of hearts.” 3) Peace is the fruit of love. Love in a situation of injustice becomes manifested and verified through the work for social justice. It is hypocrisy to confess Yeshua as the Prince of Peace when social, political, and economic structures in the land are so full of violence against the poor “the least of our brothers and sisters.” This type of violence is not easily recognized because it is hidden in these structures which have simply become part of reality and tradition. The *Paz* document then calls on all Christians to make transforming these violent structures a priority in the practice of their faith because they pose the greatest threat to peace in Latin America:

This situation demands all-embracing, courageous, urgent and profound transformations. We should not be surprised that the temptation to violence is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights.³⁶

The bishops then calls on “those who have the greater share of the wealth, culture, and power ... not to take advantage of the pacifist position of the church in order to oppose, either actively or passively, the profound transformations that are so necessary for if they jealously retain their privileges and defend them through violence, they are responsible to history for provoking explosive revolutions of despair.” Under these circumstances, the bishops again reaffirm what Paul VI had earlier said in an encyclical that “revolutionary insurrection can be legitimated (just war theory) in the case of evident prolonged tyranny that seriously works against the fundamental rights of human beings.” But they quickly add that because too often in history violence seems to breed more violence, they urge all Latin American Christians to understand the afflictions of the poor and to change the structures which cause them, but to always resist hateful and violent means and apply themselves instead to effective non-violent actions.³⁷

The *Paz* document recognizes the complexity of the task of peacemaking especially in a region with long histories of institutional violence. However, it looks to the future with a strong and realistic sense of hope. The document ends with a social conscience formation process which emphasizes the need for the active involvement of all sectors of the Church in the sacred responsibility of peacemaking. While cognizant of the numbing effect of the history of colonization on the collective consciousness of Latin Americans, the CELAM bishops are nevertheless convinced that breaking out of this numbness is possible and that it is essential in, and constitutive of, the true practice of the Christian faith.

The *Justicia* and *Paz* documents of the second CELAM conference in Medellin, Colombia might be viewed as an attempt of the bishops of Latin America to create what Paulo Freire called “conscientization.” The bishops of Brazil who were in attendance at the conference were already familiar with the work of this educator and community organizer. Freire defined conscientization as the process of “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”³⁸ What the overwhelming majority of bishops at CELAM did was to point out the contradictions between the mission of the Church and the situation and condition of the vast majority of the citizens in the countries in Latin America, to present ideas and plans which could transform these contradictions, and to urge all Christians in the region to put their faith into action by putting these ideas and plans to work. Individuals and groups responded to this challenge by the bishops but one group in particular, whose beginnings date back to the years before CELAM, would have a strong influence on the emergence of liberation theology.

Basic Ecclesial Communities

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) grew out of several sources: 1) the experiences of the rural *campesinos* throughout Latin America initially in Brazil and Panama who gathered to pray together in their villages because no priests were available to come for the traditional eucharistic celebration; 2) the availability of pastoral leaders trained at the various Catholic Social Research Centers established precisely to train lay leaders in social action among the poor; 3) popular or revolutionary organizations dedicated to social transformation; 4) progressive bishops and priests who were willing to share their traditional roles with the laity and encouraged them to believe in the Reformation concept of “the priesthood of all people”; 5) the availability of Spanish translations of the bible.³⁹

As a movement that started among the poor, BECs were very different from traditional lay organizations and movements. The Knights of Columbus and various brotherhoods, the Legion of Mary, the Catholic Social Action movement, the devotional associations were largely middle class groups and focused on charity-oriented activities and programs. Even the more recent groups like the *Cursillo* Movement, the Marriage Encounter groups, the Catholic Youth organization also attracted only the middle class and, like the traditional groups, also avoided anything political. The Charismatic Movement attracted many poor people but also avoided the social dimension of their faith life. The BECs were definitely political not in the sense of identifying with a political party but in the sense of being deeply involved in the political, social, and economic decisions that affect their lives. It was the BECs who carried out to the thousands of poor people the good news as translated to their situation by their bishops

who participated in the Medellin conference. It was a new way of being church or, perhaps, more accurately it was a bringing back of an old way of being church, a church with a preferential option for the poor.

A quick glance at one of the meetings of a Basic Ecclesial Community in Nicaragua will help show how the above sources came together. In 1966, the poet- priest Ernesto Cardenal (a former Trappist monk in the same religious community as Thomas Merton) and other pastoral workers had learned the discussion group method from another Catholic priest in Managua who used it as a faith development strategy for groups of about ten to fifteen people in the surrounding villages. Gradually the discussions included not just their problems with food, work, family, and church but also the social, political, and economic realities that affected their lives. Finally, the participants began asking whether God was interested in their suffering and poverty, whether it was God's will that they remain poor for the rest of their lives. Their reading of the bible revealed to them a God of life who sent his son so that everyone may have life in abundance. They discovered from each other that their poverty was not intended by God, but was rather the result of unjust economic and political systems that were hidden from their eyes. They began to experience a conflict between what they understood the bible to be saying and the daily realities of their lives. These were the questions brought by the *campesino* participants of the BEC in the island of Solentiname led by Cardenal and the pastoral workers that went with him to the island. Here is a BEC discussion recorded by Ernesto Cardenal in a book entitled The Gospel in Solentiname:

Elvis: "The importance of Christ's birth is that it was the birth of the revolution, right? There are many people afraid of the word, as they were afraid of Christ because he was coming to change the world. I remember that they tried to kill him

even when he was just a tiny infant. From then on the revolution has been growing and it keeps growing little by little and nobody can stop it.”

Cardenal: “And it has to grow here also, doesn’t it?”

Pancho: “We have to get rid of selfishness and do what Christ said, and go on with the revolution, as you socialists say. I’m not a socialist; I’m not a revolutionary. I like to hear the talk and grasp what I can but really I’m nothing. Although I would like to see some changes in Nicaragua.”

Manuel: “But if there’s going to be a change, you have to cooperate with it, because it is going to take all of our courage put together.”

Pancho: “But how do you do it! I’d like somebody to tell me, ‘That’s the way it’s going to be done.’ But you can’t! When we rise up they kill us.”

Alejandro: “But look they killed him, too.”

Pancho: “Correct, but he was Christ and we’re never going to compare ourselves with him.”

Manuel: “But I heard there have been other men, like Che Guevarra, who also have died for freedom.”

Pancho: “Right. You can die, you, and tomorrow we’ll all be dancing and we’ll never think that you died for us.”

William: “Then you think that those deaths are useless?”

Pancho: “They’re useless. Or they’re almost useless!”

Young Miriam: “I say that when there is someone who will free our country, there will be another Christ.”

Fernando (to Pancho): “When you say ‘What can I do? Nothing!’ I agree with you. There is really not much we can do individually. But when you ask another ‘What can we do.’ I would say everything. And that day when you ask each other ‘What can we do?’ you’ll already know what you are going to do. And the people all united are the same Christ that you see in this manger scene, made by Marita, that we laid at the foot of the altar during the Christmas season.⁴⁰

The conversation is both simple and complex. There is the simple fear of death but at the same time there is also a complex understanding of the power of collective action in the process of social transformation. While it does not necessitate much thought to make an analogy between the birth of Yeshua and the birth of the Nicaraguan revolution, it requires a fairly sophisticated understanding of ecclesiology to view the revolution as an embodiment of the Church’s mission within history, and, therefore, as a threat to the oppressive powers of the world. Young Myriam expressed the persistent hope of the nation’s youth but also possessed the depth of understanding to declare that those who

work for freedom may be called “another Christ.” Another example of this sort of discussion comes from a BEC in Brazil:

Paolo: “In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5: 19) there is a story about the apostles being arrested and put in prison by the authorities. Then at night an angel appeared and opened the prison doors. Do you think this is true, do we still have angels to set us free?”

Carolina: “Yes, yes, I know it’s true. When Bishop Dom Pedro Casaldaliga was attacked in his house and the police surrounded it with machine guns, no one could get in or out and no one knew what was going on exactly. So, this little girl sneaked in without being seen, got a little message from the bishop, ran to the airport, and hitched a ride to Goiana where a big group of bishops were meeting. They got the message, set up a big fuss, and Dom Pedro was set free. So, that little girl was the angel of the Lord just like the one that set the apostles free.”⁴¹

This may seem like sheer naiveté but in a situation of real oppression, *campesinos* have often relied on their faith and their understanding of the bible as resources for the task of liberation. On November 16, 1989, the world was riveted on El Salvador when the news reported on the death-squad murders of six Jesuits -- all university professors -- and their two women co-workers at the Jesuit Central American University in the city of San Salvador. However, very few people outside of Latin America knew that prior to the Jesuit murders, in El Salvador alone 75,000 had been murdered or “disappeared” by death-squads working for the country’s economic and political elites. Most of these *campesinos* were members of Basic Ecclesial Communities who saw their work for liberation as concrete expressions of their faith. It was the torture, death, and disappearances of these *campesinos* that transformed the faith of the conservative Archbishop Romero into a martyr’s faith as he told his killers a few days before his assassination: “If you kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people.” Although Archbishop Romero’s murder which happened in 1980 -- almost a decade after the (Spanish edition) publication of Gustavo Gutierrez’s A Theology of Liberation -- became

widely known in Europe and North America because it became a popular film, it must be remembered that the thousands of *campesinos* who died before him also gave their lives for their faith.

The similarities of the two BEC discussions cited should not be taken to mean that there is uniformity in method and content among BECs throughout Latin America. Nicaragua is a country of about four million people. It is still very much a poor country. Nevertheless, it has a functional democracy in that it is ruled by a coalition government with representations from nine of the thirteen political groups that emerged after the 1979 revolution. It has a politically active popular church and the BEC meetings are their most regular communal religious gathering. While the country has a huge task ahead in forming a truly democratic society, it has successfully eliminated the oligarchy under the Somoza dynasty, it has had much success in making health care available (although medicine and medical equipment are always in short supply) to virtually all its citizens, and has increased the literacy level of its citizens in the urban and rural areas. The problem of hunger has been eliminated and its citizens, although still poor, enjoy basic liberties. On the other hand, Brazil has a population of about three hundred million people and has had a succession of military rulers with the worst human rights record in the world. Poverty and hunger are rampant; illiteracy is high and unemployment is even worse. Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff has often remarked that were it not for the large number of BECs (about 250,000) throughout Brazil, the country would already have exploded in violent revolutions. Although there is an elected president now running the country, it will take years and a lot of skillful and courageous leadership to bring a modicum of justice and peace to this huge nation. It is here where the BECs have been

most active. Not only are they teaching, learning, and living a radically new way of proclaiming the divine reign for which Yeshua gave his life, they are also revitalizing the Catholic Church and, in so doing, they are carrying out in a non-violent way a much needed social revolution in that nation.

The Papal Social Encyclicals

For this final section, I have chosen five social encyclicals which, I believe, contributed to the Catholic church's journey towards a preferential option for the poor. There is an abundance of excellent commentaries on this particular set of documents and I will not duplicate their work. In the interest of space, I will simply present brief summaries of the five I have chosen, sift through them in search of key themes, and select those which I believe were significant influences in the development of liberation theology.⁴²

Most post-Vatican II historians writing about the development of modern Catholic social thought begin with the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII entitled *Rerum Novarum* (literally "of new things") and written in May of 1891 which dealt with the "condition of the working class" (the title often used to refer to it in English). The reason for the choice is the common contention that this papal document marks a starting point in the Church's long and gradual journey from its centuries (since 325 C. E.) of identification with the interests of the powerful and wealthy to its current and controversial endorsement of the "preferential option for the poor." These historians, however, are careful to point out that the Church did not simply abandon its ministry to the poor and the sick. On the contrary, it has always cared and provided for them. What they are calling attention to is the Church's long silence when it comes to the *economic, social,*

and political structures which cause the misery of the poor -- a silence construed by many poor people as tacit ecclesiastical approval of the policies and practices that kept them impoverished. In the words of Jonathan Kozol, it is a case of “your charity blinding you to the devastation and plunder caused by unjust economic and political structures.”⁴³

Other papal documents have been passionate in calling for mercy on the poor workers but Pope Leo XIII made it very clear that he wanted through the encyclical to immerse the Church in solving, not just alleviating, the social problems of the time which is mainly “the misery and wretchedness pressing so heavily and unjustly on the majority of the working class caused by a small number of very rich individuals who have managed to hang upon the necks of the teeming masses of poor people a yoke no better than that of slavery itself.”⁴⁴

In *Rerum Novarum* the problem of the working class has for its main source the industrialists’ widespread assumption that the laws of economics flow directly from the dictates of human nature. Competition, free market and wage contracts are activities natural to human beings. In condemning the “unjust and heavy yoke” *Rerum Novarum* also severely questions the widely accepted practice that when an employer pays the worker the wages s/he agreed to in the wage contract, the requirements of social justice may be considered to have been met. It contends that in the majority of cases the wage contract is agreed to through “desperation, necessity, and fear of a worse evil” and, therefore, makes workers “victims of violence and injustice” nonetheless.

How does *Rerum Novarum* propose to change the inhuman condition of the working class? Throughout Christendom the Church has always believed that the authority of the State comes from God. Consistent with this belief, it insists that it is the

primary duty of the State to protect the common good and the welfare of the poor and powerless. Is it advocating then a State controlled economy? In my view, and at the risk of oversimplification, it may briefly be said that in the classical theory of liberal capitalism, the authority of the State should be limited to the political welfare of its citizens such as defending the nation from external aggression, and promoting order and stability in society. The government, according to this theory, should allow free enterprise, open competition, and the forces of the market to operate without interference. Included in this theory is the assumption that the State and its structures of governance are neutral in the midst of conflicting economic forces at play in society. On the opposite side is Marxist theory where the State is perceived as never neutral because those who possess economic power always hold political power. In this view, those who control political power use it to protect and advance their and their friends' economic interests, always to the detriment of the working class. Thus, poverty is the result of those with political power manipulating the economy to serve only their interests. While always careful to avoid favoring socialism, *Rerum Novarum* nevertheless calls on the State as the protector of the common good to protect the interests of the workers from the excessive greed of the industrialists. At the same time it rejects any suggestion that one class is naturally hostile to another class and that the wealthy and the workers are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. It gives reasons for rejecting class conflict:

Just as the symmetry of the human frame is the result of the suitable arrangement of the different parts of the body, so is the State ordained by nature to provide an environment of harmony and agreement between these two classes, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic. Each needs the other: capital cannot do without labor; nor labor without capital.⁴⁵

But Leo was not blind to the realities of power at the writing of the encyclical in 1891. He was well aware that the wealthy did exercise control over the branches of government, that “the party which holds power manipulates for its own benefit all the economic goods and deprive the exploited and powerless multitude.” Realizing that the State could not fulfill its obligation of protecting the workers, Leo faced two options. The first was to call the rich and powerful to repentance and conversion of heart, and to prevail on the poor to be patient and bear their suffering until the conversion process was complete and needed changes were made. The other option involved encouraging the poor to organize, to defend their rights, and to confront the wealthy for their abuses, in the same way that Moses confronted the wealthy and powerful in Egypt so he could set his people free. Unfortunately, because of his fear of disorder and instability, Leo’s choice was closer to the first than the second option. For him, political and economic change must happen not through a radical restructuring of political and economic structures but through the conversion of the hearts of those who had control over those structures. His passionate call for change stopped short of any confrontation and activism against the holders of political and economic power. Instead, he admonished the workers “to fully and faithfully perform the work ... never to injure property, nor outrage the person of an employer ... never to resort to violence in defending their cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder.”⁴⁶

But despite Leo’s inability to see structural injustice as the main source of the “misery and wretchedness of the poor” he so passionately condemned, *Rerum Novarum* is still an exceedingly valuable document because it marked a definitive beginning for a process of transformation that would lead the Church to a new loyalty and advocacy,

namely, the plight of the poor and exploited workers. One way to illustrate the radicalness of Leo's stance is to imagine the present pope, John Paul II, writing an encyclical declaring himself to be on the side of women in their struggle towards full acceptance into the sacerdotal order of the Catholic Church.

Pope Pius XI wrote *Quadragesimo Anno* (*QA*) in May, 1931 on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It was a time of great economic and social upheaval affecting not just Western Europe and North America but the whole world.

Quadragesimo Anno begins by affirming Leo's contention that the economic and political orders affect in significant ways the faith life of Christians and urges both clergy and laity to commit themselves to the implementation of the social teachings of the Church by making them part of seminary and university curriculum and of their pastoral ministry.⁴⁷

On the issue of labor and capital, Pius again followed Leo in affirming their interdependence in the economic order but added the observation that in history capital had largely claimed the greatest share of the products and profits leaving only the barest minimum to labor. Working persons must be given their just share of the products they help produce in order for them to live decent lives. As seen in this encyclical, it means that they are to be given a *living wage* which would enable them to provide the basic necessities for their families. If business owners violate this basic obligation, public authorities must be called to intervene. Again, consistent with *Rerum Novarum* the State is accorded the primary responsibility of controlling and reforming the social order. Departing from *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno* alerts the State to the fact that the economy can no longer be left to free enterprise because "economic supremacy of the

few has completely replaced free competition.” The power of the State must be used to imbue economic institutions with a spirit of justice either through the creation of structures for economic cooperation or through State intervention in the just resolution of labor-management conflicts.⁴⁸

Quadragesimo Anno provides a rather severe criticism of both capitalist and socialist economic systems. It accuses a few wealthy men -- in both systems -- of dominating the economic scene, of turning the State into a slave serving their supreme greed:

The State which is supposed to be the highest arbiter, ruling in the manner of a just king and transcending the conflicting interest of small groups, and which must act to protect justice and preserve the common good, has instead become a slave to the supreme greed of a few wealthy men.⁴⁹

Because the State can no longer be trusted to fulfill its primary duty, *Quadragesimo Anno* advocates the formation of employer-worker councils or “vocational structures” that cut across class divisions and deliberate periodically on matters affecting the totality of the economic life they share. Socialism is also condemned for its godlessness, its abolition of private property, and its promotion of class violence.

The failure of the liberal capitalist system as evidenced at the time by the Great Depression left a lot of people disillusioned, betrayed, and doubtful about its ability to create progress and stability in the future. Besides, even when it seemed to be working, it only brought wealth to a small group of people. For Pius, this was solid proof that capitalism was not the better alternative (to socialism) that people believed it to be. He was clearly looking for a third alternative. In this he was different from Leo who was unwilling to undertake any structural change for fear that these changes would open the way to the evils of socialism. Unfortunately, outside of the general principles he

delineated -- protect private property, provide living wage, create structural monitors for abuses in the economic order, preserve the common good -- he left the “technical details” of this third way to those with the expertise in the field.

The greatest contribution of Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* was his recognition that Leo XIII’s admonition for change through a conversion of heart was not enough to improve the lives of poor workers. He saw that even the best-intentioned industrialist or employer could be caught in economic and political structures that embody violence, classism, and injustice. While *Rerum Novarum* is a passionate call to take the side of the poor and the workers, *Quadragesimo Anno* encourages structural change as an effective way of responding to this call.

Mater et Magistra and *Pacem in Terris* are encyclicals by pope John XXIII which were written in 1961 and 1963 respectively. The title of the first encyclical portrayed the Church as mother (mater) and teacher (magistra) as it looked upon the world longing for peace (pacem in terris). In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John started with a review of the key themes of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. He then described the changing context in the economic, political, and social orders seventy years after the former and thirty years after the latter. *Mater et Magistra* is addressed to the whole world -- to Christians and non-Christians -- by a “mother” concerned about all her children especially in light of the discovery of the atomic energy. It laments the widening gap between developed and developing countries and condemned the trade imbalances that perpetuate extreme poverty in the latter countries. While it praises the conquest of outer space and the shrinking of the globe as a result of faster forms of transportation and communication technology, it also expresses hope that advances in these fields may be

applied to reducing the wide gap between the rich and the poor, and between industrialized and developing countries of the world.⁵⁰

The continuing relevance of the social teachings of the Church are recalled and affirmed as principles to be followed in addressing the persistence of economic problems. The arms race is blamed as one of the main reasons for draining precious resources from their more worthy life-giving use in initiatives and programs for social uplift.

