

–The Christian Revolution: Liberation Theology–

1. Introduction: Biblical Liberation

Without doubt, freedom or liberation of the oppressed is a great theme of Scripture. It presents various aspects. Man is presented with creational freedom, i.e. living in his universe by the principles of true freedom. If he is functionally operative then he is free. When his will is aligned with the will of God then he is free. This is the message of the first few chapters of Genesis. He is free to obey and fulfil the mandate of God (Gen. 1:28ff). The breaking of that alignment with the will of God brings man into bondage and death (Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12ff). Biblical history in Genesis chapters 1–11 is pre-Abrahamic, that is it is a build-up to the truth of covenant. Covenant – the Abrahamic covenant – has universal connotation. By it the nations of the earth – no less Abraham’s family – will be blessed.

Liberation is seen as essential to Israel, the elect people of God. Israel is liberated from Egypt. Once in Canaan it faces the problem of the idols. With the oppression of idols goes hand in hand the oppression of the nations which oppose Israel. Israel becomes a subject people, subject to other nations because of her idolatry. The prophets, whilst they prophesy of Israel’s destruction, also prophesy of the coming Kingdom, and somehow, at the last, Israel (or at least her holy remnant) is a saved and liberated people. The eschatological end in which Israel is redeemed (liberated and established) is also the beginning of the new and eternal era of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’

Linked with this Messianic Kingdom are the nations. This theme is pursued both in Old and New Testaments. When Jesus comes he does so to liberate the oppressed (cf. Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38). However, this liberation is not limited to Israel but relates to Samaritans and Gentiles also, particularly as they are known as ‘the nations’. The ultimate in eschatology is the liberation of the nations, and their participation in the New (Messianic) Age and Kingdom.¹

So much for liberation on the national scale. Prophetism also predicts liberation for Israel as a nation. At the same time liberation in a personal sense is posited for those persons who are of the elect of God. There is also personal liberation for those who become persons of faith. Sometimes the language of the Sermon on the Mount (‘The meek shall inherit the earth’), the

¹ Whilst we do not develop this theme immediately, we will examine it in full at a later point in our study. Material for such study is included in *Salvation History* (NCPI, 1977) and *LFS. 34, The People of God: the True Community* (NCPI, 1979).

Magnificat, the pronouncements of liberation by Jesus (Luke 4:18, 11:21–23) can be interpreted in terms of social justice and moral righteousness, and sometimes in personal soteriological categories. These two elements, whilst not mutually exclusive, seem yet to speak of differing operations. One relates to personal liberation in the realm of salvation; the other in social terms of man's living in his world.

Whatever these be, the Christian Gospel is in the true stream of Biblical Judaism. Its eschatology is of the people of God, the winning of the nations to obedience to Christ, the culmination of the new age, in which creation itself is liberated to eternalisation and the inheritance of glory.

Naturally enough, the negative forces in history such as personalised evil in the forms of rebellious celestial and terrestrial creatures come in for mention. They too are defeated, and their captives released. The multifarious forms of personalised evil, and the domination of these evil powers forms a background to N.T. liberation theology. Ultimately their doom is sealed, hence the ultimate New Age knows nothing of their powers of domination. Man is freed from them, and free to fulfil his destiny in eternity. The idols are defeated.

So many elements are contained in this liberation theology as to demand a careful and detailed inquiry into them, and the formation of a Biblical rationale. Without this a praxis cannot be formed. The fact of Biblical theology is that many praxis of revolution or liberation theology are currently emerging. Although we cannot undertake an examination of these in this study we can surely seek an understanding of the Biblical principles of liberation.

2. Evangelical Liberation Theology

The Reformation saw a renewal of the Pauline 'justice of faith', commonly known as justification. Justification dealt with the acquittal of believing man from the guilt of his sins. An examination of this doctrine, however, is a deeply profound and even complex matter. Without attempting to relate it to the whole of God's salvation history or to work out all its implications, we simply set out what is the primary Protestant theology of Christian freedom. Whilst its primary basis is Pauline and allied New Testament teaching, yet the various streams of Puritanism, Pietism, Evangelicalism, and Holiness have flowed since the Reformation to make an impression upon the person we call evangelical. We now proceed to formulate that theology.

Biblical Liberation Theology

(i) Introduction: Liberation is Needed, and Posited

In John 8:31–36 Jesus states that he who sins is the bond-slave of sin. His promises of deliverance such as Luke 4:18, 11:21–23, as also the prophetic promises with which he accords (e.g. Luke 1:70–79, cf. Isaiah 61:1, etc.), mean that man is caught in an inescapable bondage. Other N.T. writers speak of this bondage (e.g. II Peter 2:19, Romans 3:9, 6:17–18, etc.). They also speak of freedom effected (e.g. Gal. 5:1, Rom. 8:1–3, Gal. 5:13, etc.) and of freedom to come (Rom. 8:21, Gal. 5:5, Rom. 5:4–5). The subject then is no fancy or illusion.

(ii) Man's Initial Freedom

Man, being created, was created as a free creature. Genesis 1:31 (cf. Eccles. 3:11, I Tim. 4:4, etc.)

shows creation to be both complete and functional. Man, within this creation, is also free and functional, provided he aligns himself, voluntarily, with God's will for him and the creation (cf. Gen. 1:28ff, 2:18ff). His relationship to God, as created, can be shown to be that of a son to the Father, a creature to the Creator, and a servant to the King. Man's true humanity lies in living within, and fulfilling, these relationships. In such lies true serenity, joy, purpose, and meaning to life.

(iii) Fall into Bondage

Man's temptation, through the serpent (cf. Rev. 12:10), is for man not simply to be like God but as God. Man was already like God. To be as God meant he sought parity. This would nullify the son-creature-servant relationship with the Father-Creator-King. Man's bondage then was that he had rejected his essential humanity, and so the essential nature of God and creation. This is powerfully presented in Romans 1:18-32.

(iv) The Nature of Man's Bondage

By being dissociated, disoriented, and dislocated in the creation for which he was made, man is in extreme bondage. Since he cannot relate fully to the functional order he is in a very real way awry in the creation which was intended to be his natural and enjoyable habitat. His bondage is primarily existential. The deceit which results from his disobedience causes him (a) To falsify the world he is in, as also God and himself, for 'he exchanged the truth of God for a lie', and so, (b) To be out of harmony with the natural order of God, creation and himself. This is a deadly form of bondage. By nature of the case, it brings him into the following, consequent bondages:

(a) Bondage to Sin

Romans 5:12ff says that sin entered into the world by man. Death likewise entered. Hence man is under the bondage of sin (John 8:34, Rom. 3:9, Prov. 5:22-23, II Peter 2:19, Rom. 6:17-18, etc.). Three elements of sin keep man in bondage, namely its pollution, its penalty and its habit-forming, lust-compelling nature. It is allied with death in its domination of man (I Cor. 15:55-56, Rom. 5:12ff, cf. Heb. 2:14-15, I John 4:18).

(b) Bondage to Death

Man is in fear of death, not so much because he has to die, as he is doomed (i.e. deserves) to die. His kind of death is the result of sin. Hence he fears it along with the judgement which goes with it. The guilt of sin makes him fear this judgement (Rom. 5:12-21, I Cor. 15:55-56, Heb. 2:14-15, I John 4:18).

(c) Bondage to Satan

By submitting to the temptation of Satan (Gen. 3:1-6) man allied himself with the purposes of Satan, i.e. to dethrone God and enthrone himself. He was thus caught into the system of this rebellious celestial power (Ephes. 2:1-3) and is said to lie under the power of the Evil One (I John 5:19). Again, in accordance with Hebrews 2:14-15, the fear of death from his sin-guilt makes him a prey to Satan. He must obey that one (Ephes. 2:1-3).

