

THEOLOGY AND LIBERATION HISTORY

We shall try to interpret the crisis in which we now find ourselves as a Church and a culture, both in the world at large and here in Latin America itself. The crisis is so thoroughgoing that we must start with the very beginnings of mankind. Only then will we be able to appreciate its depth and to understand why it has so upset everyone living in our era-particularly Latin American Christians.

LOGOS AS REVELATION IN HISTORY

We talk about theo-logy and the theo-logian. We are thereby referring to a *logos* about God (Greek *theos*). Here *logos* refers to "comprehension" or "understanding"; it is a task of gathering together, taking in, embracing. When I comprehend something, I take it in and embrace it. But if that is the case, then it would seem to be impossible for us to comprehend God. How are finite, human creatures to embrace, to comprehend, the unembraceable Infinite?

So we confront our first problem. Is it *possible* to have any *logos* about God? And if the answer to that question is yes, then under what conditions is such a *logos* possible? It is possible only on the condition that God re-veals or un-veils himself. He must strip away the veil which hides himself from us and make himself comprehensible to the finite. He,

the infinite, will be comprehensible to us by virtue of his revelation and the way in which he chooses to grant it to us,

As we know very well, this revelation is historical-and *only* historical-in nature. The only locus of revelation is history. The only *locus theologicus* is history, the concrete history we live each day. If we do not discover *the sense and import* of history, we will not be able to comprehend God's revelation to us either. God-the infinite, the Other-reveals himself to man in history. This simple statement, so summarily presented, is the whole essence of theology. It is the whole essence of the historical process as a history of liberation and a "pasch" of justice and liberation.

Let us begin our reflection here with a biblical text-specifically, with the third chapter of the book of Exodus. Moses is in the desert. He has not gone there to do penance or to acquire perfection. He has fled to the desert because he has killed an Egyptian in some way he had "discovered" the lowly Hebrew and taken a stand on his behalf, killing an Egyptian in the process. He flees from his ¿potential persecutors and heads for the desert.

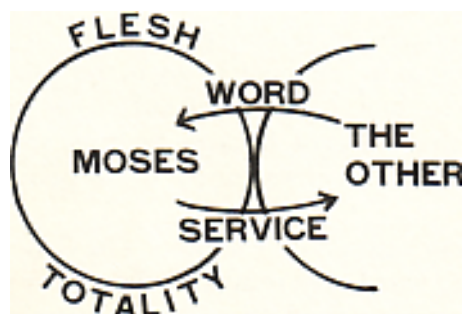
In the desert silence reigns. In such silence one begins to learn how to "hear" the Other. The desert is a vast expanse where our own words gradually are stilled. We become all ears; we are able to hear the words of the Other. Thus the desert is not an "asceticism," a process of ascending the ladder of perfection. It is rather an opening up, an expectant waiting. The person in the desert waits hopefully for the mystery that might reveal itself. To sojourn in the desert is to listen for something, to learn how to listen well. It is not a dialectic between imperfection and perfection, between impurity and purity; it is a dialectic between spoken word and hearing

So Moses is in the desert. He is in a structured totality of meaning, the totality of the desert. There he is living comfortably as a herdsman with his wife, his father-in-law, and

his flocks. Of course he is not yet the prophet that he will be later on. He is a herdsman, comfortably established in his day-to-day routine and perfectly adapted to his world. Then one day, we are told, he "looked" and "saw" a "fire flaming out of a bush." It was an object of his *vision*. He saw only the flame at first; he did not see the word that summoned him from the midst of the bush. Then he heard a word which he did not see. "Word" in the Hebrew language is *dabar*; in Greek it is translated as *logos*. But the Hebrew word does not denote "comprehension," as the Greek word does; rather, it denotes "revelation," as it does in John's Gospel. It is a creating, pro-creating, innovating word. This "word" calls the herdsman by name: "Moses! Moses!" First Moses saw something—the flame; then he heard someone pro-voking him, calling him forth, beyond what he saw before him.