Mater et Magistra reiterates Pius' insistence on the need for the State to intervene in reducing economic imbalances so long as the *principle of subsidiarity* is not ignored. This traditional principle, which states that conflicts should be resolved first at the level where it first occurred before a higher body is called to intervene, protects the initiatives and resources of those closest to the problem thereby placing the primary responsibility and accountability on the shoulders of the parties involved in the resolution of conflict. However, extreme and chronic poverty among the vast majority of the people seems to call for some exception to this principle:

Recent developments of science and technology provide additional reasons why more than ever before public authorities should intervene in reducing imbalances, whether these be between various sectors of economic life, or between different regions of the same nation, or even between different peoples of the world as a whole.⁵¹

Instead of these advances bringing a long-awaited relief to the problem of persistent poverty, the opposite has occurred. This call for State intervention in economic affairs is the reason for the negative reaction of many pro-business and ultra-conservative Catholics who characterized Pope John's encyclical as sympathetic to socialists.⁵²

The families of poor workers received special consideration from *Mater et Magistra* when it insists that in the determination of the wage contract, the employer

must consider a life of dignity for the worker's family. Workers, the encyclical states, must be given opportunities to share in every aspect of the industry especially in cases of long-term employment. Whenever this is done, relationships of interdependence instead of distrust are fostered benefiting both labor and management.

There is also concern expressed over the plight of farmers and farming communities. The Church listens not just to industrial but to agricultural workers as well. The latter are particularly vulnerable not just to the fluctuations of the market but to severe changes in the weather as well. Public authorities could also be of assistance in securing just remuneration for the farmers' work which result in products essential to the common good.

On the international scene, *Mater et Magistra* encourages developed countries to provide economic aid to less developed ones because he believed that peace could not be achieved while this wide economic gap existed between poor and rich countries. It warns donor nations, however, that economic aid should be given without violating the integrity of the receiving country: "economically developed countries should not, in giving aid to poorer nations, use the goods to impose their own way of life upon them ... nor should they seek ways of dominating them."⁵³

Mater et Magistra concludes by calling for cooperation among nations and peoples of the world in the spirit of truth and justice, a cooperation based on the brotherhood and sisterhood of all members of God's family on this planet

Pacem in Terris (peace on earth) was written during the first year of the Second Vatican Council. It declares to "all people of good will" that peace can only be achieved by following the just order God intended for the human family. Thus, the main body of

the document dwells on the different and corresponding rights and duties to be followed by individuals, public authorities, national governments, and the international community, if this order is to exist. These rights and duties are founded on the belief that “every human being is a person, endowed with intelligence and free will, who has universal and inviolable rights and duties.”⁵⁴

John was acutely aware of the possibility of nuclear war because *Pacem in Terris* was written shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the erection of the Berlin wall at the height of the Cold War. This encyclical like the previous one condemns the arms race because it diverts money and resources *from* programs and projects that address dire social and economic needs *into* war-making tools and weapons. Furthermore, the building and stockpiling of nuclear arms create an atmosphere of fear and distrust which make peacemaking an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task.

This is the first encyclical that addresses the issue of racism. It insists, using strong language, on the “elimination of every trace of racism,” and on protecting the rights of ethnic minorities to pursue a process of economic development consistent with their cultural and religious traditions. It wants the community of nations to remember that the horrors of colonialization began when one nation considered itself superior to another. The order that gives birth to genuine peace is one where racism — individual, cultural, institutional — has ceased to exist. The highly interdependent nature of global reality today makes it an urgent necessity to promote and actively support the work of the United Nations. Along with the mission of the UN, Christians and all people of good will must seek creative ways of working together for the sake of world peace. The encyclical concludes with these words:

Peace will be but an empty sounding word unless it is founded on the order which this present document has outlined in confident hope: an order founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice by freedom.⁵⁵

Pope Paul VI issued *Populorum Progressio* two years after the Second Vatican Council and it is the first encyclical devoted entirely to international development issues. He expanded on the notion alluded to by John XXIII that peace is impossible as long as a wide economic gap between rich and poor nations exists. An unjust economic order is one of the major causes of war. Peace therefore is the result of economic justice. Of all the encyclicals, Paul's *Populorum Progressio* gives the severest criticism of the basic tenets of capitalism. It gives a new meaning to development in the first few lines of the document:

The development of peoples has the close attention of the Church, particularly the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; and of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment.⁵⁶

These words are followed by similar statements from *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra*, and *Pacem in Terris* which are encapsulated in this one sentence: "Today the peoples in hunger are making a dramatic appeal to the peoples blessed with abundance ... the Church *shudders at this cry of anguish....*"⁵⁷ The whole encyclical is Paul's response to this cry of anguish. In continuity with the previous four, it explores the nature of poverty and explains its persistence, articulates the responsibilities of the Church, calls for economic planning and aid as ways to promote development, urges equality and justice in trade relations among nations, and calls development the new name for peace.

If there is still any doubt in the minds of Christians about the confluence of the “temporal affairs of this world” and the “eternal matters of the spirit,” *Populorum Progressio* erases it by declaring that the Church has been “founded to establish on earth the Kingdom of Heaven.” The earlier encyclicals he cites have made similar statements but this wants to be clear that it is the duty of every Christian to begin building the Kingdom of Heaven here and now and not in the afterlife.

In its discussion of private property, the encyclical contends that the earth and its goods are meant for everyone and that all rights must be subordinated to this. Private property, therefore, is not an absolute and unconditional right. Public authority must not only support but also enforce the idea that, at times in the interest of the common good, expropriation of private property must be allowed.⁵⁸ These are powerful and radical words indeed.

In conclusion, it may be said that the phrase which captures best the approaches used in all four sources discussed above is the one that guided pope John XXIII in transforming the image of Catholic church: “learning to discern the signs of the times.” While differing contexts must be acknowledged, this phrase may be predicated to the Second Vatican Council, the CELAM Conference in Medellin, the Basic Ecclesial Communities, and the Social Encyclicals. I conclude this chapter by indicating the changes in attitude and practice manifested in these sources.

All four major sources fully agree that the commandment to love the neighbor is not possible within an individualistic and privatized conception of religion. The very concept of neighbor thoroughly contradicts a relationship with the divine that is focused on the self alone and excludes one’s neighbors. Thus, the first change in attitude of the

Church as it “looks out of the open window” is the shift from a private to a public way of being church. As it becomes conscious of the necessity of including the neighbor’s welfare in the practice of faith, the Church needs to embrace the historical locus in which this neighbor lives and has her or his being. The second change then is the shift from an anti-historical and spiritualistic understanding of the divine plan for human salvation to an historical and incarnational understanding of such a plan. The traditional wall between the material and the spiritual needs to be torn down and give way to embracing the concept of enfoldment of matter and spirit. The third change comes from the realization that while acts of charity are needed, they often form a formidable cover that can hide the root or structural causes of suffering. Therefore, the Church must move from the charity-only to the charity-with-justice ministry to the poor in the human family. This much needed shift is powerfully expressed in Archbishop Helder Camara’s well-known remark to the soldiers sent to arrest him: “When I feed the hungry, you call me a saint; when I ask why they are hungry you call me a communist.” The fourth change comes from the variations, found in these four sources, of the statement made in *Quadragesimo Anno* that “the world is sick,” because of the “misery and wretchedness” that plague “the least of our brothers and sisters.” In this shift -- perhaps, the most difficult, the most misunderstood, and the most resisted -- the church is being asked to relinquish its long and often hidden preferential option for the rich and to commit itself to a preferential option for the poor.

These changes in attitude require corresponding shifts in practice. Theology which had long been a solely rational, intellectual pursuit employing speculative categories must now widen its scope to include and appreciate the praxical wisdom of

communities of poor and oppressed peoples, and the important findings of the social sciences. The heavily clergy-oriented and hierarchical structure of ministry in the Church must give way to the biblically sanctioned priesthood-of-the-people and grass-roots approaches to proclaiming and implementing its mission. It is the laity that is leading the Church and the clergy must learn to accept and take their leadership seriously. From an institution that has always professed a monopoly on the truth of salvation, the Catholic Church must now learn to be a pilgrim on the road searching, along with the rest of humanity, for that elusive land “flowing with milk and honey.”

These changes in attitude and practice will give birth to a new way of doing theology and of being a theologian. The next chapter will look at this “newborn” and the power structure it has to contend with in order to survive.

End Notes

- 1 As the author of the world famous A Theology of Liberation (Orbis, 1973), the first and still the best classic exposition of the movement, Gustavo Gutierrez is considered by many to be the “father” of liberation theology. But he denies the honor and says instead that although he writes the books about it, liberation theology was founded by the “world’s anonymous.” He began his graduate work in medicine but became ill before finishing his medical degree. He later decided to become a priest and entered the seminary earning degrees in philosophy and psychology at Louvain, Belgium. He also earned graduate degrees in theology from Lyons, France (doctorate in theology) and from the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained a priest in 1959 and has since then lived and worked in a slum in Lima, Peru. He teaches at the Catholic University in Lima and sometimes comes to New York during the summer to teach at the Maryknoll School of Theology. In addition to A Theology of Liberation, he has also written The Power of the Poor in History (Orbis, 1983), We Drink from our own Wells (Orbis 1984), On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent (Orbis, 1987), and The Density of the Present (Orbis, 1999). Today, Gutierrez still lives in the same slum in Peru where everybody -- young and old -- calls him their beloved “Gustavo.”
- 2 Gustavo Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, p.60. The biblical foundation of all of liberation theology in Latin America is found in the work of many biblical scholars who study the

prophetic tradition, particularly the work of the renowned biblical scholar Gerhard von Rad who writes that “there is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all human relationships as that of justice.” Latin American biblical scholars--Elsa Tamez and Porfirio Miranda--believe that Jesus brings this concept to historical reality in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. In this work, Gutierrez also distinguishes liberation theology from “theologies of development, revolution, and violence to which it is erroneously linked and sometimes reduced”(p.61).

- 3 Richard Tarnas’s The Passion of the Western Mind, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, pp. 175-190, gives a brief and brilliant exposition on the ways Thomas Aquinas applied Aristotle’s philosophy to Christian theology: “Thus Aquinas gave to Aristotelian thought a new religious significance—or, as it has been said, Aquinas converted Aristotle to Christianity and baptized him. Yet it is equally true that in the long run Aquinas converted medieval Christianity to Aristotle and to the values Aristotle represented” (p.189). The same may be said of Augustine’s use of Plato’s philosophy.
- 4 Ultra-conservative groups like *Opus Dei* (God’s Work), The League of St. Michael, and Catholics United for the Faith, to name a few, still insist on the use of these titles to refer to the Catholic church (I use the lower case for “church” in protest against these right wing groups) today because they contend that Vatican II handed the church to the devil. They believe all Vatican II documents should be added to the “Syllabus of Errors” issued by Pius IX in 1849.
- 5 Alfred North Whitehead, Adventure of Ideas, New York: The Free Press, 1967. p.274. In Whitehead’s process philosophy, reality is seen not as divided into “substances” and “accidents” where the former can exist independently of the latter, but as an organic whole whose parts are interdependent, processive, and concrescent always changing as it responds to the “lure of the divine.” According to Whitehead, to assign supreme value to one part is to commit the fallacy of “misplaced concreteness.” For pope John XXIII, when the Catholic church placed the security of its institutional structure over the needs of the people of God, it was guilty of the sin of misplaced concreteness.
- 6 I use the Hebrew original “Yeshua” to support the efforts of many contemporary theologians and biblical scholars to restore the Jewishness of Jesus as a way of countering or eradicating the still strong trace of anti-Semitism in many mainline and fundamentalist Christian congregations. This Yeshua before Christianity is also essential to the historical claims of liberation theologians about Jesus’s life and mission. Additionally, I use “Yeshua” as a protest against our culture’s commercialization and commodification of the name “Jesus.”
- 7 Norman, Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963; Dorothee Soelle, Christ the Representative, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967; Ernst Kaseman, Jesus Means Freedom, Philadelphia: Fortress,

1970; Gerhard Von Rad, The Message of the Prophets, New York: Harper & Row, 1972; Etienne Trocme, Jesus as Seen by his Contemporaries, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973; Joachim Jeremias, The Promise of Jesus to the Nations, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982. The key points of these books are the subject of Albert Nolan's brief but excellent work, Jesus Before Christianity, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

- 8 Official Church documents use the first two Latin words. References are made by giving the title followed by the paragraph number. Hence *Gaudium et Spes*, 1. Most English translations of Church documents have not been updated since the 1960s and use gender exclusive pronouns even when the Latin original itself does not use them. Unless otherwise indicated all translations from the Latin are mine. The Latin version of the documents are found in *Acta Apostolicae Sedes*.
- 9 E.E. Hales, Pope Pius IX, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962, pp.266-273.
- 10 *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 4.
- 11 The Latin expression *ex opere operato* which literally means "the work performed" came to be understood as "magic performed". The recipient did not have to do anything else; it was enough that the right signs and words were performed by the clergy. See Joseph H. Lynch, The Medieval Church: A Brief History, New York: Longman, 1992, pp. 273-302; see also, Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred, Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1982, pp. 9-150.
- 12 *Gaudium et Spes*, 25, my italics. GS repeatedly makes the point concerning the centrality of the social dimension of genuinely Christian spiritual life.
- 13 *Gaudium et Spes*, 17, my italics.
- 14 *Gaudium et Spes*, 31.
- 15 These subheadings reflect the sections of *Gaudium et Spes* that are relevant to this chapter.
- 16 *Gaudium et Spes*, 63-72.
- 17 *Gaudium et Spes*, 74, my italics. In past documents the emphasis was on uniformity and universality throughout the Catholic world. A new attitude is reflected here in the recognition of local, national, regional differences.
- 18 *Gaudium et Spes*, 75-77.
- 19 Isaiah, 2: 4.

- 20 *Gaudium et Spes* is the longest of all the 16 documents of the Second Vatican Council at 23,335 words while the average length of the rest of the documents is about 7,000 words.
- 21 In John Cobb's introduction to Delwin Brown's To Set at Liberty, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981, p. ix.
- 22 Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred pp. 307-346.
- 23 *Justicia*, 11.
- 24 *Justicia*, 17.
- 25 Alonzo de Zorita, Los Siglos de la Sangre: Vida y Labor en Mejico Ansejo, Ciudad de Mejico, Mejico: Edicol, 1967. p. 178, (my translation).
- 26 Adam Corson Finnerty, World Citizen, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982. p.13
- 27 *Justicia*, 3-4.
- 28 *Justicia*, 8.
- 29 *Justicia*, 16-23.
- 30 *Paz*, 3-5.
- 31 *Paz*, 8
- 32 Al Gedicks, "The Nationalization of Copper in Chile: Antecedents and Consequences," The Review of Radical Economics, Fall 1973, pp. 3-27. For an analysis of similar issues from a historical perspective during colonial and modern times, see Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origin of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century. New York: Academy Press, 1974; and The Modern World System II: Mercantilism and Consolidation of the European World Economy, 1600-1750, Academic Press, 1980. This lengthy study shows the persistence of the economic and political structures established by European colonial powers in Latin America. As European domination waned, the United States simply replaced the Europeans and maneuvered to maintain such structures. Liberation theologians allude to this phenomenon in their analysis of the Latin American situation and label it "the dependency theory of economy and politics." European and North American multinational corporations keep the economies of Latin American countries dependent on them, and political power is held in Latin American countries by the local political and economic elite who are loyal only to European and North American money. Of course, conservative critics of liberation theology

like Michael Novak and William Buckley deny this vehemently and call the dependency theory “blame the USA theory” and admonish the poor in Latin America to quit blaming and start working. This was also the foundation of the Reagan-Bush foreign policy towards Latin America.

- 33 This is easily possible because of what William Grieder calls the “super mobility of capital” of European and North American multinational corporations in Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of America Democracy, New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992, p. 381.
- 34 *Paz*, 12.
- 35 *Paz*, 13.
- 36 *Paz*, 15.
- 37 *Paz*, 16-18.
- 38 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: The Seabury Press, 1970, p. 19.
- 39 The most thorough work I have found on basic ecclesial communities (also called basic Christian communities) has been done by Marcelo Dec. Azevedo, SJ, Basic Ecclesial Communities, trans. John Drury, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1987. See also Thomas Bruneau, “Basic Christian Communities in Latin America, their Nature and Significance,” in Daniel Levine, ed., Churches and Politics in Latin America, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981, pp.225-237, and Guillermo Cook, The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Protestant Perspective, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.
- 40 Ernesto Cardenal, The Gospel of Solentiname, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976. pp. 19-20.
- 41 Carlos Mesters, “The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People,” in The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities: Papers from the International Congress of Theology, February 20- March 2, 1980, Sao Paulo, Brazil, eds. Sergio Torres & John Eagleson, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981, pp. 206-7.
- 42 Papal writings are ranked in degrees of authority according to their designation. *Epistulae Encyclicae* (encyclical letters) are teaching instruments which explain and admonish members of the Church about certain faith and moral issues and ranks above *epistulae apostolicae* (apostolic letters) which covers administrative and executive matters relative to church governance. These are explained in more

detail by Thomas Harte, Papal Social Encyclicals, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith Publishing, 1960, p. 7.

- 43 Graduation Keynote address, Loyola University, May 18, 1991.
- 44 *Rerum Novarum*, 2.
- 45 *Rerum Novarum*, 16.
- 46 *Rerum Novarum*, 17.
- 47 *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA), 19-29.
- 48 *Quadragesimo Anno*, 73-108.
- 49 *Quadragesimo Anno*, 109.
- 50 I discuss these two encyclicals together because they complement each other. Their themes bring out the idea of the Church as a mother and teacher of peace and remind members that the best way to give birth to, and teach, peace is to *live* it as my mother had taught me.
- 51 *Mater et Magistra*, 54.
- 52 This was one of the objections to the encyclical that Michael Novak presented in a virulent response entitled “*Mater, Si; Magistra, No!*” which he has expanded in book form (*Will it Liberate?*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986). Others — especially the pro business lobby — objected to the “socialistic tone” of the encyclical in its call for state intervention in the free market. Also, it made matters worse that Pope John’s “*socialum rationum incrementa*” which appears about ten times between paragraphs 58-70 has been translated to “increase in socialization” or “increasing socialism” in various English versions. Anyone with high school Latin exposure will know that “increase in social interactions” or “increase in social relations” is the more accurate translation. Interestingly, the encyclical has also been attacked by liberals and radicals for its passionate defense of private property. See George E. McCarthy and Royal W. Rhodes, Eclipse of Justice: Ethics, Economics & the Lost Traditions of American Catholicism, Maryknoll, New York : Orbis Books, 1992, pp. 167-71.
- 53 *Mater et Magistra*, 109-172.
- 54 *Pacem in Terris*, 11-77.
- 55 *Pacem in Terris*, 167.
- 56 *Populorum Progressio* (PP), 1.

57 *Populorum Progressio*, 13.

58 *Populorum Progressio*, 14–64.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHALLENGE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The previous chapter presented and supported the ideas and work of individuals and groups who set in motion a gradual revolution — from a preferential option for the rich to a preferential option for the poor — in the identity and mission of the Church as manifested in its official documents from the papal encyclicals, the *Gaudium et Spes* document of the Second Vatican Council, the *Justicia* and *Paz* documents of the Bishops of Latin America, to the living biblical hermeneutic of the Basic Ecclesial Communities. The combined energy generated by this historic set of events moved some Latin American theologians to undertake what they call *el proyecto historico*, later known as liberation theology.

This chapter seeks to understand this new way of doing theology and attempts to describe the challenge it poses to the traditional ways of being a faith community (*ecclesia*) within the Catholic church. The conceptual current of this discussion will flow along four interrelated questions: What is new in this theology? How is liberation theology done? What is its relationship with the ideas of Karl Marx? What changes does it want to make in the life of the *ecclesia*?

Formulating A New Theological Question

It must be noted at the outset that there is not a single liberation theology. In fact, it would be more accurate to use “liberation theologies.” Over three decades have past since Gustavo Gutierrez first presented its main themes to a small group of theologians in Chimbute, Peru. In the years that followed, his seminal thoughts, developed fully in A Theology of Liberation (1972), have been applied by many theologians to social justice

issues under different contexts in many parts of the world. Immigrants from third world nations, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups, living in Western Europe and North America have applied his ideas in combating racism and other forms of discrimination within religious congregations. Although liberation theologies coming out of Asia and Africa focus on interfaith relations and inculturation, they clearly maintain close connections with the key theological positions of Latin American liberation theologians. I want to limit myself to liberation theology in Latin America without forgetting the differences among the various countries in this vast region. As I pointed out in the BEC section of chapter two, the problems facing Nicaraguan Christians are different from those Brazilians face. Common themes or family resemblances will become evident as this chapter progresses.

