



COMING EVENTS:

Women & Men In Ministry: Monday, March 25 - 18.00 hrs. to  
Wednesday, March 27 - 13.00 hrs. at FSC  
Generalate, Via Aurelia 476. (Participants  
limited to 50).

Justice and Evangelisation: Tuesday, March 19 - 18.00 hrs. to  
**Saturday**, March 23 - 14.00 hrs. at Villa  
Cavalletti.

Sudan: Thursday, April 4 - 16.00 hrs. at SEDOS,  
Via dei Verbiti 1, Roma.

NOTES

Archbishop Dermot Ryan R.I.P.: We offer our sympathy and remembrance  
in prayer to the family and relatives  
of Archbishop Ryan, Pro Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelis-  
ation of peoples, who died unexpectedly on Thursday, March 21. Our  
sympathy goes also to the staff and members of the Congregation to  
which he had so recently been appointed.

Available at SEDOS Documentation:

Preferential Option for the poor: A Challenge of our new Constitutions;  
a letter written by Cornelius Braun, MSC., Superior General to the  
members of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in their internal  
magazine, 'Cor Unum' of January, 1983.

Liberation Theology and the Holy See: A Question of Method, by Aidan  
Nichols, OP, and "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Theology of Liberation:

A letter to a young theological student" by Clodovis Boff, OSM, - two  
aspects of the current debate on liberation theology, in *New Black-*  
*friars*. Vol. 65, No. 773, Novem. 1984.

Witness Today: Confession and Resistance, theme of the *International*  
*Review of Mission* Vol. LXXIII No. 292, October 1984, has articles on:  
the Barmen Declaration of 1934 in Hitler's Germany and its lessons  
for South African Apartheid to-day; Confronting Injustice; Eastern  
Orthodoxy and Human Rights; The Protestant Quest for a Political  
Theology etc.

Peace in Central America

A group of U.S. citizens in Rome, who are praying for peace in Central  
America participated in a day of fast and prayer on March 14 at the  
Basilica of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Piazza Euclide. In the  
evening they came together to commit themselves to a pledge of  
resistance in the event of a U.S. invasion in Central America. For  
further information contact: Suore Francescane, Tel. 36.60.247.

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JUSTICE AND EVANGELISATION  
IN SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE

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Cesar Jerez, S.J.

*(Dans cette conférence, donnée aux Soeurs de Maryknoll lors de leur dernier Chapitre Général, le Père JEREZ rend compte d'une façon personnelle de la façon dont un mouvement de libération tend à prendre un élan irréversible. La prise de conscience des situations d'injustice conduit à des efforts organisés pour y faire face. Puis vient l'inévitable répression qui, à son tour, engendre la lutte armée. Vient ensuite une polarisation quand l'Eglise, le peuple de Dieu, est aux prises avec les problèmes posés par la situation nouvelle, "au moment où les massacres ont commencé". Le Père JEREZ a pu faire référence au Nicaragua, dont l'évolution était une réussite, mais au Salvador on est dans l'impasse, le Guatemala a été écrasé et sa population indienne crucifiée; le Honduras est un pays exploité. Combien de temps encore le Nicaragua réussira-t-il à préserver sa libération? NdLR.).*

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Central America is a region that holds special meaning for you. I am not appealing to the feeling level of the Maryknoll Fathers and Sisters, but Maryknoll blood has been spilled in our country precisely in the effort to stop or extinguish the fire of violence. First, I would like to talk about the process of conscientization. Secondly, I will speak of organization; thirdly of repression; fourthly of armed struggle; fifthly of polarization in the Church, and then arrive at some conclusions and some questions.

Conscientisation: To understand the Central American situation we have to start with the process of conscientization. It took place between the early '60s and '75. At that moment we realized that we were living in an unjust situation and that we should change the situation. This was our basic dilemma: we had to do it - but how? I think that you, foreign missionaries had a lot to do with that vision, because coming from abroad you had, "new eyes" to see the situation that we were living in. We, natives, were somehow already accustomed to the situation. So it was by that period of reflection, of praying, of reading the Gospel in the concrete situation and projecting the Word of God on the situation that we were challenged to ask ourselves what is it that we can do?

I would say that for us the theology of liberation started then. That was the departure point. The concrete basic communities and the religious communities were where we were asking the question. Through that process, we were discovering the mechanism of oppression, at the local level, at the national level, and at the international level. Looking at this, we also discovered the mechanism of violence. Violence was a fact; a clear fact; but how do you describe it? How do you analyze it? We realized it was structural violence, and revolutionary violence.

At the same time, as a tool to grasp the reality, we were using social analysis at different levels and its precisely here that we started having contacts with Marxists. That was the beginning of our scenes. We thought that somehow, in Marxist thought there were useful

tools to analyze society. I am not saying that everything in marxism will be useful. Nor do I pretend to give you a full definition of what Marxism is. Are we talking about economic Marxism? Political Marxism? Ideological Marxism? Philosophical Marxism? Are we talking about Marx, Lenin, Engels, Garaudy or the full Latin American Marxists? And what exactly is that? We must be open to discussion on these points.