Moses *heard* a voice. It *said* something to him. This is a basic point for us because of the situation in which we find ourselves. Comfortably established in another totality, not the totality of the desert but the totality of daily life and its hubbub, we do not hear anything. We, like Moses, are being called by name continually; but we do not hear anyone or anything. In Hebrew there is an idiom which deals with this phenomenon. A person's hearing or ears are said to be

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"closed" or "open." We read in the Bible that Solomon was a "wise" man, a man who possessed "wisdom." That is the Greek version of the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text says that Solomon had an "open ear." In other words, he knew how to listen.

Moses, then, heard words being spoken to him. What did they say? "I have witnessed ... have heard." Note the dialogical movement here. God, the Other, has also seen and heard. He has heard the people's "cry of complaint." It, too, is a word. But it is more like a lament because it reveals the sorrow of an enslaved people. God says: "I ... have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers." God is revealing himself to Moses now because he has heard his people's cry. Moses, in turn, hears what God says: "Liberate my people... out of Egypt."

Moses, the herdsman comfortably ensconced in the desert, is suddenly confronted with a message which he, in his egotism, would have preferred not to have heard at all. In this respect he is much like Jonah, who tried to flee when he heard that he was supposed to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. He ran away, but a large fish swallowed him up. Jonah is not a real figure in history; he is a fictional character. But his story points up the fact that the prophetic calling is a tremendous responsibility rather than an honorary privilege.

Moses, the comfortable herdsman, becomes the liberator of an enslaved people. It is not an honor but a harsh responsibility insofar as he had been living in the totality of his own egotism up to then. Now he will suffer the persecution of the totality that is Egypt, because he must somehow shoulder the injustice and enslavement of his people in order to free them.

Our human vision is very limited. The Other who reveals himself in his word ever remains beyond our vision insofar as he is Other. How then do we situate ourselves before the Other as Other? We do so through faith.

FAITH AS DAY-TO-DAY INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Faith is an act of understanding, a way of seeing. But faith knows that it remains with something which it cannot transcend; it remains there, knowing that there is something more. But who or what is it that goes beyond what is seen? First of all, *hope*-the hope that the Other will reveal himself. In the concrete, this comes down to *love* for the Other as Other. It is love that goes beyond the surface vision, the flaming bush which is the sign of the Other's presence. Every day we look at the surface of a person, at his or her face. But the face does not open us up to that person as the incomprehensible mystery of liberty that he or she is. We look at individuals and groups around us every day. We see them, but we do not see them as a free and mysterious Other.

We must acknowledge that our vision stops at the surface. We must wait hopefully for the revelation of the Other as Other in and through love. Only then can the Other reveal to us what lies hidden in the novel mystery of his liberty. Faith, hope, and charity are concrete anthropological attitudes for our day-to-day life in the real world. The love in question here is not some vague, general sort of love. It is a *love for justice* because it is a love for the Other as Other. It is a love for what is "Other" in him. It is a love for the Other insofar as the Other is not me; insofar as the Other has his own rights; insofar as the Other pro-vokes me and calls me forth, calling my attention to his rights and demanding just treatment from me. That is how God reveals himself to Moses. He approaches the comfortable pastor in the desert and bids him to free the chosen people of God.

This dialogical structure will enable us to understand and appreciate what theology is. Having described the conditions which make listening possible, we must now consider the meaning of the revelatory word. What does it say? It

does not just tell us what God as Other is; it also tells us what is happening in the concrete as far as God is concerned. God sees what is happening to us and *reveals* its meaning to us. He reveals himself to us in and by revealing the "sense" or "meaning" of day-to-day history.

A whole people was enslaved in Egypt. Moses, living in the desert, had not comprehended this people as such: i.e., as slaves in Egypt. Once God reveals to him that they are enslaved, Moses includes the world of these slaves in his own world and thereby discovers the meaningful connection between their slavery and his own life. To put it another way: I do not see God, but by faith he reveals to me the meaning of what I do see. And what is seen by me are historical events. Once they had no meaning for me. Thanks to divine revelation, however, they enter into my world with new meaningfulness.