The experience of the type of poverty that results from injustice is one of the common themes of liberation theology. For all liberation theologians, any theology done in their part of the world that does not spring forth from the lived implications of the social injustice committed against the poor is “mere panting -- religious breathlessness.”¹ This experience of poverty is considerably distinct from the vow of poverty required of members of religious orders. While not diminishing the spiritual value of this sacrifice -- giving up the notion of individual ownership -- liberation theologians point out that this voluntary poverty is in no way related to the poverty that the vast majority of Latin Americans experience. Although it seems obvious, it is important to make this distinction because many Western missionaries sent to Latin America in the decades before the Second Vatican Council often used their “vow of poverty” as rationale and model for teaching and promoting a form of spirituality that ignored the dismal socio-

economic conditions of the poor. This view confuses the missionaries' voluntary poverty with that which results from years of economic and political injustice. Another notion of poverty that liberation theologians want to change is the supposedly biblical idea referred to in the gospel of Matthew as "poverty in spirit." This had been taken to mean that poor people without the basic necessities in life could use their condition to follow a spiritual path in the same way that the wealthy could, because what supposedly mattered was the common (for both the rich and the poor) possibility of "poverty in spirit." "This point of view," writes Gutierrez, "equates the case of the rich person who is spiritually poor with the case of the poor person who is rich at heart."² According to Gutierrez, this sort of exegesis ignores the varying contexts and nuances involved in sound biblical hermeneutics. It takes a phrase and isolates it from the whole body of the gospel, a practice which violates a key principle in biblical interpretation. The phrase in the gospel of Luke ("blessed are you poor," 6:20) taken by itself literally would mean: you are blessed in your condition of poverty and, therefore, you should remain poor if you want to be blessed. The one in Matthew ("blessed are the poor in Spirit," 5:1) taken by itself would mean not only that the poor does not have to get out of his/her poverty for what is supposedly important is "one's disposition" towards it. It also implies that the rich need not examine the manner through which they acquired their wealth as long as there is no "inordinate attachment to it."

These euphemisms and equivocations surrounding the concept of poverty have prevented people for hundreds of years from seeing the reality of social injustice that is the root cause of poverty in Latin America. Furthermore, this decontextualized exegesis has led to "comforting and tranquilizing conclusions." Taken as wholes both the gospels

of Luke and Matthew — indeed all synoptic and Johannine versions — do not ask the poor to accept their poverty. To say that the poor should accept their misery because they will be compensated for in the afterlife is to distort the message of the gospel as manifested in the life and mission of Yeshua.

If we believe that the kingdom of God is a gift which is received in history, and if we believe, as the eschatological promises — so charged with human and historical content — indicate to us, that the kingdom of God necessarily implies the reestablishment of justice in this world, then we must believe that Christ says that the poor are blessed *because* the kingdom of God has begun.... In other words, the elimination of the exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human has begun.... They are blessed because the coming of the kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of fellowship ... poverty is an evil and therefore incompatible with the kingdom of God, which has begun in our history and embraces the totality of human existence.³

It is important to note that liberation theologians choose the term “begun” because they acknowledge the message of Catholic eschatology that the fulfillment of the divine kingdom will only come to its fullness at the end of time. They also acknowledge that there will always be poverty on this planet (as results of sheer laziness and/or natural disasters, etc). What they hope to change is the type of poverty that is caused by human injustice embodied and perpetuated in political, economic, educational, and religious institutions. Thus, the experience of poverty that is foundational to liberation theology is “poverty as a commitment of solidarity and protest” against these injustices.⁴ It is an experience that is inspired by the prophetic tradition of the three religions of the bible (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), a tradition that vigorously works against human degradation and exploitation.

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff begin one of their books on liberation theology with a story about a bishop meeting a hungry woman and her four children on the steps of a cathedral:

He saw that they were fainting from hunger; the baby seemed to be dead. He said: 'Give the baby some milk, woman!' 'I can't, my lord,' she answered. The bishop went on insisting that she should, and she that she could not. Finally because of his insistence, she opened her blouse. Her breast was bleeding; the baby had been sucking violently on it and had drunk blood. The mother who had given it life was feeding it, like the pelican, with her own blood, her own life. Horrified and moved, the bishop knelt down in front of the woman, placed his hand on the baby's head, and there and then vowed that as long as such hunger existed, he would feed at least one hungry child each day.⁵

The misery of the woman and her children in this story is not an isolated incident. There are millions of hungry and homeless women on the steps of cathedrals, in shantytowns, and in the streets of Latin American countries and the rest of the Third World. The Boffs give more disturbing statistics to support their claim that the world is very much in need of the practical implications of the love of neighbor which Christians have supposedly made the heart of their religion. They ask their readers to consider:

1. Five hundred million persons starving;
2. One billion, six hundred million persons whose life expectancy is less than sixty (when a person in one of the developed countries reaches the age of forty five, he or she is reaching middle age; in most of Africa or Latin America, a person has little hope of living to that age);
3. One billion persons living in absolute poverty;
4. One billion, five hundred million persons with no access to the most basic medical care.
5. Five hundred million with no work or only occasional work and a per capita income of less than \$150 a year;
6. Eight hundred fourteen million who are illiterate;
7. Two billion with no regular, dependable water supply.⁶

Depending on the geography of one's experience, there are differences in the ways people react to this statistics. For the vast majority of the citizens of industrialized

nations these numbers are faceless; others may remember a face or two in these numbers as they drive home to and from work; some may go the long way in order to avoid running into these so-called “lazy bums”; there may be a few who help out by giving donations of money and food; fewer still may be those who get involved in addressing the root causes of hunger and homelessness. It may simply be due to an uncaring attitude, but it is more likely due to the fact that in a culture of plenty the experience of poverty does not imprint itself boldly on their consciousness. In First World countries, poverty tends to be hidden in geographical pockets some have referred to as the Fourth World. However, the vast majority of the citizens of the Third World who look at this statistics see the faces of their families, friends, and fellow citizens as the human content of these numbers. The ongoing experience of poverty and marginalization permeates their consciousness. While the affluent in industrialized nations offer thanks to God for their blessing, those living in poor countries seek answers to their homelessness, joblessness, hunger, disease and malnutrition, and death.

When these differences are seen in the light of faith, they become questions of justice. Liberation theologians ask the question often repeated by the poor: Why does God provide one group of people with all the blessings of heaven and earth and send others to a life of persistent poverty, powerlessness and marginalization? If all human beings are indeed made in the image and likeness of the Creator, are some people made closer to the divine image, and therefore blessed, and others less, and therefore, cursed?

There is a fluid consensus among liberation theologians that liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustices done to the poor. Gustavo Gutierrez begins his magnum opus by re-viewing the *classical* approaches to theology. He is careful to

connect with church traditions and explains that by classical he does not mean those approaches in the past that have been “definitively superseded.”⁷ Gutierrez does not clearly define “classical” but his understanding of the term is similar to that of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s who defines it as

that which speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past, a mere testimony to something that still needs to be interpreted, but says something to the present as if it were said specially to it. What we call ‘classical’ does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its own constant communication it does overcome it. The classical, then, is certainly timeless, but this timelessness is a mode of historical being.⁸

Gutierrez then does not want to replace the classical definition of theology – *fides quaerens intellectum* – because he believes that the “the essential effort to understand the faith remains.” Rather, he wants to restore an essential element that has been neglected as academic theology became normative.

In the early years of the Church, theology was closely linked with efforts to follow a spiritual path. Spiritual masters reflected on the scriptures, the teachings of the Church fathers, and the lives of holy men and women in order to gain the sort of wisdom necessary to help spiritual seekers along their journey. However, because of human weakness and differences in spiritual capacities, there soon developed a threefold pattern on the spiritual journey: the beginner, the midpointer, and the advanced. In an effort to speak the language and thought of the times, spiritual seekers, especially those in the advanced stages of the journey, acquired “a metaphysics which stressed the existence of a higher world and the transcendence of an Absolute from which everything came and to which everything returned.... The present life, on the other hand, was regarded as essentially contingent and was not valued sufficiently.”⁹ According to Gutierrez, the separation between theology and the pursuit of spirituality reached its peak in the

fourteenth century when theologians ended up in universities and spiritual masters in confessionals and monasteries. While he laments this parting of ways, he maintains that the role of theology as an essential element in the nurturing of spiritual life – the classical role – still, in the words of Gadamer, “says something to the present, as if it were said specially to it.”

Contributing to the rift between theology and the pursuit of spiritual life was the attempt around the twelfth century to turn theology into a science-- not in the way we understand this term today but in the sense of a systematized rational knowledge. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas including a long list of scholastics, who often attributed to the Great Doctor even those he did not intend, established the function of theology to explain the faith in a way that would be understandable to the highly rational discourse of the times. Again, Gutierrez believes that this role of theology continues into our day.

But he adds that

reason has, especially today, *many other manifestations than philosophical ones*. The understanding of the faith is also following along new paths in our day: the social, psychological, and biological sciences. The social sciences, for example, are extremely important for theological reflection in Latin America. *Theological thought not characterized by such a rationality and disinterestedness would not be truly faithful to an understanding of faith.* ¹⁰

Gutierrez laments the exclusively scholastic philosophical rationality used by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which only assigned an ancillary role for theology and theologians vis-à-vis the official teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the Catholic church, i.e., “1) to define, present, and explain revealed truths; 2) to examine doctrine, to denounce and condemn false doctrine, and to defend true ones; 3) to teach revealed truths authoritatively.” He rejects not only these rigid functions of theology but also the narrowness of the philosophical rationality on which they are based. He wants to retain

theology as wisdom and theology as rational knowledge but he insists that it is anachronistic to dwell on one or another specific achievement gained in historical context different from ours.

The signs of our times call for bringing together again theology and spirituality. This is achieved by viewing and doing theology as critical reflection on “praxis,” understood as a living and thinking of the faith in a transformative — of self and society— manner. The sources of liberation theology examined in the previous chapter point to this new role for the church as it responds to the needs of a particular time and culture. “By preaching the Gospel message, by its sacraments, and by the charity of its members, the Church proclaims and shelters the gift of God’s reign in the heart of human history.” History is the place for both theology and spirituality, otherwise it simply degenerates into “glorified panting”; for, where else can the central Christian commandment about loving the neighbor happen if not in the here and now of historical space and time. Commitment to the poor manifested in the loving service of transforming the oppressive conditions that enslave them is the first act in liberation theology.

Theology follows; it is a second step. What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be said about theology: it rises at sundown ... It is a reflection on liberatory praxis... But it does not mean doing [the reflection] from an armchair; rather it means sinking roots where the pulse of history is beating at this moment and illuminating history with the Lord of History, who irreversibly committed himself to the present moment of human kind to carry it to its fulfillment.¹¹

For liberation theologians, the pulse of history is felt in what is happening to the least of their brothers and sisters in Latin America. It is a plea to all Christians to protest against the trampling of human dignity and the plundering of the vast majority of humankind. It is an invitation, through the practice of love and justice, to build the reign

of God. This is the new theological task liberation theologians invite every believer to embrace. It is at once old and new because Christianity was born not from among the *theoroi* but from among Yeshua's constant companions, the widows, the orphans, and the sick and those cast outside the walls of the cities in first century Palestine. Yeshua listened to the cries of these *anawim*, healed the sick, sided with the widows and orphans, told them the good news, treated them as if they were the clearest and dearest in the memory of God, and formed an *ecclesia* from among them. Yeshua's act of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized is the *first act* in the theology of liberation. Without this first act, there is no liberation theology.

This act of solidarity with the experience of the poor is as old as the birth of Christianity. But in our contemporary world it points to new elements in the faithful living of the faith. One of these is its historicity. Christian doctrines in the context of liberation theology are derived not from supra-historical realities but from concrete historical human experience. Heaven and earth become connected realities. Process philosopher A.N. Whitehead captures this well:

What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion -- the fellow sufferer who understands.¹²

In Whitehead's process thought, heaven is not a suprahistorical reality. He understood well the Christian mystery of the "word made flesh," a love in heaven that floods back again into the world, into history. This is also the way liberation theology sees the practice of faith. To live one's faith is to be involved in the historical process, in the making of *el proyecto historico*. In theological language, its methodology is similar to

Paul Tillich's method of correlation: it takes seriously an historical event and examines that event in light of scriptures and church tradition. Liberation theologians would agree with Tillich that every theology is contextual or dependent upon a specific historical location.¹³ Liberation theology is animated by the idea that Christian faith and its understanding be related to the concrete situation in which Christians live. In Latin America, this means a situation of poverty, and the command from scriptures and church tradition regarding love of neighbor must be understood in the context of the thousands of poor people in the region. Where liberation theologians differ from Paul Tillich is in their insistence that the injustice committed against the poor should not only be considered the *subject of reflection* but more importantly that it be the *core of a theologian's life*. Liberation theology is not so much a new way of doing theology as it is a new way of being a theologian. It is about creating a new social reality in the here and now. This is why it insists on historical consciousness. In chapter one, I referred to Gadamer's *effective historical consciousness* as an awareness of being and living in time, and of the present as a product of the past. For Gadamer, human life is affected, effected, and made effective by our consciousness of history. It is a profound acknowledgment of the relativities and differences of ways of thinking and acting in different places and times. As I pointed out in chapter two, the whole Vatican II gathering was permeated by this consciousness. The dramatic changes in the liturgy attests to these differences in places and times. For instance, although this was the case for hundreds of years before Vatican II, no one today attends a eucharistic liturgy where the presiding priest faces away from the people, nor do we still hear Latin as the regular language of the mass.

Historical consciousness has changed the way that the divine plan for human redemption is understood. Prior to this consciousness, this plan was thought to be complete and predetermined in the divine mind (ultra-conservative Catholic and Calvinist groups among others still believe this to be true) and will gradually be unfolded in human history where human participation is unnecessary at worst and passive at best. The experience of historicity implies that the course of history is open to human participation, that human beings are partners with the Creator in the sculpting and unfolding of historical events. North American theologian Roger Haight concurs:

Society and culture are constructed by human beings and not totally preconstituted by a created pattern of nature. And hence the pattern and structure of social life can be changed by human planning and initiative. Without this supposition massive poverty in Latin America and elsewhere might be understood as some form of fated necessity which is to be endured passively because it was not in human control.¹⁴

Liberation theologians hold that the massive poverty of the people in Latin America is not a result of fate but the product of a pervasive colonial “culture of silence” created initially by powerful individuals who used their power to construct social realities which preserved their power and privilege. While colonial authorities initiated this oppressive reality, it is continued and maintained today by neo-colonialists in the corporate *personae* of multinational corporations and the military industrial complex. This is the reason why liberation theology is sometimes referred to as *el proyecto historico*. It is a historical project intended to undo this culture of silence and these socially constructed realities that have brought chronic and persistent poverty to Latin America. In the midst of this massive poverty in a land so full of faith, a new theological question arises: How does faith confront the injustices that grind the faces of the poor to the earth in Latin America?

Doing Liberation Theology: The Hermeneutic Circle

Commitment to and solidarity with the poor begins with an emotional response to the dismal condition that assails the lives of so many people. Believing that the mind cannot see what the heart cannot feel, liberation theologians acknowledge the role that emotions play in understanding. However, they are fully aware that loving one's neighbor requires more than an emotional response. In a situation of injustice, the most loving response a Christian believer can show is to understand the source of injustice and to work towards its elimination through deliberate action. To be a human being means to possess and enjoy the gift of freedom. It is an affront to the giver of this gift for humans to live in conditions that dehumanize. And if massive poverty is not brought on by fate or natural necessity, then it must be the result of human decisions. Human decisions may be undone. After the moving encounter with the hungry woman and her children, the bishop is compelled to say in his heart: "This should not happen to a child of God, I must find a way to stop this from happening." There is both a negative and positive direction to this response. This reality should not be allowed to continue and, therefore, one must engage oneself in the creation of a different reality.

In the previous chapter, I described the shift in the attitude of the Catholic church towards the world during the years during and after Vatican II. From an attitude of retrenchment, condemnation, and fear which characterized the Church from the Council of Trent in the 16th century through Vatican I (1869-70) in the second half of the nineteenth century -- as it recoiled from the "attacks" of modern, secular and intellectual culture -- the Church opened its windows toward history and the problems of humanity.

The Basque- Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino sees two distinct problems of faith emerging in different parts of our contemporary world.

The first began with the Enlightenment cry *sapere aude* which at its height became formulated in terms of human independence and secularization, empirical knowledge and the scientific method over against God. This is succinctly expressed in this question: Do we still need God, and, if we do, how can we continue to believe in God in a scientific age? This is the question with which European and North American theology wrestle.

The other is the problem of massive poverty and oppression that characterize the history of the people of Latin America. This question here is: how do we live our faith in a world of destitution? This is the problem facing Latin America and the rest of the third world.¹⁵ Gutierrez states the problem in a similar way: the problem of northern theology is how one mediates God in a satisfied society? The problem of Latin America is not the problem of God or faith in God; rather it is the problem of the non-person, the oppressed and disenfranchised and how Christians worthy of the name respond to them in their situation.¹⁶

Doing liberation theology means participating in the historical process and getting involved in a project of liberation. Liberation comes from the Latin word *liber* which means free, and has been deliberately chosen by liberation theologians to express two concepts in one word: “freedom from” and “freedom for.” Because the vast majority of the citizens of Latin American countries are bound to the misery of illness, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, and death everyday of their human existence, they are in a very real sense in captivity.

Before the work of liberation becomes possible, one must understand the causes of the massive poverty of the region. It is the consensus of liberation theologians that the rationality found in philosophy is no longer sufficient to help explain the phenomenon of poverty in Latin America. Gutierrez searches for “manifestations of reasons other than philosophical ones” and prefers those that can accurately explain the persistent poverty of the people in the region. Hence, the social sciences become essential tools in understanding the situation of the poor and in assisting efforts for social change and liberation. Because the intention of liberation theologians is to find a social theory that would be congruent with their moral commitment and goals, the choice in favor of Marxist social analysis is virtually inevitable. This is not to say that other social theories were not considered. Most liberation theologians, however, believe that many of these contemporary social theories emerged from contexts of such wealth and power that they serve only to provide legitimacy for the political, economic, and ecclesiastical status quo. Furthermore, in Latin America, Marxism is viewed by the majority of progressives for its pragmatic results -- in the Jamesian sense of “the important thing is the difference it makes --” without the Western European and North American inflated and culturally-induced fear of communism. Because of the plunder and the excesses of capitalist industries, Latin American intellectuals, community leaders, and activists see their own version of Marxism as an effective theoretical base from which to critique interventionist foreign policy and dependence-inducing Western European and North American market economy.

The prophetic tradition of the biblical religions with its passionate commitment to the *anawim* (the poor ones, the ones thrown outside the city walls) connects solidly well

with Marxism's equally fervent call for the liberation of the workers of the world from the dehumanizing conditions made for them by capitalists. However, the congruence of moral intent between liberation theologians and Marxists does not mean that the former have overlooked the atheism of the latter. This is the reason why Leonardo Boff claims that Marxism is only one of the guides, not the destination of the journey of liberation for there is only one destination and that is the eschatological fullness of the reign of God. Marxism is a companion and a useful tool in the liberation journey.¹⁷ The famous Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner created the notion of "anonymous Christians" which he applied to any person who by the force of their goodwill and good heart, outside any religious frame of reference, works towards humanization -- the work for peace and justice. Similarly, liberation theologians pay more attention to *orthopraxy* than to *orthodoxy* for they are more interested in what a person does rather than what a person believes. In this sense Marxists who work with them are in reality "anonymous or orthopraxic Christians" and they are in turn open to Marxists referring to them as "anonymous or orthopraxic Marxists" separating them from religious opiates. Liberation theologians agree with Marx's observation that religion can, and often, play a supporting role in oppressive institutional and ideological structures of the state. But they also believe that this is not necessarily true, that this is most likely to occur when religion is absorbed into what Walter Brueggemann calls the "economics and politics of the empire."¹⁸ Released from its captivity in the affairs of the empire, religion can be a powerful force in social transformation.