We saw that there were some elements which could be useful to analyze the concrete situation and we used them. We had several arguments with our brothers and sisters from the developed countries who said, "You fool, Latins! Using that methodology will be contaminating because if you buy the philosophy then you have to buy the political action. So you will become Marxist-Leninists necessarily". Our answer, maybe too naive and simple, was, "Look, we are Christians. We have faith and we are using it". That is the fact. But at the same time I have to admit that at that moment we were not well enough informed on the international implications of structural violence. We thought, in a naive way, that it was more a question of a local/national problem. Now we are realizing how important it is to look at the international level to discover what violence is at the level of North-South, of East-West, Middle East-Middle West.

Organization: After the analytical period came the period of organization. The fact was that the poor in our countries didn't have the right to be organized. Trade Unions were not allowed. Political parties were for the elite. We, who worked in pastoral areas thought that it was important to help organize the men and women we were working with. We started doing that, maybe in a naive way, but we did it. And I remember that each organization, each popular organization, in countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and in some way, Nicaragua, were born in the Church. We used to say that such organizations "nacieron de la sotana de la iglesia o de los hábitos de las monjas", that such organizations were born from the habits of the sisters and the cassocks of the priests! For better or for worse, that was the fact.

The Church had a lot of power to invoke, without a doubt, and because of that, churches became places of gathering. We have to admit that there was some naivete but at the same time a lot of hope and generosity. And maybe you can remember those times when there were those centers all over Central America. They were flourishing. We were organizing and there was a lot of hope. There were outstanding Bishops around and we were very happy with them. Medellin, Vatican II and the Theology of Liberation brought a lot of hope. We were celebrating. We thought that the Kingdom of God was already present.

Repression: But then came the repression. The Church was already too subversive for the times and repression came first with the expulsion of some of the men and women working there. You remember names; perhaps some of you were even expelled. But it was not enough - to expel them - because the seed was already alive there. Then the killing started and it has been very sad. Maybe this happened to you too; when we see pictures of that time we realize that out of a group of ten, perhaps four, five, six have been killed. They gave up their lives for the liberation of the poor there.

Taking Central America as a whole, I would say that from this time on there were about 50 Sisters and Priests, religious men and women killed. But thousands upon thousands of men and women catechists, delegates of the Word, or simple Christians, were ready to give their lives. And that became part of our history. When that killing started we saw some hesitation on the part of the Church: should we continue or not? Should we go through with this process of conscientization and organization? Are we provoking the repression? Are we responsible for it? My personal impression is that, we, Church men and women, are not really that important. We don't have the capacity to provoke that reaction. Our contribution has been so little, I would say, so small. The whole situation of justice is far more complicated than a group of Sisters and Priests shouting against injustice.

Struggle: Then the armed struggle started. Christians organized themselves in different movements. They were trying to use civil ways - elections, trade unions, normal participation at different levels. But after each election, a fraud took place. Remember the cases of Guatemala, of EL Salvador of Honduras, and the dictatorship of Somosa in Nicaragua. There was no possibility of finding a way out. Then the armed struggle took place. From the beginning, our Marxist friends told us that it was the only way for change to take place and that we were naive to think that we could accomplish a change in a Christian way. And here, we return to our reflection on violence. Where is it possible to use violence? When is it possible? Under what conditions? You have to answer all those questions.

The fighting started in different countries, but it was not successful everywhere. In Nicaragua, it was possible because the whole population became so united against the dictatorship. But if you look at the case of El Salvador, for instance, you will see that the entire situation is at an impasse. There is no way out. Will the revolutionary movement in El Salvador come to power or not? And what happened in Guatemala? The Guatemalan Indians have been smashed and the Guatemalan movements for liberation have been smashed. Is that the responsibility of the Church? Is that what we have started?

All of that is the usual development. It happens precisely because the situation has been so unjust. In time we have seen just how difficult the situations could and did become. And here there were special temptations for us. In such situations, when the armed struggle was taking place, I would say that one of the first temptations we had was to "clandestinity" - to be clandestine. How to be united with such groups? What should be our relationships with them? It was so difficult for us because we were not accustomed to that. How can you change names and attitudes? For better or for worse, we were now a sort of public men and women and so it wasn't easy. There was the temptation: "I have my clandestine contacts - somebody approached me asking for this or that". There were the sympathizers, the cooperators and the members. But, of course, very few men and women from religious organizations or religious orders were members. Cooperation or sympathy was different from becoming full members.

In such a situation we experienced the dichotomy or schizophrenia of belonging to a religious organization and belonging to or having

sympathy with a political organization. There was an internal disruption. At a certain moment we had to make a decision - should we be religious men or women, or should we belong to a political organization? I know some cases personally where this became a most powerful experience. One of my best friends had to make a very personal option because he could see there was no other possibility. I didn't. Why didn't I and some of our other friends? It's one of the mysteries of life. We always thought that it was possible to change things from the angle of our faith and that we were not necessarily implicated in the political action.

Polarization: At that time I would say that secularization in the Latin American Church or the Central American Church, to be modest, took the form of politization. That does not mean that politization didn't have anything to do with religious manifestations. Of course, there was a strong relationship there. Somehow secularization took the shape of politization. In that process, at times I would say that prayer, the experience of God, the experience of our faith, the sharing of hope, charity and love were very important. I am not saying that we were kneeling all day; sometimes we didn't have the time to pray but for most of us it has been a profoundly Christian experience.