(d) Bondage to the World System and Its Powers

According to Biblical teaching, Satan has weaned away angelic and human powers from voluntary loyalty to God (cf. Rev. 12:1ff). Fallen angels, demonic and spirit-powers are part of his system. His system is anti-God, and seeks also to create a counterpart for all that God is and does. Hence the Scriptures speak of 'the world', meaning that system of evil which attempts to subvert the creation, and impose its own rule upon it. It has therefore a world-wisdom (I Cor. 1:20ff), and is an age of its own (Gal. 1:4-5), and its own rulers and agents nominated as 'principalities and powers'. (See Col. 2:14-15, Ephes. 6:12, Rom. 8:38-39, Gal. 1:4, cf. II Peter 2:4, Jude 6.) Galatians 1:4 (amongst other references) indicates that man is under bondage to these powers by his sin-guilt.

(e) Bondage to Flesh

Human flesh, as bodily life, is part of normal creation, and is not denigrated. Wrong and lustful use of the body, through the mind (Ephes. 2:2-3, cf. I John 2:15), is called flesh. Romans 8:5ff shows that flesh is man's nature as opposed to God and His law. It is humanity affected by sin. It is man in rebellion against God and His (creational, functional) laws. A study of Colossians 2: 11f, Romans 8:5-7, Galatians 5:17, 19-20, 24, Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:22 (etc.) shows us that man is in bondage to his flesh and its (mind) lusts by virtue of his actual sins and their guilt.

(f) Bondage to Law

Whilst Paul speaks of Mosaic law to Jews he nevertheless broadens the principle to show that man is under bondage to law generally, for law preceded the giving of the (Jewish) law to Moses. Man is always under law (Romans 7:1) and under its power because of sin-guilt (I Cor. 15:56, Rom. 7:4, etc.). The condemnation of the law is what brings man into bondage.

(g) Bondage to God's Wrath

Since in I Thess. 1:10 Paul speaks of being delivered 'from the wrath to come' (cf. Rom. 5:10), then wrath, and especially fear of it, must keep man in bondage. This is equivalent to the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10-14). It is also the same as man fearing judgement and death (I John 4:18, Heb. 2:14-15). Romans 1:18 speaks of wrath being experienced now. Whilst this keeps man in a bondage of fear, the anticipation of its final crisis is also enslaving.

(h) Bondage to Conscience

Hebrews 9:14 (cf. 6:1) speaks of the conscience of man as being laden with dead works, i.e. works which are dead and corrupting. This form of uncleanness and moral death are demeaning to man, and keep him in shame and fear.

(i) Bondage to Idols

Part of man's alienation to God is in the worship of (attachment to) idols. I Corinthians 12:2 speaks of the grip these idols have upon man (cf. Hosea 4:17). Idols are part of the evil system (I Cor. 8:5) and keep man in bondage (Gal. 4: 8-10), and keep man in a form of law-bondage (cf. Col. 2:8). Were man not sinful, guilty, and allied to evil, the idols could not grip him. They are man's alternatives to the true God (Rom. 1:21-23, cf. Acts 17:28-29).

(v) Man is Delivered from Bondage

Christ's promise was that he would deliver man from bondage. He effected this in two ways:—

- (a) He actually released men and women from the actual oppression of Satan wherever he went in Palestine (Acts 10:38). Satanic bondage took the forms of sickness, disease, demon oppression and possession, and manipulation of man through guilt. The term 'rebuke' is seen in three typical happenings of healing sicknesses (Luke 4:40–41), of exorcism (Luke 4:33–35), and of demonic incitement of physical elements (Luke 8 :22–25).
- (b) He bore the entire guilt of man upon the Cross (I Peter 2:24, 3:18, II Cor. 5:21, Isaiah 53:3ff, Heb. 9:26, Rom. 8:3, II Cor. 5:14, etc.). It is clear from such references as John 14:30–31, John 12:31, Luke 11:21–23, Luke 22:53, cf. Heb. 2:14–15, 1 John 3:8 that the Cross was the time of conflict with Satan and his hosts (cf. Col. 2:14–15). At the same time, as we have said, it was the time of bearing the sins of man, and effecting purification for sins (Heb. 1:3) as well as propitiation for them (I John 4:10, Romans 3:24ff). In effect, then, the entire guilt of man was dealt with so that man could be acquitted from the charge and guilt of sin (Rom. 3:24ff, Gal. 2:16f, Rom. 5:5, 8:1, Gal. 3:13–14, etc.).

The whole principle of the defeat of the enemies in whose bondage sinful man is enslaved is this:— Christ, by bearing our guilt, has taken away the means whereby evil enemies can keep man in bondage. There is no basis, apart from guilt, for the enslavement by these enemies.

(vi) Effecting Man's Liberation

The fruits and benefits of the Cross have to be brought to man, to his understanding and acceptance, and then applied actually to his person. Whilst the work of the Cross is total, and is sufficient for complete liberation, it must be effected by the Holy Spirit. The principle is enunciated in Romans 8:1– 3, Titus 3:3–7, and I Cor. 6:9–11. In John 16:7–11 Jesus speaks of the initial (prevenient) work of the Spirit in conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement. The regenerating work of the Spirit (Titus 3:3–7) is the applicative work of the Spirit. In Romans 8:2 this is called 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. In II Cor. 3:17 Paul affirms that 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty', meaning that the Spirit (a) Effects freedom by his applicative works, (b) Continually ensures operational freedom by his presence, teaching, etc. This is borne out in Galatians 5:16–18.

(vii) The Elements of Christian Freedom

Man is liberated from sin and its condemnation. As a result he is now free to obey. By 'free to obey' we mean two things:—

- (a) He is liberated in his will and charged with love. Hence he is not under bondage to sin (cf. Rom. 6:17f). He is motivated by love, and enabled by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13–14).

- (b) In one sense he is free not to obey, although he loses freedom by disobedience. We mean he has a genuine free choice to decided one way or the other. He is weighted, of course, to obey.

Galatians 5:13–14 shows that liberty is in serving, love-wise. Since the law is love (Gal. 5:14, Rom. 13:8–10), then liberty is in loving. At the same time the law, functionally, is the way of freedom. This is seen in Psalm 119:45, James 1:22–25, 2:8–12, for obedience is the manner or mode of freedom. Romans chs. 13–14 (cf. I Cor. 8) shows the principle of freedom to be love. One is only truly free when one is free not to do what one is free to do. See Romans 14:14–19. One's freedom must not be permitted to prove a stumbling block to weaker brethren.

(viii) The Effects of Christian Freedom

This is a vast subject. However, simply put it means that the liberated person walks freely in God's creation. Whilst his freedom is continually contested, he learns to walk in freedom. This means he loves others. It also means his love within the people of God is a form of freedom to him and an aid to it for others. Moreover the 'free community' witnesses to soteriological and functional freedom. It is their task to share this freedom with those outside the elect community so that they, too, may join it through justification.

(ix) Eschatological Freedom

In Romans 7:13–25 – amongst other passages – Paul deals with the moral conflict continually confronting man. Man is in pain because of the conflict with sin. Likewise in Romans 8:18–25 Paul depicts the anguish all creation – including redeemed man – knows because (a) The creation is subjected to futility and frustration, unable to express itself fully, and (b) Man (and creation) has not yet been released into the full liberty of the sons of God. This liberty must mean that attainment of maturation, of glory, and of eternalisation. In this state man will not be troubled by evil, but will be released to express his redeemed humanity, his filial relationship with the Father, and the qualities of his glorified being. He will then utilise the inheritance which is his. Doubtless eternity will be the full and perfect expression of God's freedom.

(x) Current Continuing Freedom

As we suggested, man is free to obey, free in obeying, and freed from the strangling hold of evil. He can thus fulfil God's purposes. At the same time the old enemies attack him, seeking to frustrate his God-given freedom, and to drag him back into bondage. Galatians 5:1 warns against such attempts. Man then has continually to assert his guiltlessness (Rev. 12:11) and stand firm against evil (James 4:7, I Peter 5:8–9, cf. I John 2:13–14, 4:4, 5:4). The redeemed sinner must keep on reckoning on his release from sin (Rom. 6:11), and obey from the heart (Rom. 6:17), and so live in his freedom. As we have indicated, this is by the agency of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2–3, Gal. 5:16–18, 22–26, cf. Gal. 3:1–3). The doctrine of justification ensures that man may reckon on his imputed righteousness and not, again, come under the bondage of guilt and so of accusation and bondage. I Corinthians 15:55–58 shows that the defeat of sin and death ensures one can press on in the Christian life, and the work of the Lord.