That is what happened to Moses. The once carefree herdsman is suddenly plagued by pangs of conscience. If he does not go out and liberate his people, he will be conscious of having committed sin. If he remains in the desert, he will be a traitor to the call he has received. Faith does not permit me to see what is revealed to me. Rather, it enables me to see the import and meaning of happenings in history where the word of God is at work and where I will carry out my role as a Christian.

REDEFINING THEOLOGY

So "theology" means thinking about God, about a God who reveals himself in history. To believe God's revelation is to comprehend and embrace the import of what he reveals to us. In other words, it is to comprehend and embrace the meaning of history. There is nothing paradoxical about Jesus' statement that good done to the poor is good done to him. It is a simple truth. The person who sees a free Other in the poor and liberates the slave from Egypt is the person

who truly loves God, for the slave in Egypt is the very epiphany of God himself. If a person opens up to the slave in Egypt, he opens up to God; if he shuts out the slave in Egypt, he shuts out God. The person who does not commit himself to the liberation of the slaves in Egypt is an atheist. He is Cain killing Abel. Once Abel was dead, Cain was alone. He now believed himself to be the only One, the Eternal. He presented himself as a pantheistic god. That was the temptation posed to Adam in the garden: "You will be like gods." To be like God is to pretend to be the one and only being; to refuse to open up to the Other, who has been murdered.

God, however, keeps on revealing himself to us as the Other who summons us. He is the first Other. If I do not listen to my fellow man in bondage, then I am not listening to God either. If I do not commit myself to the liberation of my fellow man, then I am an atheist. Not only do I not love God, I am actually fighting against God because I am affirming my own divinity.

Theology, then, is a *logos* which ponders God revealing himself in history.

What about *pastoral theology*? "Pastoral" comes from the word "pastor," which means shepherd. However, it does not refer to the shepherd or herdsman nicely established in the desert with his family and flock. It refers to the poor and lowly shepherd who must confront the pharaoh in order to free his people, without even knowing exactly what to say or how to say it. Once this goal is achieved, it is the pastor who must pass over and through the desert. This passover (*pesah* in Hebrew) occurs in a second desert. It is not the desert of the comfortably settled shepherd. It is the desert through which Moses guides his people in the process of liberation. Once again it is a process of historical discernment. Which way do we go? What is the meaning and purpose of the whole process? Only the person who has faith can find out, for only such a person knows how to open up to God's

revelatory word and to discover its concrete import.

Hence pastoral theology is a way of pondering the journey of God's people as they seek liberation in the desert. And this journey towards liberation is a *passover*, a passover from bondage to total liberation. The Hebrew word alludes to the ongoing paschal resurrection. Pastoral activity is paschal; it is our passage through the desert that leads to liberation.

Passolini has a curious film entitled *Teorema*. He uses an unexpected motif-sexuality-to deal with the same theme we are discussing here. At the heart of this film is a human being, naked at the end, who is running through the desert towards God. That is precisely the thesis of Kierkegaard: We are naked creatures in the desert, running towards God; we are poor, wretched creatures without anything, who must open up to God. In a sense, we are dealing with the passage of humanity through the desert of liberation history.

FAITH AND THE ORDINARY CHARISM OF PROPHECY

If we are to be pastors and if theology is to enlighten us, we must be able to discover the sense and meaning of the historical present. Discovering the meaning of the present-note that I say the present, not the future-is called *prophecy*. Here I am not talking about prophecy as an extraordinary charism. I am talking about it as the thing that goes to make up the day-to-day life of real Christian faith. Jesus said that we would be able to move mountains if we had faith as small as the mustard seed. Well, the mountains with which I am familiar are pretty quiet; so our faith must be very small indeed. Prophecy is part of this faith held by the Christian people.

The word "prophecy" comes from a Greek word (*profemi*) which means "to speak out before someone." The

prophet speaks out before the people, telling them the meaning of the events that are taking place here and now. Moses stands before the enslaved Israelites and tells them that Yahweh has sent him to liberate them. He stands before the pharaoh and tells him to let the Israelites go. The Hebrew text then tells us that the pharaoh "hardened his heart." For the Hebrews, the heart was the seat of man's liberty. The Bible is telling us that the pharaoh lost his freedom because he had sinned, because he was exercising domination over other human beings.