Christian discernment was very important, finding the will of God in a concrete situation. How will you not be confused? How can you find out where God is in such a situation? - where is his will? Then there is the whole question of reading the signs of the times, the question of being open to the Spirit, the question of being open to the experience of prayer - all very important and not the experience of prayer in a private way but the experience of prayer together as a community, because the decisions somehow will touch, affect the whole community, the whole religious group of men and women.

This is where the polarization of the Church took place for such social phenomena are so important and so heavy that it is really very difficult to be isolated from them. It was coming to the whole Church; to the religious communities of men and women; to all the organizations. Polarization has been so heavy that in some places our own families are divided, three on one side and five on the other. From time to time we should come together, but how do you deal with that sort of situation?

When I was still in Guatemala we decided: we can be together; we can celebrate together; we can talk - but not about politics because a quarrel will take place. It was very difficult to be open to dialogue. Sometimes it was almost impossible to talk to each other once we approached such topics. In such situations, it was very important to be open, to be patient.

We should be sacraments of unity and truth in such a situation. It is so easy to be involved in a naive limbo of piety. I don't have anything against piety. I have tried to be pious, but sometimes we can create a sort of shield for ourselves in such situations and we do not go to the root of the problem precisely because of this kind of pious thinking.

At this moment we are experiencing how divided our Church, is how divided many communities are, and we are trying to start a dialogue to overcome that division. I think that it will be possible but at the same time it is very painful. I suppose that among you, as among us there were some, and I respect them, who thought that the Church shouldn't have anything to do with such situations. They said we should be isolated; we should pray; we should administer the sacraments. We don't have anything to do with such situations. We must pray, they said, but why do we have to discuss, to write, to reflect, to deal with the Theology of Liberation? It has been an internal struggle, a heavy one, because some thought it was much better to evade the situation entirely.

That is why it is so painful when we look at those men and women who gave their lives in the service of the poor and who are condemned as either Marxists, violent people or Communists, but not seen at all as martyrs. Even in Rome they asked me, "Wasn't Bishop Romero a Marxist?" And the Maryknoll Sisters? Time will canonize those people, but at the moment there is suspicion, and we must suffer that suspicion.

Conclusions: Now I would like to come to some conclusions and some questions. I know that I am simplifying the issues but you must fill them out. What should we do? What should we do in Central America where there is a revolution threatened by a big power? Is it possible or not to do anything there? What should be done in a situation like the Salvadorean one where things seem to be at an impasse? What to do in the Guatemalan situation where the whole country has been crucified by power? What to do in the Honduran situation when Honduras has ultimately become a country used and misused by the superpower?

Be Present: First of all we have to look at the reality and we have to acknowledge the reality. We need a clear vision to see how it is and accept it as it is. Sometimes we don't like to see for it is so painful to look at and to discover the real facts. But we have to accept them - those real facts. We should be present and exercise that presence in different ways. If we would like to preach the Gospel in such a situation, if we would like to make Jesus present in such a situation, we have to be present there. I know that sometimes that is very difficult and being human has its own limitations. There are cases where you have to tell one of your brothers or sisters, "Please, leave this country through the back door, not through the front door. It is not possible for you to stay here because there are clear limits". But it is important to be present, and to be present in different ways; to be present walking with those who are suffering. Remember, the displaced, the poor, the refugees and work with them. We have to share their life. And when I say to walk with, it is not only walking together, but suffering together, sharing together.

I know that some of you will tell me "Look, Cesar, don't be so utopian. We, born, educated in our highly developed country - we can never become poor. Our grammar will denounce us. How can you make us identified with the poor? That's impossible." Somehow, that is true, but this process of incarnation, this process of being with, walking with, is an unending process. You can go and do the most

you can do there, and that is where we must show our spiritual strength. I don't like to talk about spiritual and material things - to make that dichotomy, but somehow, if we have spiritual strength - faith - then we must show it and not just in Church or Chapel or in some private form of prayer in our heart. We have to show it in concrete ways ... in working with ordinary, poor people. Doing that, we exercise our presence with hope, with love, with faith.

A Loving Presence: Hate should not have a place in our hearts.

Sometimes we become so desperate that we turn to hate. But please, pray and return to what you should be. The history of the Church shows a lot of hatred. In the name of God we have fought and killed in war. Remember the Crusades, the Conquest and so many other events perhaps worse. We have to be present without hate. We must avoid that temptation precisely to be able to accompany the people.

The class struggle is a fact; we cannot deny that. But the real challenge for Christians is how to overcome the class struggle by love and not hate. We have several experiences of men and women who gave their lives for the poor precisely because they loved so much. A few days before Ita and Maura were killed they came to see me and were discussing the qualities of the sisters going to El Salvador to work and of course we talked of violence, prayer, etc. At one moment my question was about readiness to die, because of the situation there. Maybe I was talking from a theoretical viewpoint at that particular moment but about five days later they were killed. They made their decision.