(xi) The Context of Christian Freedom

We will be looking at the widest canvas of Christian freedom. This will include not only the people of God as the holy remnant, and ultimately as the ‘great multitude such as no man can number out of every nation, and people, and kindred and tribe and tongue’, but also the widest question of all the nations, and of all creation. Whilst on the one hand the dimensions of freedom for one person are immense, and the qualitative results of freedom rich beyond man’s imagination (cf. I Cor. 2:10 et.al.), yet also the matter of freedom relates to all God’s creation. Its measure must ultimately be the measure of God in His glory, and His vindication in being the Creator–Father–King of His creation and Kingdom.

It means then that the context of true human freedom is always the human race. It is also the human race as its divisions are drawn in families, tribes, clans, and nations. At the same time, this freedom is in context with the whole of creation, for creation ultimately participates in the eschatological freedom of the sons of God. Yet the eschatological is in hope, whilst the now–time is in faith and practice.

It must therefore be a very rich experience for men to live in freedom, even though that freedom be constantly contested by the enslaving forces of evil. Part of our study will be to see the changing nature and modes of worldly bondage, and the flexible, adaptive nature of God’s love in freedom.

3. History and The Freedom of Man

(i) There Has Always Been Freedom For Some

What our study is primarily concerned with doing is seeing what is man’s essential freedom, and whether, man being in bondage can be freed, and if so, how. Also what is important is whether the means by which freedom is given to him are ultimately valid, that is whether they lead to further or other bondage. We must then know what is the nature of bondage, and what is the nature of true freedom, and indeed authentic liberation.

The Biblical revelation has it that there have always been men and women who are free. Hebrews 11 poses this in terms of faith in God. An examination of the persons who had faith shows that few, if any, escaped suffering, and that suffering was generally the concomitant of faith. Nevertheless these persons are denoted as free persons because they voluntarily aligned themselves with the will of God (cf. Genesis 26:4–5). However, it is the principle of faith in God which leads to personal freedom amid what are the social bondages of the world. On this basis Paul can say, ‘In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free’, and he is referring to ‘female’, ‘Gentile’, and ‘slave’ as three categories thought, at least by Jews, and of course by others also, to be inferior, and even enslaving. The story of the tax–gatherer who cried, ‘Lord, be propitious to me, a sinner!’ is the paradigm for the universal principle of faith. God effects this person’s liberation from guilt and its consequence by a legitimate act of mercy. The person may be then free to live out his categories of life no matter what his circumstances may be. This is the teaching of Hebrews ii, and Paul expounds it in principle as ‘the justice of faith’ in his Romans treatment.

In practice, persons have in history lived freely under the most debasing and onerous conditions of human enslavement. Men and women have had a strange and wonderful freedom in concentration camps. Persons like Helen Keller have found (with James Denney) that ‘heredity fixes not our fate but our trial’.

Philosophical determinism is given the lie by adventurous people who have defied the social structures² about them which would have hedged them in and debased the freedom of the human spirit.

The problem which confronts us is that whilst the human spirit in some special cases may well find freedom when and where there is social and political enslavement, is that enough? Must freedom always be personalistic, and in many cases for the individual, pietistic?

(ii) There Have Been Movements Of and For Freedom in History

This is self-evident. Proverbially, nations have fought for their freedom. They have also seen their continuing freedom, often, in the subjugation of other nations, which has meant they have denied freedom to such peoples. Biblically we see the mandate of Genesis 1:28–30 to indicate the modes of living for humanity as it aligns itself with God's purposes for the world, i.e. that man shall spread across the earth, utilising and sharing the facilities and resources on the basis of one large family, even though this family become a series of loosely-knit tribes, clans and people. Under this principle all would be free. We know that the desire for personal and people autonomy – over and against the will of God – is seen as the cause for human enslavement. The case of Nimrod and Babel is seen as the paradigm for man's drive for political autonomy (Gen. 10:8–14, 11:1–9). Some see in Cain's building of a city (Gen. 4:17) the making of an unnecessary commercialism and density population.³

God's concern for nations is portrayed in Scripture. The fact that God chooses Israel as His special people does not mean they are His favourite people. They are chosen for a task, and this is with a view to all the nations. In Exodus 19:5–6 Israel is to be the priest-nation among all the nations, which may well mean for all the nations. Israel itself saw God as the God of all the nations. The question is whether Israel thought of God as King over all the earth by creation, but believed that Israel being His primary choice meant He controlled the nations primarily for Israel's benefit and profit? The other question is whether His treatment of Israel is an exemplar for His treatment of all nations? Also: where does the community of God, the church, that is the true Israel fit into God's schemes for nations, and the liberation of the earth?

What happened historically in regard to Israel is before us. God actually liberated an oppressed minority enslaved in Egypt. He brought them to Canaan and gave them that land and their freedom. Hence a good case can be made out for a liberation theology where the nation is a theocracy. It may be an over-simplification to say that what God did with Israel lie will do with any nation which will become a theocracy. God's choice of Israel is that of grace. It is not necessarily a paradigm for all nations. Answers to some of our questions can only be found in eschatology and allied apocalyptic. That is, we are asking whether Israel's task, as also that of the church, is primarily related to the soteriological. If that is the case, then we have to examine the relationship of liberation to soteriology and to the ultimate emancipation of the universe as it relates to creation and the eschaton. If liberation of persons and nations is the current goal and not only eschatological, then we need to think through a

² When we say 'structures' we do not mean that authority structures or authority are per se wrong. In fact we will pose that true freedom can only be found within true authority. We refer here of course to authoritarian uses of authority for purposes which are not commensurate with that authority.

³ For the whole matter of 'city' see Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970.

number of issues in regard to the present prevailing perspectives of evangelism. For example, the recent World Congress on Evangelism scarcely related evangelism to the need or opportunity to effect liberation of peoples as nations. It aligned itself with nothing of a liberation theology other than that which above we have called Evangelical Liberation Theology (see p.2).

In formulating a Biblical theology of Liberation and Revolution we must then determine whether God's liberation of Israel from Egypt is the paradigm and principle for all liberation theology, or whether in fact Israel is unique as a nation, intended in terms of Exodus 19:5–6 to be the priest–nation: intended in terms of Isaiah 32:1–13, 44:1–8, and Isaiah 55 (and kindred passages) to be a witness–nation, and intended also in the light of the Servant–passages in the latter portion of Isaiah to be a servant–nation, this servant–nation to be a Liberator–nation in the light of Isaiah 42:1–9 – ‘I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those that sit in darkness.’ Such a nation is witness to God in His holiness, His deliverance and His covenantal love. Of course the nation as Servant is the nation as Messiah, and although it is the holy remnant (Isaiah 6) that witnesses, yet this is the *raison d'être* of the nation. Israel is one Son (Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1) and all persons of faith the children of God (Deut. 14:1). In the N.T. the people of God are all one Son (Gal. 3:26–29) for Hosea 11:1 is attributed to Jesus the Messiah, who himself is the Servant of the Isaianic passages, as Mark 10:45 and kindred passages confirm.

In order to understand Israel as unique we must examine God's liberation (theology) as it relates to that nation, and in what we have written above the foundation and basis of the matter.