Inspired by Marxist social analysis, Segundo creates a four-step process for doing liberation theology, a process which moves not linearly but in a spiral: 1) act of will, 2) ideological suspicion, 3) exegetical suspicion, 4) liberating action.¹⁹

The first moment in the hermeneutic circle is this sense of moral outrage which becomes a condition for what Segundo calls “an act of the will” to find some way to change an oppressive reality. This moment is compared to Marx’s passionate outrage at the plight of the workers who were so commodified and objectified by the owners of industry that they were treated with even less care than the machines in the factory. According to Segundo, Marx formulated the theory of historical materialism as an explanation of the proletariat’s failure to sustain their “act of will” which should have led to a revolution. Marx believed that industrialists successfully neutralized the proletariat’s revolutionary passion and determination by disseminating to the workers ideological justifications for the political, economic, and social institutions that supported the status quo.

In the Church, there has always been an abundance of good intentions -- acts of will -- when faced with massive suffering. But these intentions have rarely resulted in the much-needed ministry of investigating the root causes of the suffering -- prophetic ministry -- because doing so would be upsetting to the political and economic elite that heavily influences ecclesiastical politics.

Segundo then wants to see through these ideological justifications and to recognize them for what they really are: social realities constructed in order to buttress the economic, political, and religious interests of the ruling classes. The vow of obedience that a priest makes to the bishop upon ordination is one example of these

ideological justifications in the religious sphere. Jesuit priest Joseph Mulligan who has spent most of his life in Latin America observes that a great number of priests in Latin America and, I would add, in many parts of the third world come from humble origins themselves. After ordination they are assigned to churches where they find themselves living an upper-middle class or upper class lifestyle: a secure home and job complete with food and laundry services, cars, vacations to foreign countries, etc. They begin to command respect, move with professional and business people who give them favors and help them with the right connections, and who make big contributions to support the work of the diocese. Although there are certainly many courageous priests who refused to be blinded by a life of privilege, the vast majority has to maintain friendly ties with the rich and especially the bishop who controls their income and property. At a July 1989 conference in Nicaragua of leaders of Basic Ecclesial Communities with representatives from 25 countries, the delegates agreed that the hierarchy's lack of understanding of the day to day struggles of the poor is the main obstacle to the official Church's effective participation in the liberation work in Latin America.²⁰ The poet-activist bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of Sao Felix Brazil once remarked: "The Church has not gotten along with any revolution, largely because the Church as an institution, and more specifically the hierarchy, has almost always gotten along quite well with the established power of the rich."²¹

Churches are human institutions and as such they are also subject to human manipulation. The use of "exegetical suspicion" enables believers to question traditional doctrinal claims. During much of Marx's adult life, the ruling classes succeeded in getting the official church to declare that its mission is exclusively supernatural in nature

and is unaffected by the movements of history. This left the church powerless to intervene in the social injustice perpetrated against the workers and other oppressed groups. Segundo holds that the use of exegetical suspicion at that time in the history of the Church could have revealed a strong and consistent prophetic tradition in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures, a tradition which was solidly on the side of the victims of injustice. Further, exegetical suspicion could also have provided differences between the kind of Christianity faithful to its Jewish roots and the kind captured in Greek philosophical thought. A careful use of exegetical suspicion can lead to the discovery of Christianity as a force not only for individual but institutional transformation as well. Although he does not explicitly state it, Segundo believes that Marx's atheism was a consequence of his abhorrence of the blatantly oppressive practices of the hierarchy and the inability of the Church to stop them.

The fourth movement in the hermeneutic circle is the decision to implement in concrete situation the liberatory praxis that has been informed by the three previous moments. Although it is called a hermeneutic circle, it is more appropriate to call it a spiral because each completed process is different from the one before and after it, and each completed process yields insights or misunderstandings that either bring the spiral down or up. An example may help illustrate how this process works in actual practice. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff present a "theology of land" in their book.²² I will use the matrix of their example but apply it to the Philippine situation that is closer to my own experience.

Insertion into the experience of the landless -- slum dwellers and tenant farmers -- enabled me to see and experience directly their struggles. The experience of the bishop

with the homeless woman and her children and the statistics cited at the beginning of the chapter became a daily part of my life as I entered their community. At first, I was simply an outsider, one among many who have come and gone. As I listened and learned, many relationships began to develop and in time the trust level improved. From the inside, I saw that their poverty was something that happened to them. It happened not by accident but as a result of social injustice. The prejudice that became part of my theological education about the poor slowly began to dissolve and give way to a better understanding of their situation. It is easy to assume that poverty is the result of laziness, ignorance, or wickedness. This is the “shortest and most superficial explanation of poverty” and ignores the “collective or structural dimension of the problem.” The remedy usually recommended in response to this “empirical” view of poverty is “assistentialism” or aid to individuals or masses of people.

Another explanation of poverty is the functional explanation that sees poverty as the result of a nation’s backwardness. If old ways of doing things are reformed, progress will come. If poor countries are given the right technology -- the latest advances in farming techniques and the most potent fertilizers -- the harvest would be plentiful and even tenant farmers will eventually receive a share that would be sufficient for the support of his or her family. According to the Boffs, the positive side of this view is that it sees poverty on a collective level although it still fails to see it as a conflictive event.

The second moment -- ideological suspicion -- allows a person to look back at the history of the concept of private property. The Filipino historian Jeremias Montemayor questioned the concept of ownership in formerly colonized nations. According to him, virtually all of the so-called owners of the land in these countries were really those who

betrayed their respective countries and collaborated with colonial invaders. Private ownership during colonial administration is at best a questionable idea and at worst a continuation of a tradition of oppression. After a meticulous historical analysis of land ownership in the colonized world and the Philippines in particular, Montemayor asked this question: How can twenty six families be the rightful owners of over 7,000 islands that comprise the Philippine republic? In the Philippine situation, land ownership is clearly a continuation of an arrangement – economic and political – which began during colonial times and simply continued by subsequent invaders of the islands, i.e., Japan and the United States.²³

The third moment of the hermeneutic circle is “exegetical suspicion.” This moment asks a set of questions which goes beyond the traditional role of religion as merely concerned with supernatural matters unaffected by the movements of history: What role, for instance, has the church played in the creation of political and economic policies which assigned ownership to vast tracts of lands in the hands of the few and left the vast majority of the populations landless? How is sin and salvation/liberation to be understood in this historical situation? What reinforces or undercuts the gospel values and the social teachings of the Church? According to Segundo, these questions will reveal how the Church has become absorbed into the dominant social position even as it insists on its solely supratemporal and supernatural role. Further, freed from its captivity into this dominant position, religious beliefs, symbols, and institutions can become a powerful force for social transformation.

The fourth moment of the hermeneutic circle is the decision regarding the actual implementation of the liberatory praxis or program of action that result from the previous

three moments of the circle. In actuality it is a spiral rather than a circle because the process is repeated as new ideas and improved action emerge from the actual experience of the community with the liberatory practice. Interfaith grassroots organizations in collaboration with secular progressive organizations and their respective leaders created and attempted to implement a land reform process in the Philippines during the Marcos years in the late sixties. When the political and economic elite of the nation realized that many political leaders might give in to the pressure of the grassroots organizations and church congregations, Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and scrapped the whole land reform program.

In 1979, a similar process was implemented in Nicaragua where 85% of poor *campesinos* became landowners after centuries of landlessness and tenant farming. Two main reasons explain the difference between the former and the latter. First, the people power in the Philippines, while it was successful in getting rid of Marcos, was never able to establish a political organization supported by the whole country; in Nicaragua, the grassroots movement that deposed Somoza had been an organized political force with the support of the vast majority of the citizenry. Second, in the Philippines, Church groups (mostly BEC members) that fought Marcos retreated back into the same ecclesiastical structures after the dictator left the country; in Nicaragua the Church groups that helped eject Somoza became the “people’s church” which distinguished itself from the “Church of the elite,” the church that helped maintain Somoza in power.²⁴

Liberation theologians contend that borrowing conceptual tools from Marx does not Marxism make; after all Marx himself did some borrowing from Christian social thought. For many of them, this is so self-evident that they believe accusations coming

from the conservative and business sectors of the region do not even deserve a reply. However, when the Vatican began to get involved, liberation theologians started to take their accusations seriously. What is liberation theology's relationship with Marxism? Is it possible to be a Christian and at the same time believe and use Marxist social analysis as a process for understanding the economic and political realities of a nation?

Liberation Theology and Marxism

Just as there is not a single liberation theology so is there not a single Marxism. Ideas evolve and followers of these ideas themselves undergo some transformations as they try to be meaningful to changing historical and cultural contexts. As belief systems, Marxism and Christianity have both evolved and developed. In his theory of the development of doctrine the 19th century English theologian John Henry Newman (1801-1890) insisted that the survival of belief systems depends on their ability to maintain "chronic vigor" in changing historical times and contexts. Does liberation theology possess the life-enhancing applicability that can contribute to the "chronic vigor" of both Christianity and Marxism? ²⁵

Many liberation theologians have been accused of advocating Marxism. These critics have even gone so far as to say that with the end of the Soviet Union, liberation theology has also lost its relevance. I believe that there is indeed some relatedness between liberation theology and Marxism. At the same time, it must be admitted that this is a complex relation which is open to different interpretations. Anyone who reads Luke-Acts in the New Testament will easily see that the early followers of Yeshua held their property in common and shared everything they owned with members of the community. Thus, the connection between liberation theology and Marx cannot be understood apart

from the interpretation liberation theologians have given to the central message of Christianity and to the dearest ideas of Marx.

The preferential option for the poor, which emerged from the historical sources examined in the previous chapter, is a consistent theme throughout the bible both in the Old and New Testaments. The Mexican biblical scholar Elsa Tamez has combed the books of the Old Testament in search of words that would explain fully what is meant there by the term oppression. Her search yields nine words to characterize oppression: *'anah* (degradation), *'ashaq* (violent despoliation), *lahats* (cries resulting from the heavy blows of the oppressor), *nagash* (exploitation by forced labor), *yanah* (deadly violence), *ratsats* (crushing force on the head), *daka'* (interior knocking down), *dak* (vexation and the persistent hope for a new order), *tok* (tyranny in hidden ways).²⁶ According to Tamez, these experience of the oppressed workers cry to the heavens for divine intervention. A quick glance at Marx's Capital will yield an equivalent if not more adjectives in his description of the dehumanizing treatment of workers by their employers. Both liberation theology and Marxism are committed to the liberation of the poor and the workers.

In the eyes of the poor and marginalized, the world is not the way it should be. This is a conflictive statement when spoken to those who benefit from the world as it is. Liberation theologians contend that social reality is open to human creation and remaking. The lot of the poor is not an accident of nature but the result of human decisions. The traditional explanation of poverty given by Church authorities as the will of God for the poor is seen by liberation theologians as a numbing or silencing strategy so that the poor will not disturb the status quo. In a similar manner, Marxism provides

exploited workers the intellectual and practical tools to help them see through the ideological justifications used by their industrialist employers to cover their oppressive practices.

That the world is not the way it should be is at the heart of Karl Marx's atheism. Religion for Marx had become the preserver of an oppressive reality. Marx did not seem to have been able to distinguish between faith and religion. The former is the response a person gives to the questions about the meaning and value of life while the latter is the attempt to institutionalize one response to the rejection and exclusion of other and othered responses. The religious figures that Marx saw established a pietistic and spiritualistic religion that ignored the cries of the poor and the plight of the exploited workers. Therefore, he rejected not only this religion but the God of that religion as well. Marx's atheism in this context is very closely related to the atheism -- a form of denial of (false) gods-- of the prophets that is also at the core of the prophetic tradition. Liberation theology bridges the godlessness of Marx and the godlessness of the prophets in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, it would be difficult to understand Marx's view of religion without taking a brief -- at the risk of oversimplification -- look at Hegel's and Fierbach's.

G.W. F. Hegel created his philosophical system on the concept of Spirit (Geist) as the matrix linking consciousness to history. While it is difficult, and almost impossible, to clearly explicate what Hegel meant by this term within the limited scope of this chapter, I think it is quite fair to suggest that he understood the concept to mean an all-encompassing and pervasive Spirit that is the guiding energy and lure of all creation and possibility. It is with this concept of Spirit that he rejected the dichotomy Kant made

between “phenomenon” (appearance) and “noumenon” (things-in-themselves). As is widely known, Kant in his first Critique claimed that we can only know what appears to us in experience and, because the as-they-are-in-themselvesness (quiddity) of things cannot be experienced it cannot be known. Hegel spent years studying the whole Kantian philosophical system. This immersion into his hero’s work often sent him into seclusion where he would console himself by communing with nature. “I seek to be reconciled with myself, and with other men, in the arms of Nature,” he wrote, “and for this reason I often fly to this true mother, to isolate myself from other men in her company.” It was in one of these isolated moments, while watching the Alpine scenery in Berne, Switzerland that he experienced some sort of a mystical vision. This was characterized by a profound sense of the unity of the cosmos, “where all finite division was seen as illusory, everything was interdependent, and ultimate reality was a whole.”²⁷ This turning point experience led him to the monistic work of Spinoza and finally to his own all embracing philosophical work.

Starting his system with a penetrating investigation into the intricate workings of human consciousness in Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel proceeded in Encyclopaedia Logic to bridge the Kantian division of reality (phenomenon/noumenon) by claiming that all the things we experience are seen by our mind as manifestations of an all-encompassing Spirit and are, therefore, related to each other in that Spirit:

(A)ccording to Kant, thoughts, although they are universal and necessary determinations, are still only our thoughts, and are cut off from what the thing is *in-itself* by an impassable gulf. On the contrary, the true objectivity of thinking consists in this: that thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the *In-itself* of things and of whatever else is objective.²⁸

Thus, by bringing together again the dualized reality of Kant, Hegel brought Spirit into human history. Here, for liberation theologians, lies the power of his philosophical system. Hegel's philosophy became the conceptual mother of the liberation theologians' belief in a God who is active in the events of history guiding and luring its players to a certain future. Phenomenology of Spirit, translated literally, means "the appearance/experience of Spirit" in history. His concept of Spirit combines the Sophia of Greek philosophy and the immanent God of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition as it manifests itself in the events of history.

But how is this manifesting realized? If Spirit, as Hegel contends, "makes itself what it essentially is," what is the role of human reason and action in history? If human will and consciousness are not the causes of but simply mediate the movement of Spirit from potentiality to actuality, and if the role of human beings in the events of history is simply reflective of and mediational to that of Spirit's, what power do humans have in changing the world? Further, if Spirit "makes itself what it essentially is" then can it not be said that Spirit (as manifested in history) is on the side of the industrialists because the essence that it has made of itself has been oppressive to the workers for hundreds of years? These are the questions that preoccupied Karl Marx. While he honors Hegel as the "great teacher" for recognizing the connection between history and human consciousness, Marx nevertheless classified him as still part of the old Greek *theoroi* who came to the amphitheater to reflect and contemplate on the games from a distance and cared not what happened to the players. Marx rejected Hegel's Spirit, redirected the *telos* of history -- away from its zenith in the Absolute Spirit -- towards the materialist and political goal of a classless society.

In Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx found a formidable ally for his rejection of Hegel's Spirit. Although Feuerbach admits in the preface to The Essence of Christianity that his "work is negative, destructive," he quickly adds that he intends to negate and destroy only the "unhuman, not the human elements of religion."²⁹ Yet anyone who reads this work cannot help but be overwhelmed by the "unhuman elements" he discusses. So pervasive is the inhumanity of the religion he describes that it is easy to sympathize with the radical theory of religion he proposes. Again, I can only attempt at a gist of the central thesis of his work and the guiding concern is simply to understand Marx's atheism. Feuerbach retains the dialectical movement (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) of Hegel but instead of placing it within history, he situates it in human consciousness and applies it to religion.

According to Feuerbach human beings unconsciously project aspects of their being -- ideals, desires, character-- away from themselves. In time these projections become objectified as the attributes of God. Because of the unconscious nature of the projection, humans are unable to see that these attributes have human origins in the first place. Now as attributes of God, they return to humanity to control and negatively influence their life. Anticipating Weber's sociological study of religion, Feuerbach's projection theory recognizes that religion and culture advance together and that the attributes a people assign to god correspond to the attributes they hold in esteem. He writes:

Physical strength is an attribute of the Homeric gods: Zeus is the strongest of the gods. Why? Because physical strength, in and by itself, was regarded as something glorious, divine. To the ancient Germans the highest virtues were those of the warrior; therefore, their supreme god was the god of war, Odin. Not the attributes of the divinity, but the divineness or the deity of the attributes is the first true Divine Being.³⁰

The last sentence is more than just a play of words. Considered more closely, it is simultaneously a profound theological and anthropological statement. Indeed, the essence of Christianity for Feuerbach consists in God's predicating the divine self to humans in a way that honors and challenges humanity. I think he has often been misunderstood on this point and, as a result, has been labeled the father of materialism. However, I believe a deeper look at the thrust of his arguments in defense of humanity moves him closer to Christian humanism. Culture -- which shares the same root word with "cultic" does have a way of creating a god based on the qualities admired in the that culture. In the Old Testament the Israelites create the god (a golden calf) of the culture they were part of in Egypt. The writer of this particular story captured in vivid images the power of culture even for a captive people. Moses had to remind the Israelites of their one true God, the one who was moved to tears by their slavery in Egypt. Human imagination creates the god represented by the Egyptian golden calf and the God in the Hebrews' holy of holies. What distinguishes them is the "divineness or deity of their attributes." Capturing the essence of the commandment to love one's neighbor, he says:

God suffers -- suffering is the predicate -- not for himself but for men, for others. What does that mean in plain speech? Nothing else than this: to suffer for others is divine. He who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them acts divinely, is God to man.³¹

The god who punishes and causes alienation and suffering must be rejected. Feuerbach's atheism -- if indeed one can use the term for him -- comes from his refusal to believe in the divinity of a being that destroys humanity. It is an atheism that rejects the worship of idols and makes room for the God who suffers for the sake of human liberation. It is for reason that he can say "man is the beginning, the middle and the end

of religion.”³² It is Feuerbach’s humanity-grounded God that later caught Marx’s interests and drew him to the world of religion.