So we have to be present. Our contribution then, will be a contribution of love, not a contribution of violence. I respect those who use violence at some moments but I think that should not be our contribution. I prefer to quote Dom Helder Camara when he said "I prefer to be killed before I kill." Or what Bishop Romero said clearly, and what many of our brothers and sisters said and did before now.

A Critical Presence: At the same time we have to exercise a critical presence. In a place like Nicaragua it is very important. I don't believe too much in vanguards. "We are the vanguards and that's why we are doing this and that. . ." You have to prove that you are in the vanguard and this can be done only if you are identified with the majority of the poor, if you respect the voice of the poor. We Christians can exercise a critical presence, not shouting, not criticizing from a standpoint apart, but really with the witness of our lives. We have to be free to tell them we don't agree to this or that because of this or that reason. It is not always easy, because when it comes to the Left we tend to be more tolerant. We say they are fighting for the poor; But when the Right is in question we find it easier to react. When we find our friends are there then it is a different story. Critical presence is always the challenge.

"Supplementary" works: I can also understand that in some specific cases we have to take on "supplementary" work. I want to clarify that I don't believe we priests or sisters should be part of a political party. That's not what we are called to but there are concrete situations in which we cannot avoid doing supplementary.



Later we can discuss perhaps, the cases of Fernando, Miguel and Ernesto. I hope that El Salvador will not come to that; nor Guatemala either, but I can understand different situations where we might have to take on such work, although Canon Law, the instructions of the Church and sometimes our superiors will not be easy to deal with. Such cases are born out of the will to serve the ordinary people.

To conclude - I don't like to appear naive, but I really believe that Christian Faith challenges us in situations like those of Central America. The hope of the resurrection has to be there. We should be men and women who try to follow Jesus in that concrete situation. The following of Jesus is not a question of our spiritual retreats. It is not a question of our Eucharistic celebration. It should be a question of day to day living, following Jesus, in concrete situations making present the God of Life who is the God in whom we believe.

Talk given by the Rev. Cesar Jerez, S.J.  
October 14, 1984, at Madison, Conn. to assembled  
Delegates of Maryknoll Sisters General Assembly  
and Maryknoll Fathers Society Chapter. Joint  
Theological Reflection Days.

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#### LAZARUS

What am I to tell them  
those who are here to sniff around  
the curious  
crowding round the table  
and in the courtyard  
in Bethany

- about the darkness  
over there-

I did not see Abraham, Isaac or Jacob  
the righteous, the Prophets, the Judges or the Kings  
But I have contracted their silence

I am unable to speak

Martha speaks Gratitude  
Mary signs Hosanna  
What for?

I have come back to die  
I shall have to die again  
and again and again

No, I do not regret it  
it was worth it  
but only in order to know  
that He,  
before He brought me back to life,  
wept  
because I had died

Ref: THINGS ULTIMATE;  
Janusz St. Pasiert (Trans. Charles Lambert). London, Poets  
'and Painters' Press, 1980.

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**SOME BASIC REMARKS ABOUT THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION**

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John Fuellenbach, SVD

*(Le Père Fuellenbach a donné des conférences et dirigé des séminaires pendant plus de 15 ans sur la théologie de la libération, et il exprime encore sa stupéfaction au sujet des idées étranges que les gens se font de cette théologie. En dépit de 5.000 publications, dans des livres ou des articles, parues entre 1970 et 1980, il y a toujours une ignorance considérable sur cette théologie. Par ex.: "c'est quelque chose dont il faut se méfier", "quelque chose d'exotique", "pas pour les fidèles mais pour des extrémistes", "une marotte passagère", "une stratégie marxiste sous le couvert de l'Écriture": telles sont certaines réflexions entendues. Le P. John Fuellenbach espère que la réaction du Vatican à cette théologie, aura au moins pour effet que les gens concernés se sentiront provoqués à découvrir les raisons de cette agitation. N.d.l.R.).*

I would like to state a few basic elements which are at the heart of this theology, in the form of some theses which are inclusive not exclusive of each other.

Liberation Theology is:

1. a theology that originates and develops out of a particular situation in Latin America, a situation marked by "utter dependence and oppression" for millions of people and which asks the Church a very simple question: 'Does theology or the Gospel have anything to say to our situation that could help to overcome this hopeless and desperate state of affairs? If not, the church and the gospel will become utterly irrelevant to our situation'.
2. a theology that asked for a radical commitment of the Christian to the plight of the poor in order to help them to change the situation through an active engagement for social justice and human rights. Only such a commitment in a radical form can be the correct basis from which theology can be done and from where we will be able to understand the Bible message once again correctly.
3. a theology that takes the "social analysis" of a situation as essential in order to understand adequately the causes of oppression and dependence. Only then can one do theology correctly and not independently of the concretely analysed situation. The social analysis which is used, borrows concepts from marxist social analysis which implies a particular ideology but most of all a particular strategy for changing social-political situations. This is one of the main points of contention which has brought Liberation Theology into dispute and discredit.
4. a theology that is critical of all traditional Theology since the use of social science helps to uncover the unconscious pre-suppositions out of which all theology is done. In particular,

marxist analysis of reality has shown that all our most lofty ideas and ideals, including theology, are conditioned by social, political and economic factors. There is therefore no objective theology that could claim to be the "norma normata" for all theology, a claim often made or presumed by western theologians.