(iii) Israel and Liberation

Israel's history is connected with –

- (a) Covenantal patronage of God with related covenantal Fatherhood. Exodus 2:23–25, cf. Deut. 26:5–10 (‘Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel and God knew their condition.’) shows that the election of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the reason of covenant, but then that covenant has, as we have seen, universal connotation. Covenantal Fatherhood (giving birth to Israel, creating the nation, fathering it, etc.) is seen in such passages as Malachi 2:10, Deut. 32:6ff, Isaiah 1:2, 63:16–17, 64:8.
- (b) The principle of Exodus, i.e. national liberation with a view to serving God. God tells Pharaoh many times, ‘Let My people go that they (he, my Son Israel) may serve Me.
- (c) The principle of theocracy. If God is covenantal–Father, then He is also King of His people. In fact the true king was the father of his people. So with God. Deut. 17:14–20 (cf. I Sam. 8) indicates that the king to be appointed over Israel will not destroy the theocratic nature of the nation, for the king will be the representative of God the King.
- (d) The principle of rebellion and exile. Deuteronomy chapters 28–30 is the charge given to Israel to obey. Covenant and election must not be presumed upon. God will break the nation,

sending it into exile. The priesthood of Exodus 19:5–6 is a holy priesthood (Lev. 11:44) and must be thus punished. Exile theology is also at the same time restoration theology. The truth of God is most richly known in and by suffering. Hence Israel is to be the Suffering Servant, serving God and His nations. She is to be the light to the nations.

- (e) The principle of eschatological (Messianic–kingdom) triumph. The ‘day of the Lord’ is related to ‘the latter days’. The Kingdom is to be restored to Israel when the Spirit is poured from on high. This national regeneration will be accompanied by universal regeneration. Isaiah 2:1–5, Joel 2:28ff, Micah 7:11–20, Amos 9 are some of the passages which speak of Israel’s renewal and which point to universal regeneration. Passages such as Isaiah 11 (cf. Hab. 2: 14) , 65 and 66 speak indeed of a new heaven and a new earth, and of the ultimate reign of God in peace, with the reconciliation of all things.

The N.T. stresses the elect nature of the nation of Israel. It confirms the promises to true Israel. Romans 9–11 gives a rationale of God’s unchanging love to His people.

Whilst certain elements and principles in the formation, establishment, and history of Israel may be taken – if desired – to be paradigmatic, yet it is another matter to claim that Israel is a paradigm for nations who may seek to establish the principles of liberation, and social freedom. What is certain is that within Israel the principle of social freedom is powerfully set forth. The codes found in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy certainly set about to affirm, establish and maintain a high level of human freedom. Consequently the prophets have two basic points to make in regard to social justice and true human living:–

- (a) The law given by God must not be demeaned by hypocritical observance. Sacrifices are false if the offerers themselves are not living righteously, and executing true social justice.
- (b) The law itself is good, but love of God and fellow–man are the principles by which its true nature is observed.

It is to be doubted whether Israel ever followed its law to any great degree. Idolatry devastated the moral righteousness of the people. Hence the prophets inveigh against the idols. Stephen’s message to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7) was virtually a statement that Israel had never been given over fully to the righteousness of God.

Finally, prophetism was the dynamic which gives Israel the greatness it has in history. It is evident that the prophets were not, generally speaking, heeded. Nor was their message obeyed. However, the thrust of the prophets is no less than, and quite brilliant. The message of the prophets is not per se social. It involves the social question, and true human freedom in its societal context, but the message of the prophets relates to Israel’s position amongst the nations, the shame of her disobedience, the grace of God in restoration (regeneration of the nation) , and her unique place as a witness to the nations. The promises of Messiah, Suffering Servant, Kingdom and Covenant, as also the Messianic age, the judgements upon evil, and the establishment of the great Kingdom, are ultimately universal in their connotation.

For this reason not even the message of social justice must be seen, primarily, outside of their national context and the true nature of Israel as witness.

This does not mean they will not provide rich source materials for the present social prophet. It also does not mean they are not of universal value, and that they are not, in themselves, basic morality and social freedom for all men, but, we repeat, they must be understood primarily within their own context, the people of God being taught the way of God, that Israel might honour and sanctify the Name of its Creator–Father, Redeemer, the Covenant–King.

(iv) The Truth of the People of God

Liberation theology must be contexted if it is to be Biblical. Thus when we speak of freedom movements in history, and these vis–a–vis Israel’s history as a nation, we need to understand the whole purport of the people of God. No less do we need to understand salvation–history,⁴ i.e. heilsgeschichte, for the two are virtually the one. The movement of mankind must be seen in the light of the elective purposes of God. We mean that if human liberation and social justice are seen as ends in themselves or the rights of man worked out humanistically in each context and generation, then we may have missed the import of what man is about in his creation. However, to view God’s history as purposive and to ignore current social needs, social justice, and the liberation of the human spirit is to use salvation–history and the history of the people of God as an ethical and social ‘cop–out’. Micah 6:8 tells us that God is not teaching His people how they should live in history. He has already taught them:– ‘He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’

If we look at the people of God⁵ we see, in brief, the following:–

- (a) God has created all men to serve Him, and relate to Him as creatures, sons and servant–subjects.
- (b) The rebellion of man constitutes his abdication from the original state of his being and the mandate to which he was committed (cf. Gen. 1:28ff). Thus man – in rebellion – does not relate to the essential nature of God, the universe, man and himself.
- (c) The history of the children of God is opposed to that of the children of evil (cf. I John 3:10ff, John 8:44, Ephes. 2:1–3). Seth, the substitute of Abel, commences the line of ‘the sons of God’ (cf. Gen. 6:1ff).
- (d) History prior to Abrahamic is pre–Abrahamic, pre–covenantal. In relation to the people of God, Abraham’s election is the foundation of the covenant–household.
- (e) Israel is God’s people, but then, all men of faith are the children of God and the children of Abraham (cf. Gen. 15: 6, Galatians 3).
- (f) Moses is over God’s house in Israel, but as a servant. Christ is head; God being the builder. See Hebrews 3:1– 6, Numbers 12:7, cf. John 8:34–36.
- (g) Pentecost brings the new true family of God, having both continuity and discontinuity with the qahal of Israel. The

⁴ For a simple but comprehensive treatment of this see *Salvation History* (NCPI, 1977).

⁵ For a wider treatment of the subject see *LFS. 34, The People of God: The True Community* (NCPI, 1979).

ecclesia is the new qahal not excluding Israel, but including all people of faith.

- (h) The people of God are light, salt, witnesses. The witness of the Suffering Servant (nation and Messiah) is now taken up by the new community born at Pentecost (Acts 1:8). This community is a proclaiming community, sharing the saving word (I Cor. 1:21, Rom. 10:16–17). It is a servant community serving the world, but never being servile. As Christ serves by being the ransom, so the community by proclaiming the ransom, and applying the effects of redeeming love. The community is the love–community, under the Lordship of Christ and leadership of the Spirit.
- (i) The proclamation of the people of God is to effect ‘the faith– obedience of the nations.’ Rom. 1:5, 15:18f, 16:25–27, cf. 10:16 and Matt. 28:19, Gen. 49:10, Psalm 2:7–8, Acts 1:8.
- (j) Hope is the dynamic (with faith and love) for the community of God. Prophetic truth assures the successful end. Suffering is nevertheless a concomitant of hope (Rom. 8:18–30, II Cor. 4:16f). The doctrine of creation, as also of redemption insists that man be involved in his world. He is to ‘do good unto all men’. The end assures him of the need for, and fruitfulness of, action in the now–time.
- (k) The conclusion of history can be seen from two aspects:– The first is the people of God gathered (e.g. Rev. 7:9ff, 21:1ff) and the second the healing of the nations and the bringing into the city of God (where God dwells) , by the kings of the earth, ‘the glory and honour of the nations’ (Rev. 21:22–27, 22:1–5). This must mean that over–all God has concern for nations, all the nations, and the outcome of their people–being. This is the equivalent of Isaiah 42:1–4 (‘He shall bring forth justice to the nations he will faithfully bring forth justice He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.’).

We conclude then that freedom movements in history may be random, arbitrary, and/or caused by the exigencies of history, but the steady establishment of the true community (the people of God) is the thrust of the Scriptures. It must prove relevant to current enquiry and teaching concerning a revolution or liberation theology. Theologies may be adduced or formed, but unless they relate to the historical–prophetic thrust we have examined they will be called in doubt.