Karl Marx was born in the historic Rhineland town of Trier to a Jewish family that descended from a long line (four centuries) of rabbis on both sides of his family. His father Heinrich Marx instilled in his young son the importance of religion: “A great support for morality is pure faith in God. You know that I am anything but a fanatic. But faith is a real requirement for man sooner or later, and there are moments in life when even the atheist is involuntarily drawn to worship the Almighty.”³³ Karl’s mother, Henriette Pressburg was a Hungarian Jew whose ancestors fled to the Netherlands in the 16th century. Racism and discrimination came early to Karl Marx’s family. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Rhineland came under the control of Prussia and Jews were barred from holding public office. In order to support his family, Heinrich and Henriette Marx became Lutherans although they waited until the death of their parents to do so out of respect for their religious tradition. Karl Marx was also baptized into the Lutheran faith so that he could attend an elementary school that accepted only baptized children. Karl went on to attend the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier, a former Jesuit college that became a state school after the priests there were called to run a different school. While at this school, he wrote several essays that caught the attention of his teachers for their depth and originality. For the purposes of the chapter, I want quote from an exegetical paper which he wrote on the Gospel of John, Chapter 15, verses 1-14, entitled “The Union of Believers with Christ according to John 15:1-14, Showing Its Basis and Essence, Its Absolute Necessity, and Its Effects.” The young Marx writes:

Union with Christ consists in the most intimate, most vital communion with him, in having him before our eyes and in our hearts, and being so imbued with the

highest love for him; at the same time return our hearts to our brothers whom he has closely bound to us, and for whom also he sacrificed himself. Our true life as Christians is fulfilled in sacrificing ourselves for one another out of love for Christ.³⁴

His choice of John's gospel is already indicative of his maturing understanding of the essence of Christianity which the gospel of John expresses in very strong words: whoever says s/he loves God whom s/he cannot see and not love his or her neighbor whom s/he says is a liar. This is the Johannine version of the commandment given by Yeshua to his disciples: Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself. Another essay worth mentioning is Karl Marx's reflections on the choice of a profession where his criteria are: it should lead to opportunities for action for the sake of uplifting humanity; it should create a character that sees greatness in doing things for others; it should put one in easy contact with honorable men and women who are models for ethical living. He states the rewards:

If we choose the position in life in which we can most of all work for [hu]mankind, no burdens can bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all ... we shall experience no petty, limited, selfish joy, but our happiness will belong to millions, our deeds will live on quietly but perpetually at work, and over our ashes will be shed the hot tears of noble people. God gave to all the general aim of lifting up humanity although, it was left for us to seek the means by which this aim can be achieved.³⁵

There are certainly a good number of people who believe that his religious convictions, his passion for the moral life, and his commitment to the betterment of humanity were the products of his idealistic youthful years which he later abandoned. There are passages in the 43 volume collected works that may be used to support this contention. Engels himself points to Marx's atheism in his doctoral dissertation, "On the Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature." But the biblical scholar, historian, and economist Jose Miranda asserts that "from 1850 on,

atheism, or at least the explicit profession of it disappears from his [Marx] writing -- with one exception ... in an interview with R. Landor, a reporter for the New York World published in July 18, 1871:

R. Landor: What is the position of the International on religion?

Dr. Marx: On that point I cannot speak in the name of the society. I myself am an atheist. It is startling, no doubt, to hear such an avowal in England, but there is some comfort in the thought that it need not be made in a whisper in either Germany or France.³⁶

But four months later, on November 23, 1871 Marx wrote to Friedrich Bolte saying that the reason he refused to join the Bakunin Alliance was “the fact that the alliance insisted upon ‘atheism as a dogma’ dictated to the members.”³⁷ Once again, the issue boils down to what sort of atheism did Marx profess? I conclude with Miranda that his atheism was a rejection of the Churches’ support of a *status quo* oppressive to the workers. I would add that his atheism was an argument for a political spirituality, the sort of spirituality that he discussed in his exegetical essay on John’s gospel: if your god makes you blind to the suffering of others, reject god and do something for the liberation of your brothers and sisters, and God will find you. To this spirituality, Marx was consistent. At the end of his life his life-long friend Friedrich Engels would say in his eulogy:

Marx was the best-hated and most calumniated man of his time. Governments, both absolutist and republican deported him from their territories. The bourgeoisie, whether conservative or ultra-democratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him because his work in defense of oppressed workers. All this he brushed aside as though it were cobweb, ignoring it, answering only when extreme necessity compelled him. And he died beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers -- from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America -- and I make bold to say that though he may have had many opponents, he had hardly had one personal enemy. His name will endure through the years, and his work will not be forgotten.³⁸

His life followed his own criteria for the most worthy of professions. His early thoughts on religion matured through his contact with the works of Hegel and Feuerbach each of whom in their own ways rejected the dominant images of God at the time. Hegel's Spirit brought Kant's God from the "heavens blue" to the events of history. Marx would later move beyond Hegel's Geist -- still dialectically connected to the heavens -- in favor of a God who would work full time showing and giving love to people in the streets. This is where Feuerbach proved helpful to Marx:

What the old mystics said of God, that he is the highest and commonest of being, applies in truth to love, and that not a visionary, imaginary love -- no! a real love, a love which has flesh and blood, which liberates as an Almighty force through all the living.³⁹

Most liberation theologians insist that the way to God is through the work of justice for the "least of our brothers and sisters." It is the way to God and at the same time God's way to us. Their relationship with Marx is rooted in the same spirituality of justice, rejected in the 19th century by ecclesiastical leaders who made the "Lord in heaven" subservient to the "lord in Berlin" and in the 20th and 21st century by the same types of leaders who made the Lord of Heaven beholden to the lords of multinational corporations and of the military industrial complex. Accusing Marx of atheism may be compared to the Buddhist in the parable of the arrow:

A farmer was harvesting fruits in his orchard when an arrow from someone hiding in the thick foliage of a tree hit him on the chest. He was able to scream for help before falling to the ground. His friends came to help. One of them wanted to pull out the arrow but another said it might worsen the bleeding; another said that pulling the arrow right would only save the farmer's life if they can first determine whether any vital organs was punctured; still another suggested that if they first find the direction of the arrow and pull it out in the same angle it entered the body, the farmer would have a better chance of surviving. While his friends were discussing the option the farmer bled to death.⁴⁰

In a world bleeding from massive poverty, the question about whether one is an atheist or a believer in God is secondary at best. The blessed thing to do is to perform something life-giving for the wounded. This is liberation theology's relationship with Marx. The parable of the arrow is the bridge that unites liberation theologians to Marx; in Feuerbach's thinking, it is also the bridge that brings divinity to them.

Transfusing New Life into the *Ecclesia*

Earlier I referred to the words of A.N. Whitehead who conveyed the idea that to be conservative is to go against the movement of the universe -- and to suffer death. Indeed, "change is," as the women in my village taught me, "the air that keeps our stories breathing." The universe and the stories we tell about it go through a process of birth in one time and rebirth in another. The story of Yeshua has survived because it has connected throughout its two thousand year history with changing times. Its emergence into the world came about as a result of radical change. Christianity, as Dominic Crossan has clearly shown began as a reform movement within Judaism. After Yeshua's death, this movement with its leaders formed its own identity distinct from its mother religion.⁴¹

It is of particular interest to me that Pope John XXIII referred to the process of change he wanted the Church to experience as "letting the fresh air in." He, too, realized that if Christianity is to survive, it must be willing to change. As was pointed out in chapter one, the changes Vatican II made applied mostly to the European and North American contexts. But as Christianity moves out of its historical boundedness to the *first* world and into the *whole* world scene, it needs to listen to other voices, symbols, thoughts and practices. The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner once asked at a gathering of bishops why must the Vatican continue to insist that in China grape and not rice wine

must be used for a eucharistic liturgy to be valid. There is in the life of the *ecclesia*, particularly the hierarchical side of it, an insistence even after Vatican II on perpetuating its western European infrastructures. If Christianity is truly going to be a world religion, this insistence is going against the movement of the religious universe.

Liberation theologians were not the first to call for changes in the Church. Church history is full of groups and individuals who wanted and worked for change. In the fourth century a bishop named Arius preached to his followers that Yeshua has a nature (homoiousios) similar to but not the same as (homoousios) God. He had a lot of followers because his Christology made Yeshua more accessible to human beings. The official guardians of orthodoxy declared him a heretic accusing him of denying the divinity of the second person in the Trinity. In the 10th century Orthodox Christians sought to drop the word “filioque” in the Credo because in their minds they could not accept that the “Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (filioque).” According to them, the right and original doctrine states that the “Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father” and “filioque” was a heretical addition. In the first example one Greek letter caused the condemnation and alienation of hundreds of people; in the second, thousands of people left the Church because of a single Latin word. These are just two examples but there were others who introduced changes that kept the story of Yeshua “breathing.”

Liberation theologians are seeking not changes in the formulation and articulation of doctrine but an institutional conversion which, they are convinced, would bring vibrancy and gospel-fidelity back to the Catholic Church in Latin America and the rest of the world. This conversion needs to happen in three main areas of the life of the Church.

The Church finds itself at a time when its prophetic ministry needs to be at the heart of its mission. The kind of faith that merely seeks understanding loses its power to make the word of God “good news” to the world. The faith that the Church must nurture is the kind that can bring “chronic vigor” in our time and culture to Yeshua’s story. In order for this to happen, three key changes must find be implemented.

First, the Catholic church needs to listen to its prophets —old and new. Contrary to popular understanding, prophets, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, are neither fortellers of the future nor dreamers of doom but are designers of God’s faithful communities using, as creative tools, only their lives and their words. These prophetic words have come to our days from the earliest prophets of Israel:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
and bring the poor of the land to an end,
saying ‘when will the new moon be over
that we may sell grain,
when will the sabbath end
that we may offer wheat for sale
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances
that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 8:4-6).
You who devour the flesh of my people
and flay the skin from off their bodies
and break their bones in pieces
and chop them like meat in a kettle
like flesh in a caldron (Micah 3:3).
Your hands are full of blood
wash them clean by seeking justice
lifting the yoke of oppression
defending the orphans
and making yourselves allies of the widows (Isa. 1: 15-17).

These words were spoken from about a thousand to eight hundred years before Yeshua’s birth. The torture and death of their speakers seem only to make the words last. They are echoed today by: Luis Zamora the church guitarist whose fingers were cut off

by Pinochet's soldier's for "playing music that agitates;" Virgilio Pamintuan whose tongue was cut by Marcos' cronies for "turning laborers against their employers" (union organizing); Remedios and her unborn child who was stabbed to death because her husband Joaquin Rodriguez collaborated with foreigners (Jesuit missionaries and teachers) at a local university. The list can go on for days. During our peace martyrs' commemoration in the university where I work and teach, students volunteer to read the names of these little known martyrs maimed, "disappeared" or murdered for the prophetic voices they had spoken. Then there are the more well-known voices:

Archbishop Romero who was shot because he called President Jimmy Carter to stop sending aid to El Salvador "because the military are only using them to kill their own brothers and sisters in our nation named after a savior;" the four US women missionaries who were raped and killed for creating a justice-oriented curriculum for their missionary schools and community centers; the six Jesuit university professors who were massacred at the university where they taught and lived "because they were turning college students against their government." The voices of the prophets of old continue in the lives of contemporary ones. "If they kill me," wrote Archbishop Romero, "I will rise again in the Salvadoran people."⁴² The church today, especially the hierarchy, needs to embrace these words of the prophets "to keep Yeshua's story breathing and vibrant" in our day.

Second, the Catholic church must find creative ways to break free from its almost exclusive alliance with neo-colonial powers, i.e., multinational corporations and their protectors within the military-industrial complex who combine their money and might to turn every nation into big spenders or raw material providers at the expense of the majority of its citizens. The conflict in Chiapas, Mexico is a good example. In 1921 the

indigenous people after a long struggle persuaded the government of Mexico to write into the constitution the security and integrity of their land by declaring it off limits to outside and foreign business interests. Seventy-two years later, in an attempt to attract business and in preparation for NAFTA the Mexican congress eliminated that protection from the constitution. The indigenous community felt betrayed and when dialogue broke down, they began to wage a guerrilla war against the government. Mexico is a predominantly Catholic country, yet the vast majority of Catholics--clergy and laity alike -- kept silent on the issue. One bishop said that this was a political issue that was best left to politicians. Christians should be the first to know that betrayal, similar to crime that put Yeshua, on the cross is not just a political but a moral issue as well. The Catholic church, and especially the hierarchy should have borne the cross with the indigenous people of Chiapas.

Third, the Catholic church needs to end its paradigm for conveying to elementary and highschool students the kind of relationship God desires with the human family. Moral theologian Dick Westley says that there are two powerful stories from the Old Testament used by two communities to introduce God to young people. The story of Adam and Eve is used by most Catholic religion teachers to explain to children that the God of Abraham and Moses (Sara is never mentioned) is primarily a maker of laws. Some of these laws are embedded in nature and some are planted in the human heart (natural law). According to this version -- Westley calls it the religious account -- God wants every good girls and boys to look for these laws in their hearts and follow them fastidiously. Because God is a maker of laws, obedience makes the divine heart happy, and deviation from the law invites wrath. This way of introducing God to children has

been going on virtually unchanged since the fifties. My children who are now twelve and fifteen years old went through this process when they were in the second grade at a Catholic elementary school. Fortunately, I could quickly subvert the process at home.

The other story is the story of the exodus from Egypt. This is told by many faithful Jews during the Seder (Passover) meal to children as a way of “making the event present again” in their hearts and minds. In this story God is a lover of freedom and is known to weep at the sight of enslaved peoples. This was what happened in Egypt when God saw the suffering of the Israelites. For most Jews, this was their introduction to the God of the bible. According to Westley, this story -- the “faith version” is the “key” to understanding every single story in the bible.

Because of poor education and background in sound biblical research, many Catholic school teachers in the primary and secondary levels were, and still are, unaware that the exodus event (1280 B.C.E.) happened some three hundred years before any Old Testament book ever got written (950B.C.E.). The book of Genesis was a looking back at the way Yahweh created the world based on the divine person revealed in the exodus event. Westley suggests that the first three words in this book should have begun with “once upon a time,” instead of “in the beginning. This would have saved Christians not only from distorting the image of God but also from creationism (among others).⁴³ The Vatican needs to change its image of God -- from one who is a law-clinger to that of a liberation worker.

All three changes above converge in the preferential option for the poor. Listening to prophets opens the eyes, mind, and hearts to the suffering of the poor which in turn, gives men and women the opportunity to create anew with Yahweh a second exodus

story. For, as Meister Eckhart so pointedly reminded Christians: “What good does it do for Yeshua to have been born two thousand years ago if we do not give birth to him in our own time and culture.”⁴⁴ This second exodus, this local incarnation is the challenge of liberation theology.

End Notes

- 1 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. Salvation and Liberation. trans. John Derway. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 12. Theology as an academic and rational endeavour became part of an internationalized form of colonization which Freire later called culture of silence.
- 2 Gustavo Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation. trans. Caridad Enda and John Eagleson. 15th Anniversary edition. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, p. 164. Actually, according to Gutierrez, there is no equality here because the poor person is still the hungry, the exploited, and the powerless and her or his “rich at heart” is only a “text” to keep him or her silent.
- 3 Gustavo Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. 170. Gutierrez rejects the misconception that the reign of God happens only at the end of time.
- 4 Gustavo Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. 171.
- 5 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. Introducing Liberation Theology. trans. Paul Beras. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 1.
- 6 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. Introducing Liberation Theology, p. 3.
- 7 Gustavo Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. xxxiv.
- 8 Hans Georg Gadamer. Truth and Method. trans. Joel Winsheimer and Donald Marshall. New York: Crossroads, 1984, p. 257.
- 9 Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. 4.
- 10 Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. 5.
- 11 Gutierrez. A Theology of Liberation, p. 9.
- 12 Alfred Mork Whitehead. Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, New York: McMillan, 1929, p. 532.

- 13 Dave Tillich. Systematic Theology. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1957, 1963, 3: pp. 283-94.
- 14 Rosa Haight. An Alternative Vision. New York: Paulist Press, 1985, p. 17.
- 15 Jon Sobrino. Christology at the Crossroads. trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978, p. 18.
- 16 Gustavo Gutierrez. The Power of the Poor in History. trans. Robert Barr. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, p. 102
- 17 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. Introducing Liberation Theology, p. 27.
- 18 Walter Bruggeman. The Prophetic Imagination. New York: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 56.
- 19 Juan Luis Segundo. The Liberation of Theology. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976. The whole of chapter one deals with the moments of hermeneutic circle.
- 20 Joe Mulligan. The Nicaraguan Church and the Revolution. Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed and Ward, 1991, pp. 137-162.
- 21 Pedro Caraldaliga. Prophetic in Combat. Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer Stone Books, 1987, p. 33.
- 22 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 41-42.
- 23 Jeremias Montemayor. Philippine Socio-Economic Problems. Manila, Phillipines: Asian Publishing Company, 1969, p. 79.
- 24 Joint Presentation to the New Orleans chapter of *Pax Christi* by Rev. Rob Carrie, Jesuit Priest and Farmer in a Nicaraguan Cooperative Farming Zone and this writer.
- 25 John Henry Newman. An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. Westminster, Maryland Christian Classics, 1968, pp. 205-206.
- 26 Elza Tamez. Bible of the Oppressed. trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982, pp. 8-9.
- 27 Samuel Kophitz. Hegel: A Brief Biography. New York: Ballantine Books, 1969, p. 48.
- 28 G. W. F. Hegel. Encyclopedia Logic: Preliminary Conceptions # 40-50 in Hegel reader ed. Stephen Houlgate. Malden, Massachusetts, 1998. pp. 152-161.

- 29 Ludwig Fuerbach. The Essence of Christianity. trans. George Eliot. New York: Harper Row, 1957, p. xiv.
- 30 Ludwig Fuerbach. The Essence of Christianity, p. 21.
- 31 Ludwig Fuerbach. The Essence of Christianity, p. 60.
- 32 Ludwig Fuerbach. The Essence of Christianity, p. xix.
- 33 Karl Marx and Frederick Engles. Collected Works. eds. Lawrence & Wishart, London: 1968, vol. 1, p. 647.
- 34 Karl Marx and Frederick Engles. Collected Works. vol. 1, p. 3.
- 35 Karl Marx and Frederick Engles. Collected Works. vol. 1, p. 9.
- 36 Jose Porfirio Miranda. Marx against the Marxists. trans. John Drury. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980, p. 280.
- 37 Jose Porfirio Miranda. Marx against the Marxists, p. 282.
- 38 Karl Marx and Frederick Engles. Selected Works in One Volume. Paperback edition. Lawrence and Wishart, 1970, p. 470.
- 39 Ludwig Fuerbach. The Essence of Christianity, p. 48
- 40 This was my “story cane and pillow” during a Zen retreat at a Buddhist monastery in metro Manila (Philippines) where I hid from Marcos’ Death Squads. The story functions like the Christian parable in terms of the orientation, disorientation, and reorientation pattern.
- 41 John Dominic Grossan. The Birth of Christianity. New York: Harper Collins, 1999, p. xxxiii.
- 42 Oscar Romero. Voice for the Voiceless. trans. Michael Walsh. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, p. 50.
- 43 Dick Westley. Morality and Its Beyond. Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1984, pp. 51-85.
- 44 Meister Eckhart in Howey D. Egan. ed. An Anthology of Christian Mystics. Collegeville, Minnesota: Pueblo Books, 1996, pp. 295.

CHAPTER 4

THE BLINDSPOTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In the previous chapter, I described the challenge placed by liberation theology at the doors of the Catholic church using a phrase from the document on justice and peace at the CELAM conference in Medellin (Colombia): the preferential option for the poor. I also indicated that liberation theologians seek from every Christian but primarily from the hierarchy a courageous commitment towards incarnating for our time and culture the implications of the exodus story. However, this challenge suffers from several omissions that, if not considered, may lead to serious, if not fatal, accidents along the liberation journey. This chapter points out several of these omissions and acknowledges the need for interlocking social change strategies so that the liberation struggle in one area does not lead to oppression in another. However, due to the limited scope of this study I concentrate on the most urgent omission -- full acceptance of women into the ordained ministry of the Church -- in the context of the Catholic faith community.

As both a community organizer and teacher, I have been gifted with the company of people whose passion, thinking, and commitment to the pressing issues of our times have inspired and “lifted me as I myself climb” these “uphill journeys.”¹ There is the community of activists mostly people of color and some white people, who have assisted me in handling blatant and subtle discrimination and have taught me that -- because racism is a prison of sin for us all -- its walls must come down even if parts of our skins are torn off with them. Liberation theologians are aware that the poorest people in Latin America are the indigenous peoples of the region but the racial nature of their oppression is hardly mentioned in the formers’ passionate theological work. There is the community

of activists who work to change our earth-plundering ways believing, as Thomas Berry and Rachel Carson have beautifully shown, that the dream of the earth is also the dream of God. The destruction of the environment by local and multinational mining and logging industries have wiped out not only precious plant and animal species but also the homes, livelihood, and cultures of native peoples. The cry and dream of the earth has not found its way, excepting Leonardo Boff's (1998) recent work on ecology and spirituality to the work of the theologians discussed here. There are my gay "*kapatid sa kaluluwa*" (spirit brothers and sisters), my children's "*titos*" (spirit-uncles) and "*titas*" (spirit-aunts) who suffer daily assaults born of homophobia and homohatred even among their own blood and religious families, but yet whose lives have been models of non-violent and just living. The injustices against gay people in the land of the machos have not found many sympathetic ears among liberation theologians. There is my community of peace workers who still believe, despite the proliferation of war and killing-tool companies that the only way we can be effective and honest about the power of love is to reject the power of weapons. Within this community are found my friends and colleagues who are actively working to stop violence against women especially in their own homes and churches. I am particularly thinking, as I write this chapter, of two women friends who run a center for battered women and children in a predominantly Catholic town near New Orleans. With hardly any money they have gotten the whole town, without the participation of a single Catholic priest, organized against domestic violence and sexual assault. While I delight in my relationships with these activist friends, I must also seek forgiveness for the oppressions and omissions I am not yet aware of as a male, able-

bodied, heterosexual, employed, married, parent, Catholic Christian living in a first world country.