In this connection the accusation of Liberation Theologians against their colleagues in the West is two fold:

- a) 'You do not dare to subject your theological presuppositions to a critical analysis which would reveal that your theology is to a great extent the product of your social, political and economic situation, out of which you unconsciously construct your theology! European theology operates from the basis of affluence and progress. The theologian in Europe does his/her theologizing from and for such a society.
  - b) The second accusation is that of arrogance: European theologians behave as if they know what theology is and that everyone else has to submit to their judgement when theologizing.
5. a theology that seriously tries to give new meaning to the Word of God in a situation of hopeless oppression and utter dependence. It sees itself as the correct interpretation of Vatican II and the papal documents, *Populorum Progressio* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* for the situation in Latin America.

My concern here is now to show the biblical basis on which this theology bases its challenging claims. The question here is not so much that Marxism seems to have an influence on this theology but on how to introduce real change into a hopeless situation i.e. the question of social strategy in which marxist elements seem to appear. But the more basic question is the one Schilleebeckx asked already years ago: "Should we Christians put this world in order and if so-why?" The theological bases seem to be: the Kingdom of God and, a correct image of God.

#### I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

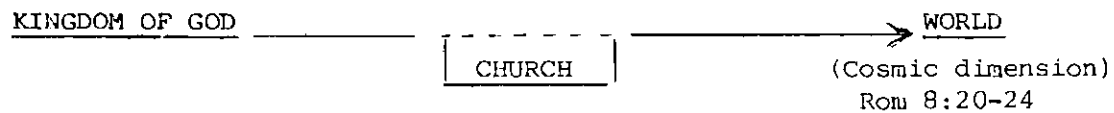
Without going into great details to do justice to a concept as complex as the biblical term or symbol-Kingdom of God-we can say with justification: God's ultimate plan, his intentionality with the whole of creation, can be adequately expressed by the biblical term: KINGDOM OF GOD. Bringing about the Kingdom of God is the ultimate goal of something like history, it is the fulfilment of the age-old dream of humankind and of nature: the New heaven and the New earth (1 Cor 15:23-28). This ultimate goal of all creation is for Christians the vantagepoint from which we understand ourselves and the whole of reality. It is our Christian "VISION", the horizon within which we locate and arrange everything.

This world is the arena where God's ultimate plan of creation unfolds. The Kingdom of God happens first of all here in the midst of our human affairs. It happens already, among us although the future fulfillment is still to come. It is this world that will be transformed into the New heaven and the New earth.

It is NOT as if God collects a few pieces from this old world and constructs from these the "beautiful mosaic" which will make up the New heaven and the New earth while the rest of creation is meant to be the fuel to 'burn' this mosaic. It is the whole of creation that will be transformed into the New heaven and the New earth.

Jesus saw God's Kingdom as a reality breaking into this world, challenging all present structures and powers, not as utopian vision that might come about one day. The Kingdom is in our midst, it is now the all-determining reality in the midst of the old sin-permeated world which is still under the mighty sway of evil powers and principalities.

The Church enters precisely here. She is related to the whole of humankind and must see herself in the service of God's plan, the Kingdom of God. In her the final fulfillment of God's plan is "initially and in an anticipatory way" already present.



Thus the mission of the Church today can be described in a threefold way:

1. to proclaim in Word and Sacrament that the Kingdom of God has come in the power of Jesus of Nazareth.
2. to offer her own life as a "test case" to show that the Kingdom is present and operative in the world today. She is an anticipation of the final reconciliation of the whole of history, although this is realized initially in a particular phenomenon of history, namely the Christian community.
3. to challenge society as a whole, to restructure itself along the basic principles of the 'inbreaking' Kingdom which are: justice, peace, brotherhood and human rights. This is a 'constitutive element of proclaiming the Gospel' since the ultimate goal of the Kingdom is the transformation of the whole of creation and the Church must understand her mission in the service of the imminent Kingdom of God.

This "holistic view" of the human person and the world is decisive. Salvation is something that effects all realms of creation and all interhuman relations, autonomous, interpersonal, and social. Since the Kingdom enters a sin-permeated world, a world of oppression and exploitation, 'salvation' is to be understood as liberation, an all-embracing liberation, that is, in a "holistic sense": spiritual, psychological, and socio-political.

A human person is essentially determined by two facts: 'being in the world' and 'being related'. Both elements bind him or her essentially into this world and the socio-political relation must be taken seriously when it is a matter of a 'holistic approach' to salvation. Therefore, to be a Christian means to commit oneself in the name of the Kingdom present, to mediating salvation, or better

liberation, to all, but in particular to those who are most excluded from the peace, justice and joy of the 'inbreaking' Kingdom of God. (Rom 14:17)

St. Paul has given us an almost classic definition of what the Kingdom of God is all about:

"The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but a matter of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

(Rom 14:17) and, - "Not in talk consists the Kingdom of God but in Power" (1 Cor. 4:20).

Albert Schweitzer once called this text of Romans, "A Christian creed for all times." To be a Christian means then, to transform society, human reality, human structures in the direction of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; to commit oneself to change situations where the opposite is most evident and tangible situations inimical to the Kingdom which is constantly breaking into this world.