Then Moses asked God for the gift of liberation, and the plagues began. How would we describe those plagues today in sociological terms? If the water supply of some large city was turned to blood today, would it not smack of sabotage? Then came the other plagues, culminating in the horrendous death of all the firstborn in Egypt. Only this last terror changed the mind of the unjust oppressor. He let the Israelites go, not out of a sense of justice but out of fear. Pharaoh changed his mind again and sent his army out in pursuit of the Israelites. His army was swallowed up in the Red Sea. How much violence there is in this whole story! And we must give this violence consideration too, because all these questions must be examined in any Latin American theology.

Moses is a prophet because he spells out the meaning of events before the people. The point he makes is that they have been enslaved and that now God chooses to liberate them. Here pastoral theology becomes reflection on the praxis of liberation. Christian praxis must be committed to the day-to-day liberation process of people; it must seek to discover the ultimate eschatological meaning of that process.

Let me give an example of what I mean by this. When I open the morning paper, I should know how salvation history is working itself out through everything that is happening. I should not say: "I don't understand anything that

is going on in this country or around the world." The person who feels "lost" in the face of events-be they political' economic, cultural, religious, or spiritual-is a person who has little or no faith. He must ask for an increase of faith, because he does not discern the import and meaning of the present. In such a case this individual leaves home in the morning and heads for work. He may want to serve his fellow men. But he does not know how to do it, and his work may actually be a disservice that directly contradicts the message of the Gospel. Since he does not know where the meaning of events lies, he may perform many meaningless things.

This is an important point. There is no sense in trying to shore up a building or reinforce it if we' have not asked ourselves whether the building is worth saving in the first place. Perhaps we have not noticed that other people are at work laying the foundations of another building, that there is where we should be too. It is most important for us to discover the sense and meaning of things, because all our activity will depend on that. We can waste a whole lifetime in useless labor. As the old saying goes: The road to hell is paved with good intentions. But it is not just our intention that can go astray; our whole effort can be misguided. We must work for something that God really wants. We must use all our intelligence and will to get closer to what God wants to reveal to us in the difficult but adventurous times in which we live. What is taking place before our eyes is wondrous, even though; we may not notice it at times. I think we are at the dawn of a great phase of Church history, and this applies in particular to the Church in Latin America. That is what I shall try to bring out in the remarks which follow.

But before I pursue that topic further, I would like to Clarify a few points for those of you who have some acquaintance with theology. I should like to indicate how Church

history came to be separated from dogmatic theology; how theology lost its roots in history so that we now find it difficult to comprehend the day-to-day reality around us. We must rediscover a great brand of theology that we have forgotten. Right now I should like to sketch how all this happened, and I want to begin with our own history as an example.

CHURCH HISTORY AND CULTURAL HISTORY

The difficulty we face in trying to expound a history of the Church in Latin America derives from the fact that there is no written history of Latin American culture. In his book, *America en la historia* ("America in History"), Leopoldo Zea notes that we are constantly trying to find out what is native to America; but in the process we discover that "America is outside history."

If we examine the great expositions of the history of world culture, we find that Latin America is not given adequate consideration. In one such history of culture, for example, Alfred Weber devotes only a few remarks to Latin America. He notes that Portugal and Spain prompted a European expansion which resulted in the conquest of America. That is the sum total of his treatment of Latin America.

Latin America receives this treatment, in general, because the great cultural historians are Europeans or North Americans, not Latin Americans. We have no one of world stature. But that is not the only reason. The fact is that we ourselves are ignorant of our history. Latin America remains on the outskirts of history. To have a Church history, we must have a cultural history. So far we lack that cultural history. If we are to find our place as Christians in Latin America, we must first find our place as Latin Americans in the history of world culture.

Because we are "outside history," we have necessarily fallen prey to an inauthentic historicity. Here a few words of explanation are in order.