4. Current Revolution or Liberation Theology

(i) The Principles and Modes of Liberation Theology

The current liberation theology is a theology of revolution. Although it comes in varying forms, the basic idea at heart is that man must be liberated not only from sin and the moral enemies by which he is beset – as set out in our Evangelical Liberation Theology – but from practical, political and economic oppression. This oppression may take many forms such as racial, classist and sexist oppression. It may involve the oppression of people by multi–national corporations, or it may involve forms of oppression which spring from pluralist societies. Pluralism must give way to egalitarian freedom. Basic liberation theology has no time for the changes of gradualism. The whole structure of society must be changed in order to free people on the one hand from oppressive

exploitive capitalism, and on the other hand from totalitarianism such as is found in Russian and Chinese communism. Whilst espousing the economic principle of Marxism it rejects the forms in which communism has emerged. It claims the Marxist analysis of history to be a correct one, and claims that Christian Marxism would transform society and liberate humanity from the various forms of oppression under which it suffers.

Che Guevara once said, 'When Christians dare to give a total revolutionary witness, the Latin American revolution will be invincible, seeing that until now Christians have allowed their teaching to be manipulated by reactionaries.' Likewise Fidel Castro has said, 'A Christian who adheres to Christian preaching in its purest form, will not side with the exploiters, nor with the bourgeoisie, nor with those who cause injustice, hunger and misery.'⁶

Liberation – after the Marxist view – sees man as alienated within his society. The economic forces at work have dehumanised him. They have used him for their own ends. In this sense man ceases to be man. To give him the personal Gospel of liberation within his context is one thing. To change that context and make it viable for him for a life of practical human freedom is another.

Dr. Gordon Dicker, in an essay contained in *O Freedom, O Freedom*⁷, makes the following points concerning the nature of liberation theology:–

- (a) It is a participant's theology. That is it is not the theology of a spectator, but of a person who is himself (or, herself) oppressed. You need to be black to understand 'Black Theology', and woman to understand 'Woman's Liberation'; and so on.
- (b) It is a political theology. The church often opts out of political involvement. This forces all Christians to be politically involved. Decisions have to be made in this regard. An open stand must be made against oppressors for the oppressed. Insistence on involvement can be most uncomfortable.
- (c) It is a theology interested in praxis only, and not theology for its own sake. As the process of political change is in operation, theological reflection is upon the action. Theology is geared only for action and change.
- (d) It is a theology heavily involved in and dependent upon other disciplines such as sociology, economics and political analysis. As such it is not so much interested in the abstract ideas of love and justice as it is in seeing them operate in the concrete situations. It cannot afford to leave the workings of justice and love to intuitive or arbitrary operations but demands that the disciplines named above give some structure to these operations. For the most part most liberationist theologians regard Marxism as the best politico-economic analysis of the oppressive society.
- (e) Liberation theology is ecumenical theology. That is it is impatient with in-fighting on the scores of faith and practice. This theology meets people across the

⁶ Ernesto Cardenal y Fidel Castro, *Christianismo y Revolucion*, (Buenos Aires, Ed. Quetzal, 1974, p.36).

⁷ *O Freedom, O Freedom*, 6 authors. First essay Gordon Dicker. (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1976).

denominational and religious cultural barriers, so that the theologian– practitioners are one in attitude, approach, and action. Ecclesiastical differences seem piffling in the light of liberation theology.

(ii) Elements Relating to Liberation Theology

There are other elements we should understand. Many of these relate to the insights of Marxism, as we shall see, but in practice the theologian demands contextualised theology. In other words, his principles of operation demand an analysis of the current situation in any culture or national society. Such an analysis must take into consideration the international scene. What is a Western nation and society will have one form of oppression and a Third World country another. Any country, either Eastern or Western, may be under the effects and influences of multi–nationals. Thus liberation theology will be concerned with the oppression of the Black American, the Latin Americas with the domination of a class society. To discover, say, the context of the Australian culture is to examine the many elements which bring humans under one kind of bondage or another, e.g. women under men, aborigines under whites, and so on.

One of the vogue terms in liberation theology is alienation. Alienation, according to Hegel, was a necessary element or feature in the human situation. It is that which develops individualism and stimulates the person to develop, cut off as he is from the social, cultural and political community in which he is born. For some theologians (not those who are liberationists) man's alienation is from his primeval roots in God, His creation and His purposes. Hence man is in existential loneliness, deprived of his true functional operations. For Marx alienation was another thing. Non–alienation or true operational living is to produce things. In creative work man gives himself external embodiment. To sell the works created is to lose that securative embodiment. A capitalist society simply uses man to create, but in alienating the worker from his products, it alienates him from himself. In this sense he ceases to possess his own life. Other persons then become not his community of living, but rivals in the marketplace and threats to his own self–interest. Hence Marx says that alienation is not simply being out of step with one's society, but being deprived of one's true personhood. Even if this alienation is not a conscious source of pain and loneliness it is objectively a fact. The economy determines the alienation of the person. Hegel sees alienation as an essential and desirable part of social living. Marx sees it as non–essential and eradicable with the change of society. This being the case – and liberationist theologians accepting the Marxian analysis – liberation theology agrees to use Marxism as its formula for changing society, and so freeing man. In a society without alienation man is one with his fellow–beings.

Sensitive liberationist theologians then would have to do analysis of any society and use their new conceptual models to plan its liberation. All Christians would have to be involved, for if liberation theology is correct then there is no part of humankind in which every Christian is not involved, whether he wish it that way or not.

Finally, some liberationists would differ as to the use of violence or nonviolence in achieving these aims. Some argue that non–violent efforts to achieve the goal are doomed to failure. Others see the ends as well justifying the means. This of course has little or nothing to do with the various coup d'états which happen from time to time. They are not interested in overthrowing power–conscious juntas with a view to establishing their own power junta. There is no advantage per se in any coup, especially if it is just that one power structure

is exchanged for another. Any overthrow must be with a view to establishing a liberated society on the Marxist model. It is insisted that Russian and Chinese models are not true Marxism. Christian–Marxism is the only model for true liberation, and the de–alienation of man.

(iii) A Problem in Understanding Liberation Theology

Western theology with its Western principles of Biblical interpretation is based on certain presuppositions, namely that the doctrines which it formulates are timelessly true and universally valid. Exegesis and interpretation is of another order than, say, that of South American theologians. J. Andrew Kirk in an article*, *Marxism and the Church in Latin America*, describes his own problems as a theological graduate seeking to understand Latin–American theology. He had to undertake courses in various disciplines before his thinking could become compatible with that of the South Americas. In sharing this, Kirk shows how impatient these Latin theologians are of the Western methodical approach. They are more intuitive, and Kirk says in this sense they are in line with Paul. ‘Paul,’ he says, ‘quite often takes short cuts in his arguments which leave the logical purist gasping for breath!’ (One wonders whether this is not also much of the threat which the modern Western charismatic exegete poses to the purist!)

The second problem that faces exegetes and theologians is their life–stances and life–styles. The so–called objectivity which many bring to their theological studies is rarely if ever true objectivity. Each theologian, whether of the East or the West, brings to his studies his own elements of history, personality, class, culture, and sex. There are other elements also, and so the acceptance of what he says will always have to be marginal. Indeed the one who studies his theology will have to read between the lines in order to hear what is said, through, and in the spirit of, the elements of cultural conditioning. For example, the ‘black’ theologian sees the white theologian as taking up one of two stances – pro–apartheid or anti–apartheid – when in fact, theologically, neither is the point. Identification with the black in his blackness is different from being anti–apartheid, for one may be that even for the purposes of (ultimately) protecting oneself. One may see that an anti–apartheid stance will pay in the long run! A number of subjective factors may determine one’s theology, and this be unknown by the theologian himself. The question then is, ‘Who indeed is wholly objective?’ and the answer must be, ‘None!’ At the same time this should not prevent dialogue. Dialogue gives voice to dialectic and its findings.