This brings us to the next theological presupposition of Liberation Theology, one which tries to answer the constantly posed question: "Why a commitment first and foremost to the marginalized of our society?"

## II. THE CORRECT IMAGE OF GOD

Commitment to a "liberating praxis", that is, an activity which transforms society on behalf of the oppressed and exploited is regarded as the most important exercise of Christian charity. One could say similarly, the "option for the poor" becomes the central point of a true christian commitment. The term "liberating praxis", however, is ultimately the key concept of Liberation Theology and the real point of contention - the accusation of Marxist underpinning. The word PRAXIS, a key word of Marx, refers to the primacy of human involvement in the process of living a commitment which embodies both doing and thinking together. Thinking or "theory" does not precede and guide involvement as happens in an abstract philosophy of life. Thinking rather, operates from within involvement. In the involvement, theory can reflect both on itself and on doing so as to set involvement on the right path. This is called "orthopraxis".

Orthodoxy is, therefore, useless without orthopraxis; in fact it becomes a cover for false praxis if it is considered "right" in itself.

The primacy of human involvement over theory as such is found in other philosophies as well. Theology of Liberation assigns primacy to the "praxis of faith" i.e. the biblical doing of truth. And it sees praxis, as necessarily having a socio-political dimension - an idea basically derived from Karl Marx. Christian orthopraxis must accordingly include a right socio-political involvement; it cannot be limited to private virtues.

The basic question for us is not whether these ideas are borrowed from Karl Marx but whether or not they have a basis in scripture itself. Liberation theologians present the following biblical basis for their view that a "liberating praxis" is the core of any Christian commitment:

1. The EXODUS story as THE model of revelation: Ex. 3:7-9 is regarded as the basis for all revelation:

"I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry to be free of their slave drivers. Yes I am well aware of their suffering. I mean to deliver them out of the hand of their oppressors." (see also Dt. 6:20-24)

Here God reveals his very being, who he is and will be. He reveals himself as a God who hears the cry of the oppressed and who comes to set them free. It is God who takes the initiative in human history and who reveals himself through concrete events, a God who saves in history. This is the primary theme of revelation within the Old Testament and the faith of Israel. God's first deed on behalf of his people was an act of setting a group of oppressed people free, a political act. Since God remains always faithful to himself all further revelation has to be seen in the light of this first act.

2. God's demand for Justice: The great prophets like Jeremias, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and Micah all had one decisive theme and priority in their preaching: Justice and doing right towards one's neighbour". In particular they contrasted, liturgy and worship with their demand for doing justice. (Is. 1:11-17; 58: 1-11; Amos 5:21-26; Micah 6:5-8) Jeremias' phrase might be the best summary of their protest: "To know me, Yahweh, means to do Justice". (Jer. 22:16).

Generally we can say: the God of the OT is the one who reveals a clear preferential love for the poor and the oppressed and who is determined to set them free. The themes of many psalms reveal this aspect as well. Cult and worship must be based on just behaviour towards one's neighbour, otherwise it is useless. (Ps. 72,58,36,94) The Messiah is understood as the one who will bring about Yahweh's justice on behalf of the oppressed. (Is. 9:5-6; 11:2-4; 61:1f, Jer. 23:5-6).

3. Jesus' Mission: Jesus understood his mission in line with the great prophets as Luke in 4:16-21 and Matthew in 11: 1-6, quoting Is. clearly indicate.

The Kingdom message in Jesus' preaching means the transformation of all human structures. Placing oneself in the perspectives of the Kingdom of God means to participate in the struggle for the liberation of those who are oppressed by others.

4. Jesus and politics: Libraries have been written about Jesus' stand regarding politics. Jesus did not present any political agenda or programme nor did he challenge the aristocratic and hierachical worldview of his time but he did relativize all authority and put it under the judgement of the 'inbreaking' Kingdom. He did propose a "metapolitics", that is, a system of values and a view of reality by which any context may be judged. The question which we have to answer is: what does Jesus want of us today, in the time after Pentecost?

5. Our God as a compassionate God. The Bible gives us many images and descriptions of who God is but the most adequate description seems to be: "our God is a compassionate God",

a God who is with us, who does not redeem us by pulling us out of our misery while himself remaining in his glory. He is a God who saves his creatures by coming down directly into our misery, our oppression and exploitation, and who suffers all our misery "with us" (Emmanuel). He redeems us by identifying himself with our true state. The amazing fact is that God can be found in particular there, where people suffer, where suffering and misery in this world are most obvious. This is the real mystery of our God in Jesus Christ, a mystery we will never understand. As Mother Theresa would have it: one can find God in the first place among the poorest of the poor and the most forgotten and exploited on this earth.

The mystery of the poor is that God wants to redeem the world through them. Jesus demonstrated this in his own life and in his preferential love for the poor. His life and mission was that of accepting powerlessness and by doing so he revealed the limitlessness of God's compassion.