In this chapter, I will examine why the Catholic church has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the violence against women. I want to trace its philosophical, biblical-theological, and cultural sources. In the process of my tracings, I hope it will also become evident why, in my view, this is the most urgent issue in the Church today. Further, I write this section as an attempt to be in solidarity with women working to end sexism everywhere but particularly in my own Catholic faith community.

Hatred from Philosophy

Philosophy may at times be thought of as the way we use reason to construct justifications for the traditions we cherish. When used for traditions which lead to mutually enhancing relationships between men and women, philosophy becomes also what mystics call a “way of love.” But when used to justify and to continue oppressive relationships, philosophy becomes a “way of hate.” These tendencies are, of course, easier split on paper than in life. The way we live our social life is a whole lot more complex than our best attempts at articulation. As my grandmother used to say, *an tidaku-i nga akasya diri mapasalamatan an ngatanan nga gamut nga ikinabubuhi niya* (even the biggest acacia cannot thank all the roots that keep it alive). There is, as Gerard Manley Hopkins says, always a “moreness” to things, more than we can say and more than we can know. Love and hate flow in tandem in the soul and because this is so, dialogue and conversations are our best tools at avoiding the cruelties we seem to keep inventing. We know that these talking tools will not restore paradise but they have helped us undo slavery and apartheid and may yet one day also help us eliminate racism, sexism,

classism and other cruelties that plague our communities. In our time and culture, conversation and dialogue may even lead us back to those peaceful times we used to enjoy, as Gerda Lerner suggests, before men invented the oppression of women.²

Hatred may be too strong a word for some but I believe it is an apt description of the result of a demeaning and demonizing process committed against women throughout history by many institutions and systems of our society including the Catholic church. I believe a “way of hate” was employed to start and to keep this process going. By declaring that the exclusion of women in the ordained ministry is “not open for dialogue,” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Inquisition) confirms that this hatred proceeds from the highest levels of the hierarchy.

Like racism and other forms of prejudice, the beginnings of sexism are so subtle that they often escape notice. Racism begins with insignificant prejudicial gestures, jokes, words, and symbols which later coalesce to become “habits of the heart” and ways of proceeding in the various areas of life which we now know as personal and institutional racism. Sexism follows the same pattern of development. No one is born sexist. It is an attitude and a behavior that is the result of a learning and conditioning process provided by persons and systems in our culture. Theologian Margaret Farley describes sexism as “the belief that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of sex.” She adds that when power is introduced into this superior/inferior relationship, it “includes value systems and social patterns which express and support this belief.”³ While there are no longer rules in the Church that prevent males of color from full acceptance into its holy orders, rules to exclude women perdure and are protected by official Vatican declarations that these rules are not open to discussion.

At the dawning of the new millennium, more than half of humanity is still subjected to this demeaning and demonizing process against women and the Catholic church is one of the major institutions that perpetuate it. This policy prohibits women from being accepted into the priesthood for reasons based on culturally conditioned traditions and androcentric biblical hermeneutics. As an active member of a Catholic community who care deeply about the Church, I want to help create, in solidarity with others in the faith, a communal environment where each one can relate to each other as neighbors. Love of neighbor is a foundational commitment in Christianity and one that is translatable to other faith traditions in the world. However, the Church cannot be honest about loving the neighbor when it continues to promote hatred towards women through its many institutional policies — most especially by excluding women in the sacerdotal orders. Changing these policies is a complex and difficult undertaking. Further, I do not mean to imply that when women are accepted into the priesthood sexism will end in the Catholic church. Many feminist and womanist theologians — Rosemary Reuther, Elizabeth Johnson, Renita Weems, Delores Williams, to name only a few — whose works I have used for this study warn against co-optation. Co-optation is often the absorption of a single liberating praxis into a powerful and entrenched domination system neutralizing, if not wholly subverting, of the praxis' liberatory force. This is a real possibility for women entering the patriarchal system operative in the Church. But at the same time, the acceptance of women is an opportunity to work for change within the system. The lessons we have learned from the civil rights movement show that both co-optive and liberative possibilities are open to those who work from inside an oppressive system. Oppressive systems and the justifications — philosophical and otherwise — given to

support their exclusionary policies need to be fought from within and without. The well-known gay feminist theologian Beverly Harrison who became the first woman bishop in that Church has worked for change from the outside, and now inside the highest rungs of the hierarchy in the Episcopal church. But to work from the inside means to discern at the same time how and where the power of the oppressive system may be operative in the change agent.

In his brief and ambitious history of western thought, philosopher and intellectual historian Richard Tarnas concludes that philosophy as conceived for, and presented to, the world by western men is approaching its end and must give way to the philosophy done and yet to be done by a diversity of women in order for philosophy to survive. He writes:

But why has the pervasive masculinity of the western intellectual and spiritual tradition suddenly become so apparent to us today, while it has remained so invisible to almost every previous generation? I believe this is occurring only now because, as Hegel suggested, a civilization cannot become conscious of itself, cannot recognize its own significance, until it is so mature that it is approaching its own death.⁴

While his words are clearly an admission of a serious lacuna in the development of western philosophy, he nevertheless credits this new development to Hegel's dialectics and his concept of the irreversible progress of ideas as they journey through history. I think back to my own on-going work of attempting to see and undo my own sexism especially because I grew up in a land which culturally inherited two strains of it: the sweet one from China and the gallant one from Spain. Sexist sweetness and gallantry have their own peculiar contagious blinding force which, perhaps, explains why the nature of a blind spot is not unlike that of prejudice. The American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce described it succinctly when he said: "the nature of prejudice is

constituted by the very simple fact that it does not occur to us that it is.”⁵ It does not occur to us that it is because we simply do not see. Those who can see it must point it out to us. Richard Tarnas’s position suffers from something like the gallant strain of the sexism I internalized from the social context of my youth and which I continue to eject from my consciousness. By placing the emergence of women’s philosophical perspective as the inevitable fulfillment of Hegel’s dialectical process, he overlooks the work of feminists and womanists who have passionately fought against patriarchy and phallocentrism for over one hundred years now. Jennifer Gore has astutely shown that the *claims* we make about knowledge production must be consistent with the *process* of producing such knowledge because otherwise they (the claim and the process) tend to cancel out each other.⁶

As a male person of color who has grown up in a culture that took for granted the status of women as second class citizens, I need to examine my statements and commitments so that my positions and the logic I use to support them do not cancel each other out. If his commitment to supporting women’s philosophy is genuine, then he needs to give credit to their work and not ascribe it, albeit inadvertently, to Hegel’s dialectical idealism.

In my work against racism, I have multiple opportunities to speak to groups about the question of affirmative action. In my presentations, I have often used the phrase “women and blacks” and had no idea of the exclusion I was making until my black women friends finally sat me down and explained to me that the phrase did not include them.⁷ According to them, the phrase “women and blacks” really applied to white women and black men. Until then, it had never occurred to me that in undoing racism I was at the

same time helping sow sexism. This is merely one instance in my undoing racism work, and there are probably more exclusions I am not yet aware of in other areas of my life. I will continue to struggle with the liberation *cum* oppression possibilities until I have learned to shift from “additive” to “interlocking approaches” in my community and university work.⁸ With this interlocking paradigm in mind, I can better assess the consistency or inconsistency of my thought, work and symbols.

The blind spot liberation theology and liberation theologians suffer from is similar to the one I had in my anti-racism work. I contend that this is the most serious blind spot of liberation theology for at least two reasons: first, the majority of poor people in Latin America are women and if there is going to be a socio-economic liberation that will not at the same time bring sexist oppression, the female face of this poverty must be considered; second, while the Vatican has opened the permanent diaconate and the priestly orders to men of color and to gay men, it continues to prevent women from having access to these sacramental ministerial orders *in the name of God!* This blind spot is made urgent by the fact that liberation theologians (by omission) and the hierarchy (by intention) seem to agree that the exclusion of women in the ordained ministry of the Church is a non-issue! Black feminist poet June Jordan helps explain the urgency I am talking about as she remembers her mother who committed suicide:

I think all of this is really about women and work. Certainly this is all about me as a woman and my life work. I mean I am not sure my mother's suicide was something extraordinary. Perhaps *most women must deal with a similar inheritance, legacy of a woman whose death you cannot possibly because she died so many, many times....* I came too late to help my mother to her feet. By way of everlasting to all of the women who have helped me to stay alive *I am working never to be late again.*⁹

Sexism has no place anywhere but, in a most urgent way, it has no place in the Catholic church or in any church. Liberation theologians, the hierarchy, and all men in the Church need to listen and enter into the experiences of women whose deaths can no longer be pinpointed because sexism has factually and metaphorically killed so many of them so many, many times and we as a community must *“never be late again.”*

One of the reasons for the genesis of sexism in many liberation theologians comes from their educational backgrounds and experiences. Most of the ones discussed in the previous chapter received their undergraduate education in their home countries under European missionaries, and their graduate degrees in Europe under European professors. I had the same undergraduate experience and would have been sent to Rome as a theology student had I not shown what they considered “dangerous tendencies toward student activism.” I was asked instead to do an “extended regency period” which meant I could not return to the “pontifical” seminary as originally planned for my theological education. It was an originally painful experience but it turned out to be the best rejection of my college life, not only because it changed the trajectory of my theological education but also because it changed my life’s vocation. I continued my work with the slum families in the Smoky Mountain slum community, organized grassroots movements against the Marcos dictatorship, and ended up as a political refugee in New Orleans. But how did my sexism develop and survive even as I worked with the poor women in the slums of Manila and in the poor neighborhoods of New Orleans?

Everybody studying for the priesthood in the pontifical seminary I attended went through a pre-planned curriculum from the Vatican: 120 credit hours of philosophy, leaving only 72 hours for the rest of the college courses. I remember doubting whether I

could still remain whole with so much philosophy in my system. During my baccalaureate thesis defense -- which was really half a day of intellectual cruelty -- I remember asking why it was that all the questions had to do with Aristotle and Aquinas. The response I received was also a question presented as a fairly clear threat: do you want to go on to study Catholic theology? This was the problem. We studied philosophy not with *sophia* but with classical theology in mind. It was, therefore, difficult to ask questions pertaining to philosophy per se when the focus was limited to its theological usefulness. Aristotle's hylemorphic theory, for instance, could not be questioned because it might later open the possibility of doubting the Church's concept of transubstantiation as the philosophical justification for the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy. Questioning teachers was often perceived as a challenge to their authority and expertise in the field. It was never clear to us as students whether, as European professors, they were bothered by Filipino students asking questions, or, as guardians of orthodoxy in a Vatican affiliated school of theology they were concerned that such questions could later evolve into heretical thinking. What was made sufficiently clear, however, was that the school followed the Vatican tradition of education characterized mainly by obedience and loyalty to the pontiff and undergirded by western philosophical presuppositions.

Whitehead once remarked that western philosophy is a long footnote on Plato. Plato has indeed been considered as the point of reference for western philosophy. In the *Republic*, he wrote that men as a class are naturally superior to women as a class and that men can always do better anything that a woman can do including even those things traditionally assigned to them; in the *Timaieus*, he taught that women were formerly

wicked men who were punished for their irrational thinking; in *Laws*, the *Letters*, and *Theaetatus*, he claimed that women belong in the category given for children and animals because they are naturally inferior to men. The pervasiveness of the negativity towards women in Plato's work could not just have come from his mind but must have also been a characteristic of his time and culture.¹⁰

Aristotle was a brilliant young student of Plato's Academy who was initially enthralled by his master's almost poetic philosophical thought. Eventually, however, he concluded that experience provided the human mind so real an information that it could not be the result of an illusion. He then created his own philosophical system that embraced experience as a real source for learning. History would later categorize his thinking as falling under the label of realism to distinguish it from the idealism of his teacher. His appreciation for the role of experience did not seem to have led him to see the experience of cruelty women were going through in his time. While he improved on his teacher's ideas, he added another cruel element to his culture's denigration of women. Plato indicated a lack in women's nature that made them inferior to men; for Aristotle it was not merely a lack -- which could perhaps be compensated for in other areas-- but a *deformity*.¹¹ By choosing this word-- distorted *forma* --Aristotle made the condition of women more permanent, he also introduced into women's nature a fearful element which had to be watched controlled or tamed.

The philosophical thoughts and the anti-women ideas of these two thinkers would be continued and applied by two "doctors of the Church." In the early part of the 5th century, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) employed Plato's dualistic conception of the universe in his various treatises on philosophical and theological issues of his time. In the

City of God, he Christianized Plato's World of Ideas and contrasted the divine city with the city of men.¹² Augustine also brought to Christianity Plato's sexism and used it as the explanation for his contention that women could not truly reflect the *imago Dei*.

By the time Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) appeared as the Catholic church's "angelic doctor" the devaluation of women had already been entrenched in the heart of the hierarchy. Following Aristotle whose philosophy became the foundation for his theological work, Aquinas's philosophical anthropology placed men as the criterion by which other creatures would be judged and made them "the normative and generic sex of the human species." Because of the deformity and defectibility of their nature, women only partially shared in the *imago Dei* and only men had the distinction of sharing it in its fullness. Nature had shown through the incompleteness of women's humanity that they belong in a "subservient position in the social order."¹³

The consistency and persistence of this negative portrayal of women from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas -- key figures in the history of the western mind -- indicate the depth of their influence in all aspects of the culture of Europe. So pervasive is this hatred that Church leaders would later invent a conception of this negativity which made it an ontological necessity for women. This also meant that fullness of humanity was an ontological necessity for men. In this scheme of thought, it would begin to be taken for granted that in the Catholic church there were things that women simply could not be and do.

Hatred from Theology

In *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly is so overwhelmed by the anti-women thoughts and works of these four thinkers and others like them that she declares: "When

God is male; male is God.”¹⁴ She captures the line of thought that the four men described above followed: if the Unmoved Mover in philosophy is male; the *Theos* in theology is male and by extension the *Christus* in Christology had to be male. Christology is a branch of theology that reflects on the meaning of the person and mission of Yeshua who was proclaimed by his followers as the Anointed One after the resurrection event. It is in Christology where the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Inquisition) would use “ontological necessity” as a metaphysical tool to exclude women from ever being able to represent Christ in the priesthood of the Catholic church.

Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether traces the development and use of this concept in a highly creative and powerful book entitled: *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*.¹⁵ I will summarize here her analysis of the Vatican document that officially declares women’s exclusion in the ordained ministry of the priesthood. The usual argument presented by the hierarchy follows this poorly crafted syllogism: Yeshua was a man; he did not choose women disciples; therefore, he intended to exclude women from representing him in the ordained priesthood of the Church. But even if history were later to show that Yeshua did indeed have women disciples, the theological justification for women’s exclusion would still stand. Ruether explains that this is because “the neo-conservatives wish to see in the exclusion of women some unchangeable sacramental mystery that links the maleness of the priest with the maleness of Christ.” Within this conceptual design, only one -- from several possible choices -- symbol could be chosen which describes Christ’s relationship with the Church. The choice could only be the bridegroom (Christ)-bride (Church) symbolism. Since the Church is the bride, Christ, of course, had to be the bridegroom. “It is taken for granted,”

says Ruether, “that this symbol system of bridegroom over bride, of head over body, of male over female, is the revealed truth, *rather than itself being simply a projection of a certain male dominated social order.*” It comes close to the height of arrogance to claim that God can only manifest the divine self in the form of a male. This is exactly the reasoning that the *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* adopts for it insists that “there must a physical resemblance between the priest and Christ. Ruether’s response to this declaration is worth quoting *in toto*:

Since this strange new version of the imitation of Christ does not exclude a Negro, a Chinese, or a Dutchman from representing a first century Jew, or a wealthy prelate from representing a carpenter’s son, or sinners from representing the savior, we must assume that this imitation of Christ has now been reduced to one essential element, namely, the male sex.¹⁶

Ruether is calling the Church’s attention to the utter ridiculousness of the *Declaration*’s position. And she is not alone in this. The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner indicated his support for Ruether’s and other Catholic theologians’ position before his death calling the document heretical. It strikes me as not just a simple case of prejudicial thinking but an acute case of scotosis, which another Catholic theologian describes as “a hardening of the mind against a threatening bit of wisdom.”¹⁷ There is no sound basis for elevating one metaphor over the others, just as effective, in describing the relationship between Christ and the Church. Why can it not be: friend to friend, sister to sister, lover to lover? To choose only one metaphor to express so complex a reality as divine mystery is to fail to understand the nature of metaphor and, at worst, to throw oneself into a conceptual prison. Many Catholic men and women refused to put themselves in this kind of prison. Some have asked if this ontologically male savior can save, or will ever be interested is

saving women. For many of them it is time for “the changing of the gods,” as one feminist theologian calls her decision to leave the Church. Others continue on in the Church hoping for it to see -- as it had seen many times before, albeit always a bit late -- that “one of the best gifts for the critical mind and for a living tradition is the gift of a new question.”¹⁸ Can a Christology that is freed from its embeddedness in the structures of patriarchy be imagined? Ruether offers three possibilities which in varying degrees are already operative in the Church: 1) imperial Christology, 2) androgynous Christologies, 3) prophetic/iconoclastic Christology.¹⁹

1. Imperial Christology combines the awaited Messiah of the Hebrews and the Logos of God of the Greeks. The messiah is expected to reign over the nation of Israel and to protect it from its enemies with the powers of a mighty king; the Logos is the governing principle of the universe that discloses itself in the person of the Hellenic King who would rule over women, slaves, and barbarians. In the Christology of Eusebius of Caesarea, adviser to emperor Constantine, Christ becomes the emperor of the newly christianized empire embracing hierarchy, slavery, and Greco-Roman imperialism. This turn of events in the history of the Church is the context of protestant theologian Stanley Hauerwas’ question: Did Christianity convert Constantine or was it the other way around?

When has an emperor ever washed the feet of his subjects in public like Yeshua did with his disciples? When has an emperor ever sided with the outcasts of the empire against the rulers of the empire as Yeshua did with the Roman Empire? When has an emperor ever demanded equal respect and dignity for women and men as Yeshua did with his followers? Followers of the imperial model need these questions as gifts.

2. There are several Christologies that fit this category including gnostic Christologies of the early Church, medieval Yeshua mysticism especially in Julian of Norwich, Joachite christology of the women leaders of the late Middle ages, 19th century Anglo-American sects, such as the Shakers, Protestant pietism. All these Christologies attempt to unite femaleness and maleness in the person of the Christ. In its earlier formulations the “higher element of maleness” incorporated or absorbed the “lower element of femaleness” to become in Christ one whole redeemed humanity. Ruether points out a shift in the later formulations of the 19th century, as the home “becomes the launching pad for a crusade into society to redeem it and elevate it to the emergent female standard of goodness.”

3. The prophetic, iconoclastic Christ is the messianic prophet who confronts powerful ruling elites in the social, political, and religious realms and reverses the traditional hierarchies in society favoring the outcasts and rejecting the righteousness and arrogance of the wealthy. This prophetic Christ sees, and is moved to compassion at the injustices including those committed against women: Hebrew, Samaritan, Syro-phoenician. “In the iconoclastic, messianic vision,” writes Ruether, “it is the women of the despised and outcast peoples who are seen at the bottom of the present hierarchy and hence, in a special way, the last who shall be the first in the kingdom.” This is the Christology that offers the Church a way out from its patriarchal captivity. It is also the Christology that is consistent with the findings of the most recent multi-disciplinary studies on Yeshua and the movement he started two thousand years ago.

Hatred from Culture

In a book on spirituality he subtitled *The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, John Kananaugh observed, “the Christian churches have helped generate and continue to support the imperialism of the commodity.”²⁰ In this regime of truth founded on commodity, domination, exploitation, and manipulation are the rules of the game. Power players turn bodies of women into instruments in the service of this imperial commodity. The degradation and violence perpetrated against women throughout the world resulting from the misery of feminized poverty, sexual assault, wife battering, foot binding, mutilation, disappearances are the concrete consequences of their culturally disvalued existence.

Feminist Benedictine nun Joan Chittister has used Rollo May’s study of violence and power to discuss how patriarchal systems are perpetuated in many areas of our culture by the exploitive, competitive, and manipulative use of power. She maintains that in the exercise of each of these negative forces “lies the sad and enduring history of women.”²¹ But she does not lose hope. Instead, she suggests ways that women and men, especially members of faith communities, might participate in replacing them with mutually enhancing -- nurturant and integrative -- use of these powers.