Little of this would make sense to a Western exegete. To him, if he is a fundamentalist, the Scripture has encapsulated timeless truth which is universally valid. If he is liberal he will use the Scripture, but depend on his reason in utilising it. The liberation theologian sees history as dynamic, and the Word as relating to Scripture (‘The God who acts’), and so the Scripture provides him with paradigms for present history. This is why Israel as a slave nation, liberated by God personally, is a paradigm as also the wanderings through the wilderness, and the structuring of the new society in Canaan are so much material. Hence the new Moses – Christ – and the Exodus he is accomplishing for his people, is the dynamic paradigm for today.

In passing it may be noted that there is little, if any, reference to Exile Theology.

(iv) Marxism and Liberation Theology

In Western countries with their affluence there can be little background thinking available for understanding liberation theology. Take, for example, a

quote from J. G. Davies' book, *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (SCM, London, 1976). On page 91 he speaks of Cuba before the overthrow led by Castro. 91% of workers were under-nourished: 96% lived on only beans and rice, no more than 4% could afford a real meal. 36% suffered from parasitic illnesses, 31% from malaria, 14% from T.B., 13% from typhoid, and only 8% had medical care. 44% of the population never went to school, and 89% of those who did only had 3 years' schooling at the most. As for all Latin America, four persons per minute die of hunger, curable illnesses or premature old age: 5,500 per day, 2,000,000 per year. In Colombia – to take one country – 61% of all land belongs to 3.6% of all landowners. 4.6% of the population receives 40.6% of the national income. Infant mortality is 10%: there are 2.5 doctors for every ten thousand people. Every year 25,000 children die of malnutrition.

These figures could be multiplied. Even affluent nations cannot ignore the tragedies which are brought to their T.V. screens daily. Yet statistics have a way of being read without registering. The practical question is, 'What is to be done about it all?'

There is more than one answer. The older answers have been examined – over decades – and have been found wanting. One answer is, 'Submit to what is, i.e. the status quo, and God will work it out. The reference to Romans 13:1ff is intended to let us know that God has ordained the authorities that are, and, presumably, things as they now are. True, it is a sinful world (which explains why things are not perfect!), but then God is sovereign, and if we submit He will work the remainder to a good conclusion. The second answer is that of eschatological cynicism, 'The world is sinful. It brings its own misery upon itself. Things will get worse and worse (as they are) and this portends the end. We must not interfere with God's judgements.' And so on. This has been described as an ethical 'cop-out'. There is also the answer of gradualism. One should work patiently, without violence, to achieve good ends. Passive resistance will ultimately tell (say, as in India under Mahatma Ghandi) and in the interim the status quo will be seen to change, but this change will come about more by evolution than direct revolution. Another answer is the effecting of an immediate revolution or coup, so replacing the oppressive power junta with a good junta of reasonable men. Liberation theology rejects all of these answers, and despises the last for being naive, since it is unlikely to succeed. The effecting of a coup simply replaces old domination with new. Liberation theology – for the most part – finds its answer in Marxism. Marxism for it is an analysis of the bondage of humanity, as also a prescription for its release. Thoughtful liberationists see that society has to be changed before men can be changed. It dismisses as simplistic the often spoken idea, 'Change men, and you will change society.' They ask, correctly enough, 'Where are these changed men who have changed society, 2,000 years of operations having been in Christian hands?' Perhaps that question is itself simplistic. Even anti-Christian cynics have admitted that many of the freedom movements are a spin-off from the teaching of the Gospel, whilst Marxism itself has grown out of a Judaic-Christian background.

What is it then about Marxism which provides the model for Christian liberation? First let us record the fact that for many years Christian-Marxist dialogue has been in operation. The book, *From Hope to Liberation – Towards a New Marxist-Christian Dialogue* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1974) gives an account of the dialogues pursued and some of the fruits of these. Liberation Theology, in spurning the weaker methods of changing society, demands a structure which will erase the alienation of man, and set him in the context of true human liberty. We must remember Marx's view of alienation:

- (a) That is alienation pervades our kind of society because of current economic structures and conditions. Man cannot express himself in conflict and competition with others of society.

- (b) This disorientation is not simply being out of congruence with one's society, but is as deep as the essential being of man.
- (c) One can in fact be alienated without knowing this is so. Disalienation would then come as a surprise. Man needs to be rescued from the alienation in which he is enslaved.

Western societies will not, for the most part, see themselves as enslaved. Christian churches will sympathise with other churches and people under the bondage of certain systems, but will often themselves be content with the views of evangelical liberation. Liberation theologians, however, demand liberation not by gradualism but by revolution. To them Marxism has come as the viable analysis of man's bondage in society, and as the way to change society by ridding it of the elements which enslave it, and giving scope to the elements which liberate it.

J. Andrew Kirk (op.cit. p.115) explains the affinity with Marxism which the liberationist theologians have.

'The discovery of Marxism had all the attraction of a newly-found faith – many 'Christians for Socialism', as these revolutionary Christians later denominated themselves, have spoken of their conversion' to Marxism – however, what seemingly drew them to a passionate commitment to the Marxist analytical tools was the objective and ideologically disinterested account given by Marxism of the causes and cure of the fundamentally unjust economic order prevalent in all Latin American countries.

Only the Marxist account could demonstrate that it was not influenced in any way by economic vested interests. It appealed to the notion of objective laws of historical change inherent in the dynamic of actual economic processes. These laws demonstrated that justice would be achieved, not because it expressed moral ideals, but because it was the inevitable consequence of the revolution of the exploited classes by which they began to redirect history in their own interests. This account of a given situation was both total and also in absolute conflict with the 'official' one, in the sense that it began from the premise that the present situation was rotten from top to bottom, impossible to justify on any grounds, and impervious to any reforms which did not set out to change the entire economic, political and legal structures concerned.

The lack of ideological defense-mechanisms and the appeal to the discovery of economic laws which explain the development and consequences of international monopoly-Capitalism has led Marxism to claim for itself the status of scientific certainty. The revolutionary Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) accept the scientific nature of Marxist analysis without qualification. Nevertheless, with few exceptions they vehemently deny that they are consistently Marxists. In order to stress the importance of making proper distinctions they prefer to speak about being 'for socialism'.

The question has to be asked, 'Does then Marxism truly liberate man?' Marx himself did not think so – not, anyway, in the initial stages. Revolution would bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat. His view was that ultimately the State would wither away and the classless society emerge. Doubtless he saw the dialectic of history as dynamic and as ensuring this ultimate and religionless kingdom approximating to the Kingdom of God. On the Marxist model then the ultimate of revolution could be a long way off. Faith and hope would have to be

powerful to tide the liberationist over that period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is why liberationists criticise the Russian and Chinese forms of communism and see Christian Marxism as the answer. They see God as Liberator and the work of liberation as His mandate for the church. They see no reason why they should not use the Marxist analysis, especially as it is claimed to be scientific.

(v) Revolution and Liberation

We have seen that Christians hold a variety of views in regard to God's liberation of man. From the pietist–individualist view on the one wing to the violent–revolutionist on the other a number of models are posed under the titles of gradualism, evolutionary change, non–violent revolution, political penetration and transformation. All agree that man should be liberated although their modes of liberation differ to varying degrees.

It appears to be a fact of history that the early Church and its Gospel 'turned the world upside down'. It effected some kind of a revolution though without violence. With the legalising of the church by Constantine, the church entered into a whole new dimension. It had a different set of problems with which it had to cope, namely the church–state relationship and functions. It became allied with the ruling powers.

J. G. Davies (op.cit. pp.118–122) presents the traditional Christian opposition to revolution in the following 4 points:

1. 'While the revolutionary says 'no' to the actual state of the world and strives to transform it, the religious person regards the world as the divine handiwork to be inhabited and not changed.
2. The revolutionary stresses human initiative, seeing human beings as the creators of history, whereas the religious person leaves all to God as the transcendent author of history, believing that the temporal order has no value in itself but is simply a period of progress towards eternal destiny.
3. Evil, says the revolutionary, is to be fought and overcome; evil, according to the religious person, is a punishment for sin and to be endured.
4. The revolutionary idealises human beings, sanctifies the revolution and has a misplaced hope, whereas the religious person knows that we are sinners, refuses to identify revolution and Kingdom and hopes in Christ alone.'