From this biblical point of view Liberation Theology refers constantly to the "emotional aspect" of one's commitment to the poor. He who has never experienced oppression and exploitation will never know what this way of talking about God (theology) is all about. Only the one who makes this commitment to a 'liberating praxis' on behalf of these people and against the existing social order will come to see and understand. It will lead him to the discovery of God's liberating power and to a new understanding of his faith.

### III. THE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

We all are well aware today that there is no such thing as an objective science, a science, that does not depend on unreflected presuppositions. We all think, judge and act out of very concrete presuppositions which we normally accept uncritically and as self-evident. We never question these presuppositions. It was Karl Marx who, through a rigorous analysis of social and economic situations, has convincingly shown that the socio-economic structure of society (which he called the sub-structure) conditions to a large extent all our thinking, judging and acting (the so-called superstructure).

Liberation Theologians have insisted that these findings hold true for all theology as well. Before one can start theologizing at all, one must first critically reflect on one's presuppositions and critically examine how far one's own theological concepts are "conditioned" by socio-economic factors. The question is always the same: For whom does one do theology and from what situation or position is it done? The whole way we perceive reality must be looked at critically and with a kind of suspicion that in fact we perceive it from the unconscious presupposition of maintaining a social and economic substructure which is advantageous for us but which might be quite disadvantageous for the oppressed.

Awakening to the fact that all our thinking, judging and acting is conditioned to a large degree from these substructures can be a

real eye-opener. To be knocked out of one's comfortable worldview and frame of reference can be traumatic and liberating. (Example: I knew a bishop who told me that he came to see the whole oppressive structure of his society only after a policeman had kicked him. This opened his eyes to what was going on in his country). There is a way of experiencing reality which can lead us to an ideological suspicion which in turn makes us suspicious of how we do theology and how we read the Bible.

The hypothesis is that ideologies connected with current social conditions and vested interests may be unconsciously ruling our present theological ideas and pastoral praxis. It is agreed and accepted that Liberation Theology presupposes a partiality in favour of the oppressed and this is consciously accepted, not on the basis of theological reasoning alone, but on the basis of human criteria. The accusation made by Liberation Theology against academic theology is that while it may be well aware of its unconscious partiality, the fact that it poses as something impartial, is a sign of its conservative partiality from the very start.

Liberation Theology insists emphatically that only a commitment to a liberating praxis can be the true starting point for theology, i.e., to talk about God, to understand who the God of the Bible really is. One can read the Bible correctly only from the situation of, and the experience of, the poor and the oppressed.

The real challenge of Liberation Theology is this: it is not from the top, but only from the bottom of society that the world can be redeemed. Any change in society and any 'liberating praxis' of the poor will only come about through a change in the substructure. Proclaiming new ideas or denouncing present situations as unjust and dehumanizing, while at the same time avoiding the real struggle to change structural causes that ultimately create exploitation and oppression, will not bring about change no matter how prophetically it is done.

Liberation Theology sees a threefold task that has to be accomplished in order to change the present situation:

1. a "social analysis" to uncover the structural causes of exploitation and oppression. This does not have to be a 'marxist analysis'.
2. an educational task of making the exploited aware of what is happening to them. That means a "change of consciousness of the people" in order to enable them to identify the structural causes of their plight and to conceive the possibility of eliminating them.
3. A struggle against the oppressing forces which demands a commitment to a 'liberating praxis'.

It is this last point that remains the real point of contention.

#### IV. THE NECESSARY SPIRITUALITY

Liberation Theology demands a particular kind of spirituality. The option for the exploited and oppressed is not just natural. It is important that in such a commitment the God of Jesus Christ is experienced as one who comes to set us free through his suffering with



the poor. He it is who gives us the strength and courage to undertake for the poor a 'liberating praxis' which always includes the oppressor as well, and which refrains from all hatred and violence against those who cause the situation of "institutional violence". Without such a deep christian spirituality, orientating itself constantly to Jesus Christ, one cannot live this commitment without ending up in total frustration and disillusionment as we have seen so often.

A commitment to the poor does not guarantee that we will be successful in the sense that we will finally create a just society, - the Kingdom of God on earth. If Liberation Theology is capable of such a spirituality, then the accusation so easily hurled against it that it is nothing but a "revolutionary kind of praxis a la Karl Marx" is utterly wrong; without such a deep biblical spirituality it will not and even should not survive. But with such a spirituality, it is a real challenge and will lead, of necessity, to a new way of doing theology in all fields of traditional theologizing.

The real challenge could be summarized like this:

What is the key to the correct understanding of the Word of God for our time and in our situation today?

Liberation Theology would say: Only a true commitment to a liberating praxis on behalf of our oppressed and exploited brothers and sisters will enable us to see and to experience who the God of Jesus Christ really is. The word of God is disclosed only from such a commitment. Therefore, theology, talk about God, can only start and be carried out from such a presupposition if it wants to be authentic.