Exploitive power is the power that uses the other merely for the service of the self; its purpose is to take from the exploited whatever is necessary to meet the needs of the exploiter. The ideology of exploited power rests on the assumption that some people are born to rule others and others are there to serve them. The theology of exploitive power is based “on the notion that some people are endowed with clearer vision of and closer association with the divine” thus giving them a special status. Women bear the

heaviest burden from exploitive power in our culture -- in law, religion, medicine, marriage, education, politics, etc.²²

Competitive power has to do with devising strategies to give oneself an edge and destroy the competition. The ideology of this type of power is based on the assumption that to be on the other side to be wrong and to be the target of destruction. The theology of competitive power comes from the belief that God give gifts to some people destined to win over others with lesser or no gifts at all.

Manipulative power is the use of indirect ways and means to push others into structures and events under the control of the manipulators at the same time making it appear that the manipulated got there by invitation. The manipulator relies on his ability to distort reality and to defame others who resist the manipulation. Tokenism is one of the most effective tools of manipulative power. "Tokenism," Chittister says, "co-opts outsiders into the power structure in very small numbers in order to look accepting of the total group but without really having to share power with them."²³ The theological manipulator will even reduce the complexity of divine mystery to simplistic formulations so that he can impose his version of reality on unsuspecting communities. The manipulator will hide behind authority -- civil or ecclesiastical -- even after experience and scholarship reveal the flaw of his position.

All the feminist writers and thinkers I have read and hear, both in the secular and theological fields, discuss in one form or another the heavy toll exacted by exploitive, competitive, and manipulative use of power in the lives of women. I want to mention three, among hundreds of studies, which provide powerful examples of the use of these powers to assault women: Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: the Meta-ethics of Radical*

Feminism (1978) describes the horrifying ways in which different cultures physically degrade women; Marilyn French's *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1985) which questions the assaultive presuppositions of the morally acceptable behaviors; and Jeff Benedict's

Public Heroes, Private Villains: Athletes and Crimes against Women (1997) reveals the horrendous crimes sports heroes commit against women but are shielded by the lucrative sports industry.²⁴ I put them here and not in the footnotes because these works have a forefront location in my mind as I write the text of this chapter. Are there alternative use of powers that may lead to mutuality between women and men?

Chittister again relies on Rollo May's concepts of nurturant and integrative power. Nurturant power seeks the welfare of the other and tries to foster a spirit of cooperation and community in society. But while nurturant power functions well in society free of oppressive socially constructed realities, in a sexist society the nurturing roles often falls on women who never gets any nurturing in return.

This is why integrative power is the best means for promoting mutually enhancing relationships between men and women. Integrative power is based on patterns of collaboration where everyone listens and is heard and the conditions for genuine dialogue and conversations are enhanced. Exploitation, competition, and manipulation are strong human tendencies but in relationships built on trust and mutuality their existence will easily be noticed and diminished. Sexism kills women, to borrow June Jordan's words, many, many times before death actually comes. A social evil that has had hundreds of years to develop will not go away so easily. Like a huge tree with a million roots, removal will be an arduous and complex task. The negative types of power described by

May do not manifest themselves very clearly. Yet this should no cause passivity. As Chittister has shown, the exclusion of women in the ordained ministry of the Catholic church is clearly an exercise of a combination of the three forms of hatred and the destructive powers described above.

I want to end with three stories of women -- two from the bible and one from the university where I work -- which I hope will further support my contention in this chapter that liberation theology risks canceling out their credibility and the effectiveness of their liberatory passion if undoing sexism does not become integral to their liberation journey. In this first story from the Old Testament's book of Judges, a man from Ephraim was on a journey looking for his concubine who had returned to her father in Bethlehem after an altercation. The man found his concubine at her father's and they set out on a journey back. As evening fell they searched for a place to stay and got an offer from an old farmer who welcomed them at his house. The two were sharing a meal with the farmer's family when

some men from the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that may have intercourse with him." And the master of the house went out and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing." So the man seized his concubine and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break they let her go. As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light. In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house found his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hand on the threshold. "Get up," he said to her, "we are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey and the man set out for his home. When he had entered his , he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. Then he commanded the men whom he

sent saying, "Thus you shall say to all the Israelites, 'Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.'" (Jgs 19: 22-30)

Rage and sorrow are the only words I can think of but only another woman, biblical literature scholar Phyllis Trible, can really see the extent of the assault:

Of all the characters in scripture, she is the least. Appearing at the end of a *story that rapes her*, she is alone in a world men. Neither the other characters nor the narrator recognize her humanity.... Without name, speech or power, she has no friends to aid her in life or mourn her in death. Passing her back and forth among themselves, the men of Israel have obliterated her totally. Captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, dismembered, and scattered-- this woman is the most sinned against.... Her body has been broken and given to many.²⁵ Lesser power has no woman than this, that her life is laid down by a man.

The second story comes from the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament. Again it is about an unnamed woman who performs an important ritual for Yeshua whom she knew was about to experience suffering and death at the hands of the ruling elite:

While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some who were there said to one another in anger: "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor." They began to scold her but Jesus stopped them saying: "Let her alone, why do you trouble her? She has performed a sacred service to me. You will always have the poor and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." (Mk. 14: 5-9)

Once again I have read and heard this story over and over again and only another woman, biblical scholar and theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, could open my eyes to what I had been socialized not to see:

In this passion account of Mark's Gospel three disciples figure prominently: on the one hand, two of the twelve -- Judas who betrays Jesus and Peter who denies him -- and on the other, the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus. But while the stories of Judas and Peter are engraved in the memory of Christians,

the story of the woman is virtually forgotten. Although Jesus pronounces in Mark: What she has done will be told in remembrance of her, the woman's prophetic sign-action did not become part of the gospel knowledge of Christians. Even her name is lost to us.... The name of the betrayer remembered but the name of the faithful disciple is forgotten because she is a woman.²⁶

This final story happened a few years ago when the Wiccan feminist theologian Starhawk was invited to speak on violence against women at the university where I work. I was accompanying her to the lecture hall when she noticed a flyer on one of the bulletin boards. The flyer had a color picture of a young woman in a scanty swimsuit. The text on the flyer, which partly covered her breasts, said: "Come to our topless car wash and enjoy yourself, proceeds will go to charity." Starhawk took the flyer promising to return it after her talk. We noticed from a distance that at the entrance of the building there was a group composed mostly of men protesting Starhawk's presence at a Catholic university. The text in one of the signs read: "Why pay a pagan to poison our kid's minds?" As we approached the entrance, Starhawk introduced herself to one of the men and, showing the flyer to the man, asked: "Which do you think will poison your kids' mind, this (pointing to the flyer) or the work I do with battered women and their children which is the central story of my talk this evening." And the man said: "What has car washing got to do with it?"

Some omissions do have to be pointed out to many of us men, otherwise the raped and dismembered woman in the Book of Judges, the ridiculed and forgotten woman in the Gospel of Mark, the bait woman on the flyer, and the millions and thousands of other women who suffer the erasures and cruelty of patriarchy *will keep dying those many, many deaths*. While it is an illusion to think that there are easy solutions, even to think that simple dialogue will lead us to them, to have been so socialized as to have missed

Starhawk's point about "the flyer" and then do nothing, is to suffer from the return of a deadly strain of a Middle Ages affliction many teachers referred to then as "invincible ignorance."

End Notes

- 1 Adapted from "Lifting as we climb," the motto of the 50,000 black women who came together in 1916 to form the National Association of Colored Women's clubs. Racism and sexism were two of their most difficult uphill journeys. See Angela Davis. Women, Culture, & Politics. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. p. 4.
- 2 Gerda Lerner. The Creation of Patriarchy. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. She suggests in this book that the oppression of women was the original oppression and became the pattern for all others.
- 3 Margaret Farley. "Sexism," New Catholic Encyclopedia, New York, New York: McGraw Hill, 1978. 17: 604.
- 4 Richard Tarnas. The Passion of the Western Mind. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991, p. 445
- 5 Charles Sanders Pierce. Collected Papers. vol. 5. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 1934 p. 265. Pierce also declares that Descartes Cogito could not have proved anything because it could have been the result of his prejudice. Hans-Georg Gadamer makes a similar point in saying that prejudgment always accompanies our thoughts and actions. This is why conversation is so essential in understanding because it is through conversations that one's prejudices are pointed out or discovered. See Hans-Georg Gadamer. Philiosophical Hermenetics. trans. David E. Linge. Los Angeles: University of California, 1976, p. 9.
- 6 Elizabeth Ellsworth. "Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. eds. New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 90-119.
- 7 Bridging the Gap is the name of an organization I started with a colleague which meets weekly to learn to confront racist behavior through conversation, dialogue, and humor.
- 8 Patricia Hill Collins. Black Feminist Thought. New York: Pointledge, 1991, p. 222. This interlocking approach to social change strategies follows here "lifting-others-as-we-climb" tradition in African American communities.

- 9 June Jordan. On Call. Boston: South End Press, 1985, p. 26.
- 10 Joan Chittister. Job's Daughters: Women of Power. New York: Paulist Press, 1990. p. 14.
- 11 Aristotle. Generation of Animals. trans. A. L. Peck. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1943, I: 113. Thomas Aquinas presents a synthesis of this position in *Summa Theologia* 1, q. 92, q. 99.
- 12 Augustine of Hippo did for Plato's philosophy what Thomas Aquinas did for Aristotle's. The City of God. trans. J. K. Ryan. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960.
- 13 Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologia 1, q. 92, a .1 ad. 2.
- 14 Mary Lealy. Beyond God the Father. Boston: Beacon Press. 1973, p. 19.
- 15 Rosemary Redford Ruether. To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism. New York: Crossroad, 1990, pp. 45-46. Ruether offers the briefest and clearest analysis of the Vatican's argument against the ordination of women and according to the Vatican, Yeshua's modern war an ontological necessity, so therefore only modern may represent him.
- 16 Rosemary Ruether. To Change the World. p. 47.
- 17 Bernard Lonergan. Insight: A Study of Human Understanding. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1978, 191-192, 222-25.
- 18 Mary Collins. "Naming God in Public Prayer." Worship. 59, 1985, p. 292.
- 19 Rosemary Ruether. To Change the World. p. 47.
- 20 John Kavanaugh. Following Jesus in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984 p. 111.
- 21 Joan Chittister. Job's Daughters, p. 11.
- 22 Joan Chittister. Job's Daughters, p. 12.
- 23 Joan Chittister. Job's Daughters, p. 27.
- 24 These books have opened my eyes to the horrifying human toll of sexism in the world.
- 25 Phyllis Trible. Texts of Terror. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 80-81.

- 26 Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. In Memory of Her. New York: Crossroads, 1983, p. 411.

CHAPTER 5

COMPOSING A CURRICULUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

This final chapter attempts a composition of curriculum grounded in liberation theology as a theory for social change, and will flow along three lines. First, it takes a recursive look at the four previous chapters to retrieve a sense of self as agent using the method of *currere*.¹ Second, it discusses an approach to knowledge grounded in a preferential option for the poor through the concept of conscientization and describes its implications in the learning process. Finally, it presents a teaching narrative where *currere* and conscientization move like connective spirals between and around the outer and the inner worlds of the teacher and the learner as they embark on an emancipatory learning journey.

Looking Back through the *Currere* Lens

My earliest educational experiences in the village came from a world that knew no walls between the classroom and the village community. I was part of one closely-knit and tightly woven universe where conflicts and tensions in one area affected the threads of life in another. In this context, education was the student's daily living and learning in the discursive world – words, rituals, symbols, dreams, stories, etc. -- of the village. The educated person was the one who contributed to the fund of collective wisdom from which the community drew in responding to the problems that arose therein. The role of the teacher was to model a pedagogical style --within and without the classroom -- characterized by a seasoned expertise in the use of the local language, a sustained devotion to promoting uplifting relationships, and a highly reverent sensitivity to the natural world. The pedagogical methods employed were participation in common tasks,

e.g., digging a well or planting rice, conversations, and frequent telling of stories. Public and private divisions were unheard of because of the smallness of the community, and because the responsibility of maintaining and repairing the common good that bound the village required constant conversations and communal dialogues. Further, because the village was seen as fitting into a the larger encompassing presence of the surrounding rain forest, the teaching of isolated facts and figures of the sciences or the “measured world” was looked upon as sacrilegious insensitivity to the whispering, immeasurable, intangible, and, at times, mystical language of the natural world. This common vision and this sense of place within a bigger universe, although part of a long tradition, “had to break loose from anchorage”² and had to be continually brought into being through critique, affirmation, and celebration in the lived lives of the community members of which the school was an integral part.

The huge flood I narrated in chapter one embodied this common vision and sense of belonging. It also tested not only the lessons I learned in the village but also the creativity, dedication, and courage of my teachers. However, natural calamities were not the only problems that the community had to contend with. Just like everywhere else in the universe, good and evil and their myriad combinations manifested themselves in the village life. Though rare and far between, crimes did occur, e.g., theft, poisoning the river to catch fish, violence, and the village leaders and teachers deliberated on the punishment which, at times, included tying a criminal’s hands and literally walking with him on the two-day journey to the jail in the nearest town. Judging or the making of communally funded ethical decisions was integral to being a leader and teacher in the village community. This was not a simple task. It required the knowledge and wisdom to know

which offense could be forgiven, which meant allowing the offender to stay with the community, and which not, resulting in his or her family's ejection from the village.

Truth never had the thrust and texture of a meta-narrative. There was a process, a journey, involved in reaching this truth. Adults who were chosen to be leaders and teachers had to pass a series of tests and rituals intended to sear the wisdom traditions of the village into their souls. The ones who survived with grace and kindness were deemed to be living monuments of truth in their lives and thus, capable of the sacred responsibility of leading and teaching the young ones in the community.

Curriculum in this state of affairs was literally a *curriculum vitae*. The word "vitae" as the form for both the genitive and the dative cases in Latin was viewed as a curriculum *of* and *for* life. To the question, what knowledge is of most worth? The answer from the members of the village was the knowledge, language, and the relational skills to live in the spirit of community. Teachers were engaged in an educational process of developing young lives, drawn to and shaped in, a "form of life" where one's worth was largely derived from its communal ties. Although the class size was large, there was never a feeling of "massification" or mass teaching. The collaborative relationship between the teachers and volunteer parents were a model of cooperation to the children. Students felt a sense of personalized learning. The different skills that volunteer parents brought to the classroom connected well with the skills children were learning in school, so much so that single learnings became multiple ones. "Teach little," Whitehead suggested, "but create multiple combinations."³ To an outsider, the scene of small groups of students actively engaged in different learning experiences (multiple praxis) facilitated by parents and teachers must have looked like a classroom of chaos with the

teachers and parents lost in it. Yet I remember it to be a place where we sought answers together instead of passively absorbing solutions dished out by the teacher; it was a place of interrelated instead of isolated learning; it was a space of active and creative stimulation of mind and heart, instead of a field where the drill master yelled the information to be mastered.

High-school education in a pre-college seminary program was a significantly different experience. The community, the school, the teachers, the teaching methods, the students, and the books were different and the parents -- all non-clergy adults -- were completely out of the scene. The most oppressive difference was the rule: "Only Latin, Spanish, and English are allowed and anyone caught speaking the native language will be punished." The teachers were Spanish and Portuguese members of a religious order. There were no more participations in common tasks, no more conversations, and no more storytelling because this was "high" school and a special one at that -- preparing young minds for the lofty vocation of the priesthood. We were being taught a different language. Borrowing Heidegger's words, the house of our (native) being was being gradually demolished and soon would be replaced. I did not have the insight then to recognize a persistent anxiety that pervaded my schooling in the city, in the seminary. Forty-eight of us started the program and four years later only four graduated. Not even the special status -- the elite four -- could silence the angst. Did we make it because we collaborated in the destruction of the house of our being? Did we collaborate with the colonial mind and practices of our teachers? Was it betrayal in the guise of accomplishment? It is chilling to think that all this had to happen for us to have accomplished this feat? Looking

back now, I know some damage was done to my cultural house of being, to my discursive world.

The teaching and learning method used all throughout the four years of high school was memorization. Even the punishment for breaking the language rule -- as we often naturally resorted to speaking the native dialect -- was memorization of several pages from the Latin, Spanish, or English dictionaries. We were excellent *memorizers* so much so that we did well with our lessons and even with our punishments. There were hundreds of individual practical exercises on weekends that were supposedly designed to prevent the “evil one” from taking our minds during free time. We were excellent *individual* exercisers. Story telling, so prevalent in the educational experience from the village, was replaced with the question and answer approach. The teacher asked the “right” questions and the *quickest* student with the memorized response got the correct answer. We were the quickest with our answers. Because Latin, Spanish, and English were the languages of the teachers, the smart ones were those who could speak the master’s languages. We were fluent in the *languages of the masters*. The natural world was seen as a source of superstition, and was meant only to provide humanity with the raw materials needed for the advances of civilization. We, the indigenous students, did an excellent job in *pushing the village and the natural, “whispering” world into concealment*. But the past images and ideals of the village student, village teacher, village curriculum, and the natural world became concealed.

Because we were the best memorizers, the quickest with our answers, the most fluent with the languages of the masters, and the most efficient concealers of our native culture and history, the four of us were rewarded with scholarships to the best Catholic

university in the country, with promises even to earn a scholarship to the best of the best, the Gregorian in Rome. By now, education was an encounter with a body of knowledge that was most unlike and alien to our culture. Teaching and learning were exercises in thickening the layers of concealment that had already begun in high school. Rationality as understood in the western Enlightenment tradition became the supreme arbiter of true knowledge. The *koan* and the *haiku* in the Asian enlightenment were belittled and rejected as esoteric nonsense. Philosophical (Aristotelian) reason alone was to undergird the relationship between the knower and the known, the teaching methodology, and the curriculum of the college philosophy program. As I indicated in chapter four, it was not only a Eurocentric philosophy but also the type of philosophy employed as a handmaid to Scholastic theology. Except for the elimination of the punishment regarding speaking the native language, everything with minor adjustments was similar to the high-school educational experience. Mastery of the language of the masters remained the litmus test for the educated person.

It was not until I began the Smoky Mountain Community pastoral teaching assignment that the pedagogy and curriculum of the village, concealed during my high school and college seminary years, began to push up like oak roots under concrete, colonial slabs. The approach to knowledge used and promoted in the college seminary clashed with the approach used in this slum community. At the seminary, I was taught that Western reason and its application in the learning process was the same everywhere in the world. This rationality could lead one to the truth as long as it was not vitiated by the influence of the emotional, the sensuous, and the imaginative. Pure reason, purged from the sensual and the corporeal, was the sure guide to the knowledge fit for the

superior men with a special vocation to the priesthood. Here I had also to push away into concealment everything I had learned from the women in the village who saw emotion as beneficial rather than inimical to the learning process. But as I stood with the women in this slum community, as I participated in their common tasks of looking for food and clothing in the garbage dump, as I listened to their conversations, and as they welcomed and included me in their stories, everything I thought I had successfully concealed gradually came back. The moment of revelation came as I realized that I had been quietly participating – in the name of brilliance, intellectual achievement, and western rationality – in a “culture of silence.”⁴ In that painful moment which felt both corporeal and spiritual came flooding all the self, the village, the culture, the knowledge, the consciousness and the history I had been forced to conceal.

This was an awakening to the casualties of the practice of education as domination and exploitation. But the culture of silence would not vanish instantly, the tradition of western rationality I had done well in, received rewards in, and was honored in could not be given up so easily. It would take days and months of difficult and dangerous work in the slum community with the “discarded” women and their children and others relegated to the margins, before I could extricate myself not only from the world of the oppressors but from the habits they had formed within me as well. “The true focus of revolutionary change,” says Audre Lorde, “is never merely the oppressive situations from which we seek to escape but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.”⁵ It was liberation theologians and Paulo Freire, a teacher and community organizer from Brazil, who taught me to “read” the oppressor planted deep within the chambers of my psyche. It was they who helped me see the horrible casualties

of the exploitive and dominative power that plundered colonized minds, colonized peoples, and colonized nations through the educational process. The “banking approach to education” Freire described not only helped keep the oppressive structures intact but also made the oppressed docile and silent in the face of this oppression.⁶ In liberation theology, I began to see possibilities for breaking out of this seemingly hopeless situation through the long and difficult conscientization process.