Davies himself sees these (above) as somewhat simplistic. For this reason he cannot agree with them. He stresses the fact that God has created us as free agents to work with Him in His creation for the good of all men and things.

What must be kept in mind is that Liberation Theology, by nature of the case, and because it relates to praxis, is not a symmetrical and fully formulated theology such as, say, Christology purports to be under Western theologians. Hence there is a great variety of ideas and praxis. For this reason it is difficult, even without our ingrained Western conditioning and presuppositions, to understand it.

We will therefore have to examine some elements piecemeal. We will do this as follows.

Authority and Revolution.

Many revelationists base their theories of revolution on the concept that man is good, originally. This is contrary to the Christian view of man being originally sinful. Marx's historical determinism indicates that the emergence of the classless society is irresistible.

The point which is raised is whether in fact authority overthrown will necessarily lead to true authority being established. We have seen revolutions which have not in fact changed much other than the personnel who exercise authority. Of course in a planned revolution which sweeps away what has been and replaces it with a new order, that is not necessarily the case. It is claimed that this radical operation is the only one which can effect ultimate change that will free the oppressed classes from misery.

The subject of authority⁸ is a wide one in Scripture. For our purposes passages such as Romans 13:1–7, I Peter 2:13–17, Titus 3:1, Proverbs 8:15 (29:14), Daniel 2:21, 4:17, 34–37, and John 19:11 show us that God is sovereign over His creation, and that He appoints authorities, raising them up or putting them down. The thrust of Scripture is then that the authorities are of God and must act accordingly. Should they depart from the mandate–prerogatives given to them they will be judged. Meanwhile those who are under their authority should obey them.

It is precisely at this point we meet problems, and from more than one angle. Should Christians obey authorities who are not fulfilling that which is delegated to them? Peter made it clear, 'We ought to obey God rather than men At the same time he submitted to the punishment of his captors.

What has to be distinguished is the subjective side of a refusal to submit to authority. Is the revolutionary spirit simply one of innate rebellion expressing itself along rationalised lines, or – this apart – is there a case, anyway, for revolution which will bring liberation?

The further question of whether authority is designed anyway for love places us at the centre of the significance and meaning of authority. Assuming that authority is for others and not for its own self, that must mean that the criterion of true authority is that it seeks the good of those over whom it is placed. This criterion certainly judges many of the authorities that we know.

The Authentication of Revolution.

Liberation Theology says simply that God liberated Israel from the slavery of Egypt. God was liberator. Thus – 'He breaks the rod of the oppressor' (Isa. 9:4). It says that Jesus' message of Luke 4:18, ('The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed'), and the beatitudes of Matthew 5:3–12 with other passages show that Jesus was for the materially poor and oppressed people. His invectives against the materially rich (Matt. 6:19–21, Mark 10:21, Luke 12: 13–21, 6:24, 18:18–26) show his opposition to the rich as such. The Epistles also have their warnings against riches as such.

What needs to be researched thoroughly is whether Luke 4:18 and kindred passages refer specifically to the poor in material possessions or the broken in spirit. If the term 'poor' is to be taken literally then 'blind', 'oppressed', 'captive' must likewise be understood. The fact is that Jesus preached to the poor, and also to the rich. He released no actual prisoners, nor did his immediate followers. Although this does not exclude the materially poor and actual

⁸ See LFS. No. 5, The Nature of Authority and Obedience, for a general treatment.

captives, yet its thrust seems primarily moral. This of course does not exclude the literally poor, bruised or captive persons. At the same time the bondage man was under was seen as one to evil powers (cf. Acts 10:38, Luke 11:21ff, John 12: 31, 16:11). Liberation theology would not deny this but would add that all forms of racism, classism, sexism and economic exploitation are also forms of oppression by evil. They are also evil things for they hold persons enslaved. They say that all genuine forms of liberation for human enslavement are innate in Exodus and Resurrection Theology. They suggest that the spiritualising of what Jesus promised, said and did comes from theologians who live in affluent societies. In countries such as the Latin Americas, Liberation Theology states it is praxis that counts. Action must be practical and actual and effective. They see this as the heart of the Gospel. They are therefore not interested in precise theology because, anyway, they see this emerging from institutionalised religion and they see such as in the bondage of the moneyed and power-wielding stratas of society. They suggest that praxis in fact makes theology real whereas theology with stasis is not true theology.

As for the authentication of revolution there is no doubt in the minds of liberationists that it is authentic. Not to liberate is unauthentic. At the same time, whilst there is agreement that only revolution can effect the desired change, yet they differ – many of them – as to the modes of effecting revolution, and reaching the desired goals. These nominated modes depend upon the emphases of the liberationist theologians:

(i) Conservative evangelical theologians have a different world-view in that they see the ‘powers that be’ under the sovereign control of God. They believe that the powers are both celestial and earthly and that such are moved by God. They recognise the need for practical pity, concern, and love, but believe the primary gift to men is salvation, especially as man’s significance relates to eternity. Whilst recognising the benefits of every form of human emancipation they see the temporal political order as an order which will change and fluctuate. Eschatological and apocalyptic elements give them a certain time-view and they look for a just end to human affairs and in this the millennial reign figures largely.

(ii) The theologians who hold an evolutionary view believe change must and will take place, but believe historic forces are involved and so to precipitate revolution may hinder rather than help in ultimate liberation of man in his political and cultural bondages. They believe in recognising and seeking to implement these evolutionary advances.

(iii) There is also a theology of transformation or development. The goals are clear and are freedom for all but the method is to use all existing vehicles and media for change. Again they see revolution of violent and drastic nature as often impeding the desired result. They see such transformation as Biblical, related to the doctrine of hope, and the transcendent promise of the sovereign God who will effect it.

(iv) The theologians who look to the overthrow of domination by a rich and elitist class see no hope until this is done. They believe, however, that the means do determine much of the ends and so they reject violence as the means of obtaining ends. Men like Ghandi (Hindu) and Martin Luther King (Christian) sought to use these methods.

(v) Finally there are the liberationists who feel that the ends do justify the means. Whilst acknowledging the wrongness of killing they set the lesser over against the greater evil. In fact they see this liberation by violence as the true expression of love:– We must love everyone but it is not possible to love everyone in the same way: we love the oppressed by liberating them from their misery, and the oppressors by liberating them from their sin.⁹

⁹ J. Girardi quoted by Gustavo Guitierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Madyknoll N.Y. Orbis Books, 1973). This book has been called ‘the bible of the liberation’

5. Some Conclusions Regarding Liberation Theology

Without doubt the general Western hermeneutic of Scripture leads us to the kind of interpretation we have given to the fact and truth of liberation in our statement of Evangelical Liberation. Man created free has come into the bondage of sin, death, and evil powers, and through the atonement and resurrection has been made free. This freedom must be lived out and worked out in obedience to God in the context of the Fatherhood of God, the Lordship of Christ, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. It must be experienced and filled out in the context of the church, the family of God's people. It must also relate to the needs of mankind.

Current Liberation Theology would see such a view as valid in essence, but demands that the liberation of others should not be limited to a formal, or even dynamic proclamation of the Gospel. It rejects a large number of Western theological presuppositions, believing that the church has been bound, since Constantine, by the ruling classes, and hence the hermeneutic of theologians has been generally deficient. Liberation of man must not simply be a matter of 'spiritual' liberation, but liberation of the whole man, and mankind. It means that true theology is intrinsically political. True politics is theology. Theology is praxis not stasis. The truth is only shown, not in theological theories or doctrines, but in the effective praxis. Hence, until the Gospel actually liberates men from classist, sexist, racist, and other bondages the so-called truth is ineffective.