Nemi, February 5, 1985

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CORPORATE COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE  
AND  
OPTION FOR THE POOR

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*(Below is a letter addressed to the head of the Jesuit Social Secretariate and published in his Newsletter, "Promotio Justitiae", of February, 1985. It raises forcefully questions related to corporate commitment of the Jesuits to justice. It centres on the alienation many feel who have not been able to understand the meaning of Decree 4 of the 32nd Jesuit General Congregation treating of corporate commitment to Justice. Nor have they been able to integrate it into their spirituality and apostolate.*

*The concern raised in this letter will provoke echos in many SEDOS members.)*

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Dear Father,

I have read with great joy the letter of 20th October you have addressed to all the fathers and brothers of the Society. You introduced yourself as the new director of the Social Secretariat at the Curia, and made a request for collaboration in publishing *Promotio Justitiae*. I appreciate its purpose, indicated by you as "being at the service of those who work on the frontlines of the social apostolate and of all Jesuits who earnestly seek to put into practice Decree 4 of the 32nd G.C."

These last words made me reflect again on something that has been constantly on my mind, and which I like to express in a form of a question: Are you satisfied with the assimilation of Decree 4 by the Society of Jesus? Or, if you prefer: Do you believe that Decree 4 has really penetrated the life of the Society?

I raise this question because of the knowledge I have of some provinces of Latin America and Europe and because of information I have gathered from various sources. From all this I come to understand that there are quite a number of Jesuits belonging to different age groups, having great human and religious qualities, often involved in works of great influence, yet facing great difficulties with regard to Decree 4, finding themselves psychologically blocked in accepting these directives and in fully integrating the cause of justice into their work.

This problem is all the more delicate because many of these persons are very earnest in their religious life and are committed to the service of faith in the field of their own apostolate. Though being full of good will the task of promoting justice confuses them and even leads them to negative reactions.

The consequences of such reactions are many and serious. This is obvious, and I need not say more about it. Yet, if, as you rightly state "the promotion of justice must be a dimension common to all our ministries", it is obvious that, this not being actualised, the

effectiveness of these works is much reduced. In this case, even the intention to serve faith can lead to results that ultimately are counterproductive.

What matters most is that we inquire into the causes that have brought about this situation and find the remedies for it. One of the causes is easily detected in an unfortunante presentation of the option for the poor, hurting some deeply and leading them to react against it. One could further mention the formation received, the milieu of work, and the life style of some communities, etc. What I consider most important, however, is that we understand the issue and that we seek to present the reality of injustice in a manner that touches all of us, making us feel the urgency of uniting our efforts and motivating all Jesuits to collaborate in effectively transforming a situation which is totally in contradiction with the Gospel.

I have put this problem before you, dear father, because I consider it to be fundamental. As long as this has not been solved there always will be persons in the Society who will receive *Promotio Justitiae* with apprehension, and this will reduce the efficacy of initiatives coming from the Social Secretariate.

Affectionately in the Lord,

Eduardo Briceno, S.J.

Ref. *Promotio Justitiae*; 25 Feb; 1985.

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**"HOLY FATHER, WE ARE HUNGRY!"**

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*On the last day of his visit to Peru, Pope John Paul spoke to an estimated two million slum dwellers who had gathered in Villa El Salvador, a huge shantytown located on the barren sand dunes outside Lima. In the name of the slum's Christian communities, Victor Checo delivered the following address to the pope:*

Welcome Holy Father! The people of the shantytowns, the Christians communities, the working class of Peru and especially the people of Villa El Salvador feel deeply grateful for your pastoral visit, which once again demonstrates your solidarity with the earth's poor and strengthens our Catholic faith and our Christian commitment.

Holy Father, we are hungry; we endure misery; we have no work; we are sick.

With hearts broken with pain we see our wives, stricken with tuberculosis, bring forth children. We see our children die; we see our sons and daughters grow up weak and without a future.

But in spite of all this, we believe in the God of Life who promises us abundant life in both nature and grace.

Living in hillside hovels or in shacks on these barren sand dunes does not diminish our faith, and we struggle for this life against death.

Necessity has forced us to leave our far-off villages. But we have brought with us a profound faith in God and a yearning for a more human life.

Our common need has united and organized the people of the shantytowns. It has forced us to be in solidarity with each other as we struggle for life and in the defense of our rights.

From the beginning, we have journeyed in and with the church and the church has been in and with us. It has helped us recognize and live out our dignity as children of God and as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thanks to the faith we have always had, those working pastorally among our believing and poor people have been able to create church communities made up of aware and committed Christians.

Holy Father, we feel guided and nourished by your messages, especially those on the family and on work.

We are communities that endeavour to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man to redeem us from sin, and "to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed. To announce a year of favour from the Lord" (Luke 4, 13-19).

Holy Father, may your visit once again make real the words of Jesus: "Today this text is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4, 21). Then our hunger for God and our hunger for bread will be satisfied.

We feel you are close to us, Holy Father, as a pope committed to the cause of justice and the defense of the poor...

Visibly moved by the address and by the people's enthusiasm, the pope responded spontaneously: "I have listened with great attention to the words of your representatives and I can see that here there is a great hunger for God that must not be lost....And there is hunger for bread. The Lord has taught us to pray 'Give us this day our daily bread.' No effort must be spared to give this daily bread to the hungry... For the good of Peru, the people of the slums cannot lack this daily bread! It is a right, expressed every time we pray the Lord's Prayer...May your hunger for God remain, and may you find the ways to make your hunger for bread disappear..."

Ref. Latinamerica Press. February 21, 1985.