Conscientization Revisited

In the preface to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the translator, Myra Ramos explains that the Portuguese *conscientizacao* refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against these oppressive elements of reality.”⁷ It has been translated as conscientization to preserve the two Latin roots, *scire* (to know) and *cum* (with). It is also a clever combination of the psychological-epistemological term “consciousness” and the ethical-theological term “conscience,” as if to say that conscientization is the practice of consciousness with conscience. Conscientization is related to praxis in that it functions as guardian and facilitator of the interdependent cross-fertilization of action and reflection which constitute the latter. Conscientized social change agents are to constantly guard themselves against the tendency to rely solely on reflection (verbalism) or, alternatively the temptation to act without reflection (activism). The motivating power behind conscientization is Freire’s belief in an innate human drive toward freedom that, he says, is the “ontological and existential vocation of human beings.”⁸ Domination is a direct violation of this vocation because it results in dehumanization. Conscientization,

therefore, is a process that seeks to promote the humanity not only of the oppressed but of the oppressor as well.

Literacy education among the poorest citizens of Brazil, Chile, and other parts of Latin America was the generative seed of this process of social change. Literacy in this context was not simply learning to sound out and trace words but involved as well the naming and reading of the oppressive reality that surrounded the oppressed persons' lives. Thus, conscientization began with the *breakthrough insight* among the adult learners that their oppressive reality was enscribed in a socially constructed world and as such could be dismantled and recreated. Additionally, it was the realization that this constructed world had been for centuries the instiller of their "inhibitory consciousness" – the prescribed and operative way they had of viewing their present condition – and the sculptor of their identities. Caught in a world of oppression which, up until the breakthrough insight, had been viewed as the way things were, the adult literacy students began to imagine a different life and to see "possible consciousness" – a new way of looking at themselves and the world – born of a reality liberated *from* oppression and, therefore, liberated *for* the dream of becoming more fully human.

With awareness of a transformable yet still oppressive world and with a glimpse of new liberating possibilities, *fear of freedom* that -- the result in the learner's psyche of a consciousness induced by the oppressors -- began to assert itself.⁹ This fearful disabling emotion resulted from taking internally, like a drug, "the prescriptions for living" provided by the oppressor. "Every prescription," observed Freire, "represents the imposition of one person's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the one prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness."¹⁰ The

long-term effect of this pre-scripted or prescribed way of being was the internalization of the image and person of the oppressor into the oppressed. This was a recurrent problem in trying to recruit from the oppressed leaders who would participate in social change movements. *Fear of freedom* can be likened to the damaged self-esteem of many people of color who have to deal with a racist world all of their growing years. When mixed with the realization of the magnitude of the task, this fear of freedom became a formidable obstacle in the conscientizing process and often has prevented its progress.

While this *fear of freedom* is a difficult experience to understand by anyone outside historically colonized nations, it is not an uncommon phenomenon. Students who have suffered from the cruelties of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., can see family resemblances in the adult learner's fear. Just as a damaged self-esteem can be restored, so can the *fear of freedom* be transformed into *courage for freedom*. It is here where dialogical approaches to teaching and learning are of vital importance.

Dialogue in this context, however, includes a whole lot more than an invitation to come and talk about a problem. It involves working to establish strong relationships in a "climate of mutual trust and an ever closer partnerships" in our classrooms and in our schools.¹¹ The dialogical teacher and learner seek to reverse the banking approach to education. Thus, the teacher is also at the same time a learner. S/he does not know everything and is open to what the students might teach her or him; talking, listening, decision-making, disciplining, rule-making are shared responsibilities; teacher and students are both subjects of the learning process; curriculum is not a package brought from the outside world like a recipe for a foreign dish but organically grown and prepared in the community and in the classroom by as many and as varied participants as possible.

These characteristics are required not only of teachers but also of anyone involved in the learning process.

As I pointed out in the first chapter, Paulo Freire's theory of education was one of the significant factors in my own conscientization. His insistence on the importance of the interplay of action and reflection in the teaching and learning process provided the body and soul of the curriculum and instruction that others and I created in the learning center of the Smoky Mountains community. Adjustments and modifications had to be made but the dialogical themes and thematic universe in the poor communities he worked with in Latin America had strong family resemblances, as he himself indicated, to the ones I worked with in the Philippines. Freire was very much open to the changes required by different places and times.

Freire's social change theory hinges on three assertions: (1) there is in every human being an innate drive to freedom; (2) people are capable of changing their given reality; (3) education is always a political activity. There are assumptions between and around these assertions that I would like to explore as I attempt to make my own revisions of his ideas in hopes of applying them to my educational context.

The assertion about the universal drive towards freedom is a metaphysical concept Freire places in the subject in order that s/he may be lured towards a dream of a better and more humane world. While I am not prepared to reject all metaphysical thought, especially the belief in a power beyond human and technological capabilities, I concur partly with thinkers who claim that the "metaphysics of presence" and the tendency to look for "profundity in the hidden" have hindered rather than helped our search for knowledge and understanding.¹² Freire's positing of this innate universal drive

for freedom, while it may have helped his attempt to find common ground for the key players – Christians and Marxists – in his literacy work, leads him into an essentialist notion of subjectivity. Our contemporary sensibilities compel us to ask: Whose vocation? Whose humanity? Whose essence? There are class, race, gender, and sexual orientation differences that must be brought to bear on these concepts. In what does the subjectivity of the oppressed consist? Does the oppressor share the call to humanization in the same way the oppressed does? If so, why was it the case that in recent history – El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Peru, the Middle east, Rwanda, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, to name only a few – the oppressors seem to have forgotten this call and only the oppressed seem to have remembered it? The essentializing of this drive is not only dangerous but is also, perhaps, an obstacle to the struggle for freedom, for often marginalized individuals and groups simply wait for the oppressor to awaken to his or her innate freedom-seeking essence. In chapter two, I pointed out how Leo XIII recognized the structural nature of economic injustice and yet was hindered from recommending or supporting any action against it because he believed that industrialists would eventually awaken to their *essential Christian vocation* to be charitable to those in need.

I find more helpful the notion of subjectivity as “never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive [and non-discursive] boundaries change with differing historical conditions.” Seeing self as a never finished product, subjectivity may be viewed as encompassing a “complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of our outer and inner world, the continuous engagement of a self or subject in a social reality.”¹³ This way of conceiving subjectivity does not have to exclude concern and hope for a better world. It only takes it out of the metaphysical realm implied by the positing of a

universal essence. A persistent desire for freedom that is open to negotiations and conversations maintained and nurtured by one's engagement in his or her social reality can be just as, if not more, powerful a motivating factor as a metaphysically given essential vocation. Further, this concept of subjectivity frees the self from both the deterministic constraints of an unchangeable drive and the totalizing impact of oppressive realities that tend to erase effective and creative agency.

The assertion regarding the changeable nature of a given reality is a reclaiming of the notion that human beings do have the power to alter their social circumstance instead of being passively and helplessly determined by it. The gauge indicating what shapes reality has oscillated from the psychological/theological side of the spectrum which claims that the psyche or spirit shape our social world to the anthropological/sociological side that holds the obverse position. I believe Freire's conscientization process is caught in this dualism and must, therefore, be reconceived to make room for language or other "texts" that contribute to the shaping of social reality. Further, chaos theorists have shown that there are yet unseen or unthought of possibilities that play a significant role in the shaping of our world.

The third assertion about education as a political activity is a particularization of the second assertion to the field of education. As reconstructionists and reproduction theorists of education have shown, albeit often in an overly deterministic manner, education does tend to introduce uncritically the younger generation into the politics of the present system and brings about conformity to it. Yet, at the same time, education can also lead this same generation into the politics of freedom and call them to participate more fully in the creation of a less cruel world. As an educator, I need to include some

understanding of the ways power inheres in the learning process otherwise I might not know whether the knowledge I value will take me to the politics of the former or the latter. This coming to understanding involves an unrelenting search of the ways power is exercised in our schools and classrooms. Freire's conscientization process gives a central role to dialogue but leaves unclear how power plays in the dialogue.

Lastly, Freire's conscientization process seems to relegate the past to eternal uselessness. I understand this to be the central position of many from the Frankfurt School especially Habermas – that domination obliterates totally any positive contribution of oppressed traditions. However, as Gadamer has cogently shown, *some* traditions do survive even under the most virulent oppression. The stories of indigenous peoples in the Americas and many parts of the world are testaments to this observation. My village's narrative tradition of education, though submerged, concealed, and even vitiated by years of domination has survived. Not only have I been able to retrieve, recreate, and revalue it but I have also been able to fuse other horizons into it, including Western ones for these too continue to offer positive elements.

In summary, then, a reconceived conscientization process preserves its critical tradition but avoids essentializing notions of subjectivity. Rather, it embraces the interplay of the inner and social worlds in constituting a social change agent, one that is open and willing to dialogue with multiple and even competing solidarities. It recognizes the changeable nature of social reality and, at the same time, pays attention to the ways power inheres in the learning process. Finally, it honors human temporality and sees the past as not totally lost but as offering concrete contributions towards the making of a hopeful future.

Sculpting Shared Learning

In any course that I teach the syllabus is never firmly fixed, so that I can make room for the contributions my students bring to the class. I allow ample time for the gathering of this contribution. I begin by asking each student to write an individual plan for the course if s/he were each asked to teach it. The individual plans are then discussed through a small group discussion where similarities and differences are indicated in a group plan. Finally, the group plans are critiqued along with my proposed plan and a working syllabus emerges.

This classroom curriculum planning is followed by a two-level introduction to initiate the process of establishing mutual trust. The first level is simply the giving of the usual information, namely, name, state or country of origin, year in school, and the root sources of the blood flowing in their veins. To make sure that no one is forced to give any information s/he does not feel comfortable sharing, one can simply give the signal to go to the next person. The second level introduction is a sharing of a significant learning experience – positive or negative – that has been formative of each person's identity, world view, or value system. I have been using this exercise for over fifteen years and I continue to be amazed at how powerfully it brings about a sense of partnership and community in the learning process. Further, it puts identity, ancestry, and culture at the very door of the learning process.

The fourteen weeks of the semester become opportunities for incorporating these curriculum themes into the particular course I teach. Thus, for instance, in a course I taught on health and spirituality we explored various theories of health and different traditions of spirituality including those beyond the Western and/or Christian

perspectives. My students had conversations with hospital administrators and chaplains that were brought to class as presentations and topics for discussion. Patients in private and public hospitals were interviewed and the issues they raised were discussed. Several of these conversations led to friendships that lasted beyond the conclusion of the course. A small group of four students – all nurses in a local hospital -- asked me to join them in fulfilling the wish of a terminal cancer patient to plant a garden of marigolds. I was very much a learner in this situation. Except for one, the group was there when she died three months after the course had ended.

In a course I taught on contemporary social problems, a vocal and aggressive pro-life nurse was virulent about her condemnation of abortion. She was always debating with others who took differing positions. However, three weeks into the course, another nurse finally stood up and recalled for the pro-lifer and the whole class about a recent horrible experience of being raped. Without taking the posture of an attack, she proceeded to say how easy it is to hold one ethical position condemning abortion until “the terror of rape is written all over your body and soul.” She was definitely our teacher then and her story demolished any credence anyone might have given to moral absolutism.

Still in another course on philosophy and education, students were introduced to the difficult experience of entering into another culture by putting the main points of a twenty-page article on Eastern philosophy into a seventeen syllable *haiku*. Initially, the task was met with laughter as they mostly complained – except the Korean student – that it could not be done. Later, however, they discovered not only that it could be done but

also that it was the best way for them to understand Heidegger's words about language being the house of our being.

The last day of class is set aside for what I call a "third world dinner." The class plans the event and each person brings a dish or food item to share. The students are not told until right before dinner with all the food set on the table that the whole class will be divided into three worlds, with the fourth world (the poor who live in the first world) included in the third world. Access to the food on the table is based on the financial resources proportionate to their particular world. The first world has all the money to buy every single food item on the table; the second world has enough to buy one main dish, a cookie, and a drink; the third world can only buy a cookie and a drink. Everyone very quickly recognizes the differences and feels the cruelty of the division especially as they feel the hunger in the presence of so much food – which they have brought – to the table.

When the entire world is visible – located in the different parts of the classroom – the questions of cruelty and injustice inevitably arise. We can't just eat while others starve right in the same place, can we? With so much food, can we not figure out a way to feed each other? The dinner drives home the ironic truth of the words of Martin Luther King: "By the time we finish breakfast in the morning, we have depended on two thirds of the world."¹⁴ The alarm clock we wake up to is made by workers in China who make twenty cents an hour; the shoes we put on were made by workers in Haiti who make fifteen cents an hour; the coffee we drink comes from farmers in El Salvador who make one dollar a day; the clothes we wear are made in sweatshops all over Africa, Asia, and Latin America by workers who make seventeen cents an hour and work sixteen hours a day.

The curriculum story that emerges from liberation theology begins, as I stated above, with the awareness that the world needs to be recreated from the perspective of those concealed and marginalized. And why should their invisibility and marginalization matter to curriculum theorists? It matters because “the point of the school curriculum is to goad us into caring for ourselves and our fellow human beings, to help us think and act with intelligence, sensitivity, and courage in both the public sphere – as citizens aspiring to establish a democratic society – and in the private sphere, as individuals committed to other individuals.”¹⁵ And because education is a meaningful and creative stitch of the past, present, and future, acting with intelligence means questioning the deterministic understanding of history, which is the version we have inherited from Hegel and Marx. Curriculum seeks to make room for other interpretations of the role of the past in our individual and communal lives. Surely, there is more to say about our past than what has been given to us by these two brilliant thinkers. As John Caputo has put it, whenever someone gives us the last word on anything about our individual and social lives, it is good to “restore life to its original difficulty”¹⁶ so that we can make room for more dialogue and more conversations. Indeed there is more than we can say. No one has the last word on the knowledge that can unlock for us all the mysteries of the universe. Yet life’s complexity should not also lead to despair and helplessness. A curriculum that promotes social change is one that includes both knowledge and skills in personal and social relationships, an openness to the different and differing perspectives, a willingness to participate, and to help those who are excluded, to participate in conversations, a sense of celebration and gratitude for the gifts of creation -- which is always a good place to start in creating a common good -- one that is always open to communal revisions and

reconfigurations. And it would not truly be a curriculum *of* and *for* life if it did not also include those who theorize from locations of pain and struggle,¹⁷ from the heap of lost languages, and from the violated lives and bodies of those who dwell in the whispering world. This theorizing from locations of pain and struggle has been given powerful and concrete visibility in a brief letter a principal who survived the Holocaust wrote to his teachers:

Dear Teachers

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no one should witness:

Gas chambers built by learned engineers.

Children poisoned by educated physicians.

Infants killed by trained nurses.

Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students to become human.

Your efforts must not produce learned monsters, psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important if they serve to make our children more human.¹⁸

But the curriculum story does not end here. It cannot. Soon it will have to confront a holocaust still invisible to many in the curriculum field, the assault and plunder of a living planet. George Steiner once remarked that, “the polis is that structure designed to execute Socrates.”¹⁹ He would, perhaps, be more on target if he had said, our North American culture is that structure designed to execute the earth. Our curriculum of hope, then, lies in cutting ourselves loose from this anchorage in pillage.

End Notes

- 1 William Pinar. Autobiography, Politics & Sexuality. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. pp. 19-27.

- 2 Maxine Green. Releasing the Imagination. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1995. p. 109.
- 3 Alfred North Whitehead. The Aims of Education and Other Essays. New York: Free Press. 1929. p.36.
- 4 Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. trans. Myra Ramos. New York: Seabury Press. 1970. "Culture of silence" is used throughout the book and is explained as the silencing effect on the oppressed of long years of cultural invasion achieved through the banking approach to education. "Fear of freedom" is used similarly and is often understood as the reason for the silence. "Prescription" is a literal translation from the Portuguese/Spanish languages that should not be confused with the internal connotation of its medical use in English. "Pre-scripted" or "controlled" is really what is meant insofar as the oppressor, according to Freire, pre-scripts or controls the inner and outer worlds of the oppressed. In this sense, prescription – internal and external—also results in a culture of silence.
- 5 Audre Lorde. Sister Outsider. New York: Crossings Press. 1984. p.123. Lorde has written powerfully about the effects of internalized oppression in subjugated individuals and groups. She and Freire share a similar psychology and sociology of oppression.
- 6 Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p. 59. Freire and Gustavo Gutierrez considered each other personal and intellectual friends. Liberation theology may be viewed as theology of the oppressed.
- 7 Myra Ramos in a note in the Preface to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p.19.
- 8 Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p. 52.
- 9 See note 4 above.
- 10 Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p. 31
- 11 Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. pp. 77-81.
- 12 I view the many of Derrida's work particularly Of Grammatology as undoing this metaphysics of presence. Similarly, Michel Foucault who considered himself an empiricist rejected, especially in his reconception of Kant's "What is Enlightenment?," any claim based on the valuing of the hidden.
- 13 Teresa de Lauretis. Alice Doesn't. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1984. pp.182 and 186.

- 14 Martin Luther King, Jr. in Marie Dennis Grosso. The Way to Peace. Philadelphia: Pax Christi Publications. 1991. p. 44.
- 15 William Pinar, William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, Peter Taubman. Understanding Curriculum. New York: Lang, 1995. p.848.
- 16 John Caputo. Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1987 p.11.
- 17 bell hooks. Teaching to Transgress. New York. Routledge. 1994. This is powerfully described in Chapter 5.
- 18 H. S. Shapiro in Mary J. O' Hair, H. James McLaughlin, Ulrich C. Reitzug. Foundations of Democratic Education. New York: Harcourt College Publishers. 2000.p.70.
- 19 George Steiner in N. Scott and R. Sharp. eds. Reading George Steiner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1994. p. 227.

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VITA

Alvaro Basista Alcazar was a political refugee from the repressive Philippine dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Influenced by Jesuit mentors, the work of Paulo Freire and Gustavo Gutierrez during his college seminary education, he became an activist and organizer throughout his college years and worked with tenant farmers and slum dwellers around the city of Manila. After graduation from college, he continued working as an adult literacy teacher using the Freirean model in various urban poor communities. When Marcos declared martial law in September 1972, he was arrested for organizing to block bulldozers sent by many of the dictator's business cronies to destroy the homes of those in slum communities. He was detained and tortured in one of the detention centers. With the help of Amnesty International and an underground network of activist friends, he was able to leave the country six weeks after the declaration of martial law. He continued his seminary studies at Notre Dame Graduate School of Theology in New Orleans and received a Master's Degree in Theological Studies in 1976. Unable to return home, he went on to Loyola University and finished a graduate degree in Religious Education in 1984. In January of 1985, he applied for political asylum and was granted authorization to work. In July of 1985, he became the director of the Loyola University Community Action Program and stayed active in social justice issues affecting the poor in the New Orleans community. Later that year, his application for asylum was granted. He is married to Nenita Cruz and has two teenage boys, Jay and Christopher. He remains active in social justice issues and is a member of a grassroots organization called the Jeremiah group. He teaches part-time in the Education department, and in the Religious Studies and Philosophy departments of City College at Loyola University New Orleans.

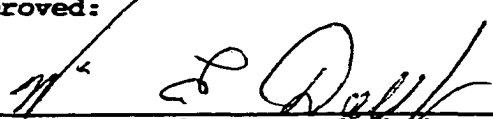
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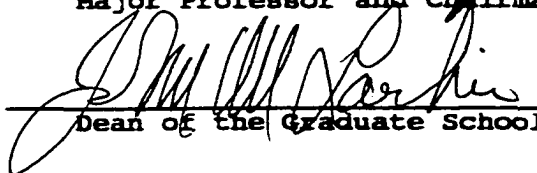
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Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction


Title of Dissertation: The Curriculum Implications of Liberation Theology
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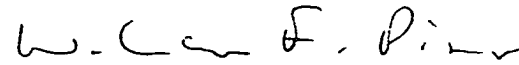
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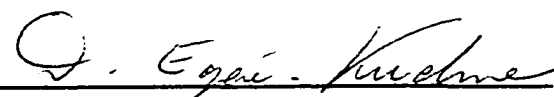

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