

## PREFACE

to the English Edition

The oil crisis is only the beginning of the end for Neolithic man. Over ten thousand years ago mankind began to exploit the land as it engaged in agriculture and the animal world as it tended its flocks. From the very beginning the exploitation of nature also included man's oppression of man: as the hunted and enslaved enemy, as the feudal serf, as the oppressed nations of colonialism and neocolonialism. The *center* (Europe, Russia, the United States, and Japan) extracted its raw materials at low cost from the countries of the *periphery* (Latin America, Black Africa, the Arab World, India and Southeast Asia, and, until recently, China).

A short time ago, *the theology of liberation* came on the scene as protest and Christian discourse. It is a challenge to the closed system, the totality represented by modern European and North American theology, that is, the theology of the center. *Liberation* occurs in history (that is, in the economic, cultural, political, sexual orders), but historical liberation is also a sign of eschatological liberation. Liberation is not disembodied "spiritualism," nor does it represent immanentistic absolutes (of those who absolutize "the world"). The theology of liberation takes on history with its eschatological sense. It is neither escapist eschatologism nor fetishistic historicism. It is the history of liberation based on

a real Christ, poor among the poor-among the poor  
*nations, the poor classes, real poor people.*

The United States is confronted with an enormous responsibility, namely, that of being an imperial nation exercising worldwide domination. This status at one time may have seemed like an accomplishment of "good sense"; it now involves the contradiction of continuing to be all-powerful.

The Vietnam debacle, Watergate, the oil crisis have created a certain level of consciousness, of guilt. The theology of liberation is the protest of dominated peoples. As such it can provide a certain clarity with regard to the causes of this guilt.

*E.D.*  
*Mendoza, Argentina*  
1975

## PREFACE

to the First Spanish-language Printing

The six lectures in this volume were originally delivered orally as part of a longer course at the Latin American Pastoral Institute in Quito and the Liturgical Institute in Medellin.<sup>1</sup> In their present form they were delivered in Buenos Aires in November 1971. They followed a simple format and were set in a simple framework. That basic framework can be seen in the subtitles which have been added in this volume.

It should be kept in mind that these chapters were originally presented as spoken lectures by one Latin American to other Latin Americans. Traces of this fact are evident in this printed edition. They could not be eliminated entirely without destroying the whole thrust of their delivery. They are words *spoken* to people, not words *typed* in the privacy of a comfortable study. They are spoken discourse, not textbook material.

The lectures present and discuss the following theses. Against the broad backdrop of various neolithic cultures, of various Semitic cultures in particular, the apostolic community in Palestine was transformed into a Church that was scattered and persecuted throughout the Mediterranean basin. Marginal elements of it also took root outside the Roman empire. From the fourth century A.D. on, it consti-

tuted what we here call Christendom [*Cristiandad*]: that is, a religious and cultural system with political, economic, and various other facets. In this system, the existential experience of the Christian was linked with hellenistic ways of conceptualizing existence. What concerns us here is Latin Christendom in the West, specifically the Spanish version of it that came to America bearing traces of the modern Europe that was then taking shape. The hispanic or Latin American Church is the product of a vast and lengthy process which mirrored what was taking place on the European continent at various stages. Colonial domination, the secularization of life, and the crisis of European modernization have ushered in a new and unforeseen state of affairs.

There is another important point to be kept in mind. If a person wishes to engage in theological reflection in Latin America, he must first know and appreciate the conditions which allow for the very possibility of reflection or thinking. If this thinking is to be Christian as well, it must take into account the fact of cultural dependence and the fact that the cultural system known as Christendom is disintegrating. That is the situation which confronts the thinker, the historian, the philosopher, and the theologian in Latin America. They all must take note of, and try to provide solutions for, the new situation that is arising as we move beyond Christendom, the modernist outlook, and the imperial "will to power."