We have seen that Liberation Theology has exponents of gradualism, penetrationism, and transformationism, all of which seek to avoid the means of violence. However, radical liberationists espouse violence, pointing out that where other means cannot succeed – and that is for almost all situations – then liberation cannot be effected. The liberation of the human race justifies the means by which it is obtained. Liberation writers point out that it is inherent in capitalism – which controls much of the human race – is intransigent in its insistence upon using the working class.

Another element to be remembered is that whilst Marxists and Christians both really espouse hope, traditional theology has spoken of hope in the light of the prophetic Word, and the sovereignty of God. Marxism bases its assurance that a classless society in the dynamism of history is the inevitable working of dialectical materialism. It sees this as related to evolution which issues in revolution. Traditional Christian theologians see the end as God's triumph. Teilhard de Chardin sees a triumphant end but as developing from a sort of creational and spiritual evolution which brings it to a moral triumph.

Liberationists see no direct working of God. Whilst they acknowledge the Exodus and Resurrection as principal paradigms they believe the power to effect political liberation, as also its initiative, are in the hands of man, no less Christian man. Hence they see the idea of faithful man waiting upon a transcendent action of the sovereign God as a capitalist-theological conditioning. Man must go and effect the liberation. They see Marxism as scientifically correct, and the true dialectic which alone can liberate man. Their rejection of Russian and Chinese models of Marxism means they hold a critical view of Marxism, and insist that it is the Christian way which fully liberates. They do not believe

that atheism is essential to genuine Marxism. It is God who is liberating, but through the mankind He has created.

When liberation theology is examined it will be seen that many of the old theological presuppositions are entirely rejected. A personalistic Gospel and salvation is virtually rejected. The personal notions of sin give way to community concepts. Man is liberated as a society, and only in that sense is a person liberated, for his context is the community. Likewise his liberation is not simply to spiritual or moral freedom, but to freedom to enjoy equally with others the gifts of the universe. Oppressions of sex, race, class, etc. are removed, and he discovers what true human living really is. The idea of 'pie in the sky, when you die, by and by', is rejected for 'pie on the earth from your birth!'. The concept of this world and life being some kind of developmental place for moral growth and ultimate (spiritual) maturation is unacceptable. The here and now is what matters, and that men use the gifts given them in creation and redemption to effect liberation of the oppressed is what matters. Hence Ernest Bloch sums up Thomas Munzer the German Anabaptist in the sentence, 'You be men and God will be God.' That is man must not relate to apocalyptic by waiting for God to act, but man is the instrument for the apocalyptic action, the attainment of the true eschaton of the human race, the emergence of the class society, and the true Kingdom.

Is Liberation Theology Intrinsically Christian?

For those couched in formal theology the above revelations of liberation theology will come as a series of shocks. There will be a reflexive rejection of its various principles. Without doubt, theologians who live where men live will agree to the principle of praxis. They will already be convinced of the uselessness of stasis. Yet they will need to be convinced of the Biblical authenticity of liberationist praxis. They will need to know whether the Bible is saying that true liberation of man presupposes the end Marxism anticipates, and also that Marxism is in fact scientific, not intrinsically atheistic, required, and sure of success. In other words, the genuine theologian will want to examine the claims of Liberationist Theology very closely.

He will also need to be aware that no theologian comes to his theology totally unconditioned. This may be said equally for the Liberationist theologian as the more traditional one. We are aware of our human pluralist history. An acritical theologian is of little use. By the same token the Liberationist theologian, having put all his money in the Marxist basket, had better be correct! Ultimately his theology, whether he accepts the fact or not, lies in the innate authenticity of Marxism. His reasoning is, 'Man is in bondage. Nothing has released him from this bondage. Christian theology per se is unable to do that. Marxism is the true historical-materialist dialectic. It is true and will succeed, but, so to speak, as the way of Christian liberation. We reject all else.'

Other factors which have to be taken into account are the bad consciences of many theologians of the Roman Catholic church in the South Americas. Doubtless the Church has failed miserably in that it has generally allied itself with the ruling juntas. What has to be discerned is the degree to which this bad conscience has determined Latin-American theologians to develop their theology. Of course, in the ultimate, the test must be the intrinsic nature of the theology they have developed. For their part, Liberation Theologians cannot be wrong. Western theology, conditioned by capitalism must be wholly wrong. Men of praxis must be right. If it is sectarianism then that is too bad; it is still correct.

Finally it must be said that if Liberation Theology is truly Biblical, and its hermeneutic the new true hermeneutic, and if Marxism is scientifically correct, then the world is bound, anyway, for the goal of this theology. Of this there can be no doubt. These theologians have discovered the true hermeneutic and the

true dialectic of history. God, so to speak, having set man in motion is following in his trail, for that is the way He had ordained it.

If the Liberationists are wrong, then their insistence upon, and pursuance of, praxis is in any case going to have a significant impact upon our generation, and the generations ahead. Whilst our fashions in theology change they change because most fashions are in stasis. Not this, however. It is committed to praxis, and its dialogue is with Marxism, and its avowal to that political analysis irreversible.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

In our next Study (LFS. 44, Social Justice and the Gospel) we attempt to raise and answer some of the questions which relate to social justice in the Scripture and its application to current situations, especially in regard to the true liberation of the Gospel.

Whilst Liberation Theology has satisfactorily answered its own questions, and has cut the nerve of so-called traditional theology and Western Biblical exegesis and has formulated its own hermeneutic of praxis, the true theologian, nevertheless, has to be satisfied it is authentic before thinking of committing himself to it. It is a case, then, of assuring his own integrity. For these reasons then we ask the following questions without answering them here:—

Whilst man undoubtedly is freed in the eschaton, does the Scripture indicate or demand that he have total freedom now, including political freedom? Is political freedom as envisaged in the emergent society necessarily a true freedom, or a total one? Lacking the primary evidence that the early church set its goals for political liberation is this aim, nevertheless, inherent in the Christian Gospel and Judaic Christian ethos? What does the Scripture say of social justice, and to what degree is the effecting of it incumbent upon the Christian community? Is participation in any form of society either capitalist, socialistic or otherwise commanded or prohibited, and are loyalties necessarily directed towards one or the other?

Again: In a world where disease, starvation, sickness, and the like obtain, what is the task of the Christian community? How does this relate to the possession of property, wealth, etc.? How does social activism relate to the sovereignty of God, apocalyptic and the eschaton? What, for example, of the Revelation of John – the seals, the trumpets, the vials including God's wrath, plagues, destruction? What of authority being given to the Beast, and the false prophet? What of the indication that this is the sovereign action of God? How does man's activism relate to God's sovereign action? What is the meaning in history and the eschaton of the City of God? What is the significance in Revelation chs. 21 and 22 of the City of God and the Kings of the nations bringing their glory into it, of the river flowing and the tree of life having its leaves 'for the healing of the nations'?

In the light of Liberation Theology we may ask the questions:— Is Marxism in fact undeniably scientific? Given that Liberation Theology rejects the Russian and Chinese models (whilst somewhat espousing the Cuban model), is there a guarantee that the true model will emerge? What work-out is there in Liberation Theology of a Pateriology, a Christology and a Pneumatology? Are in fact the Biblical Exodus and Resurrection true paradigms, or rather events in salvation history without being intended to be applied in the ways adduced? Is praxis indeed the vindication of true theology? Has there already in history been a praxis which although not the Marxist dialectic but for all that has been truly Christian?

Has a basic research been done into the Christian contribution to social justice, and are there alternate analyses or models which need to be regarded?

Conclusion

Whilst our study has done little other than giving us a fragmentary account of Evangelical Liberation and current Liberation Theology, it is impossible for it to analyse Liberation Theology or counter it, if that is indeed required. The fact is that Liberation Theology is with us, and presumably will increasingly be so. It has already amassed a great amount of written material, and has made considerable inroads into the arena of the South Americas and other places. Its praxis has challenged traditional theology, and much of Western political thinking. It requires our thoughtful consideration. It demands our full attention.

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