This presupposes a whole new horizon of understanding, a whole hermeneutic structure which is not yet accessible to the average Christian or even to the theologian himself in some instances. In practice it calls for a new existential outlook that will formulate the issues in a way which will measure up to the urgent demands imposed on us by the whole question of Latin American liberation. It is a disturbing and risky situation because it is essentially a prophetic

situation. Our position will be denigrated and criticized by unfounded progressivism and by integralist traditionalism. But the way to a Christian solution to the present-day crisis in Latin America is clear. As Jesus said to his disciples: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matt. 8:22).

From this historical city, where the Latin American Church had something akin to a new Pentecost,

*E.D.*  
*Medellín, Colombia*  
1972

## NOTES

1. For further study of the topics treated in these chapters, the reader may consult the following works by the same author: "America Latina y conciencia cristiana," *Cuadernos IPLA*, no.8, Quito, 1970 (French version *inEspin:t*, 7-8, 1965, pp. 2-20); "Iberoamérica en la historia universal," *Revista de Occidente*, 1965, 25:85-95; "Cultura, cultura latinoamericana y cultura nacional," *Cuyo* (UNC Mendoza), 4 (1968), pp. 4-40; *Historia de 14 Iglesia en América Latina* (Barcelona: Nova Terra, 1974); *El humanismo semita* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1969); "From Secularization to Secularism: Science from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment," in *Concilium*, no.47 (New York: Paulist, 1969), pp. 93-119; *Para una historia del catolicismo popular en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Cuadernos Bonum, 1970); *Les évêques latinoaméricains, défenseurs de rindien (1504-1620)* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970); *Para una de-strucción de 14 historia de la ética* (Paraná: Universidad del Litoral, 1971); *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*, 3 vols. (Buenos Aires; Siglo XXI, 1973); *Método para una filosofía de la liberación* (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1974), "Domination-Liberation," in *Concilium*, no.96 (New York: Herder, 1974), pp. 34-56.

## PREFACE

to the Second Spanish-language Printing

The first printing of this unpretentious little book was sold out in a few months. This suggests that there is a growing interest in everything that is distinctively our own-not only in the topics treated but also in the methodology employed. Since I delivered a second series of lectures in 1972, this volume has now become the first volume in a series. The second volume, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, is to appear in the near future. It will probe more deeply into topics that were merely alluded to in this present volume. In the years to come I hope to continue this annual lecture series and to shed greater light on the critical questions that now face Latin American Christians who seek to involve themselves in a committed way with the poor and with the whole process of liberation.

The criticism directed against our Latin American theology, which my friend Gustavo Gutierrez was the first to call the "theology of liberation," suggests that there is something solid to it after all. Some months ago a group of Christian thinkers from Latin America gathered at the tomb of Philip II in El Escorial. (Our statements and conclusions have been published by the house of Sigueme in Salamanca: *Fe cristiana y cambio social en América Latina*, 1973.) There our views were heard by people from the very

nations that had conquered us a few centuries ago. They listened to us attentively and even admiringly. This positive attitude suggests that Europe is beginning to glimpse in our Christian reflection-poor in material resources but rich in reality-a new phase in world theology .

This short book is a sketchy historical contribution to that theology. Volume 2 will provide a more systematic reflection on the theology of praxis, the theology of politics, and theological epistemology.

The whole job remains to be done, not because nothing has been done but because each generation must do the whole job over again, particularly when the situation is as critical as that of Latin America. Each generation must start from its novel situation; it must use its liberty created in order to effect and live out a *new moment* in the one and only history there is: the history of messianic liberation, the history of salvation. Traditionalism imitates and astutely tries to reconcile the irreconcilable; tradition lives the newness of creation, the unending re-creation effected by our Liberator, who is Other than any sort of closed, prefabricated totality. This is a discontinuous, critical moment which keeps pushing human beings forward when they try to wallow in their achievements of injustice and oppression.

Here in the Cathedral of Lima, near the tomb of Toribio de Mogrovejo and not far from the tomb of the half-breed Martin de Porres, who was not allowed into the Dominican choir, I express my belief in the liberation of Latin America. And I look forward to it hopefully as a sign of our eschatological liberation.

*E.D.*  
*Lima, Peru*  
*1973*