As we know, contemporary existentialist thought talks about temporality-i.e., the time dimension. The being of man is not like the being of things. It is not merely a present; it is a has-been which now is in the process of being by virtue of its potentiality to be. The being of man can be comprehended only in the time dimension, in the framework of temporality. It can be comprehended only in terms of its three phases or instances: that is, as a has-been, which is now in the process of being, by virtue of its potentiality to be. The "potentiality to be" is the future. In German the word for future is *Zu-kunft*, that which is "coming to" or "approaching." This suggests the paradoxical nature of the future. The future is something towards which we are going but which is also coming towards us. Thus the future is not "what I shall do." It is the actual and operative presence of what I understand as my potentiality to be. It constitutes the fundamental instance of what today is called "temporality."

Temporality, in turn, is merely the bedrock of one of its modes which we refer to as "historicity." Historicity is not simply temporality. It is the way, the mode, in which mankind lives its temporality in the concrete-and at all times. Man is *in* history only because the human realm and man himself is *already* historical. It is man who "historifies" what he lives "within" the world. A historical document, for example, is not historical in and of itself. It is historical because it was in and of man's hand. It is historical because it was in man's world, not because it is now in the world. It is historical because it *was* in the human world.

Historicity can be lived in various ways. We as Latin Americans are "outside history." This inevitably means that we are dragged down into an inauthentic brand of historicity. In our case inauthentic historicity means "historify-

ing" the things at hand (i.e., turning them into history) and interpreting them in a superficial, commonplace fashion which really covers them up and conceals them. The result is that our authentic tradition remains in the dark.

We must not equate "traditionalism" with authentic tradition. Traditionalism stops at ontic comprehension, and "ontic" is on the same level as "superficial" and "commonplace." These terms suggest that tradition does indeed transmit something, but in this transmission it conceals more than it reveals to us. It transmits to us only what is *superficial and obvious*. For example, it is obvious that we are Latin Americans. But the real point is to know what that really means. The more we dwell on the surface of what we are, the more our real inner nature and life remains concealed from us. Tradition transmits everything to us-language, for example. Now at first glance it might seem that language is an indifferent reality which poses no problems at all. We fail to take cognizance of the fact that language is not only a tool for communication, but also a trap. It is a trap because the very words of a language conceal the experience of a people; they cover over that experience. We do not realize that when a given people does not possess a certain set of experiences, it has no word for those experiences. When an attempt is made to transmit a certain experience from one people to another, which mayor may not have words for the experience, it is quite possible that translation will be impossible and that the experience may therefore be ignored or forgotten. Authentic historicity is critical, dialectical. To be critical means to be able to "de-present" the present; to take what is commonplace and habitual and look at it in another light. It means that we can really test and probe what tradition transmits to us. One of the privileged ways of testing and checking what is handed down by tradition is history. It is one valuable way of being able to test and criticize ourselves in order to uncover what lies concealed in the obvious data.

But if we stand "outside history," then we cannot possibly use this means of engaging in criticism.

If a German college student wants to know what it means to be German, he can pick up a treatment of cultural history such as that written by Alfred Weber. If an English college student wants to do the same thing, he can read Toynbee's *Study of History*. But we Latin Americans have no equivalent interpretations of our own place in world history to which we can turn.

Let us suppose we read the books just mentioned, taking the work of Weber for our example here. Weber begins with the origins of *homo sapiens*. Then he covers prehistory, the great cultures of Antiquity, and subsequent developments. Gradually his focus narrows to Germany, so that a German can get some idea of his people's place in world history from Weber's treatment. But as we Latin Americans read the book, we find ourselves being estranged from our own history as we move towards modern times. Instead of finding a detailed discussion of the conquest of America when we get to the sixteenth century, we are treated to a detailed discussion of Martin Luther. I am not suggesting that there should not be any discussion of that great Reformation figure. But I am saying that this topic was not the fundamental problem facing *us* in the sixteenth century. Gradually Weber's narrative moves into channels that simply are not ours as Latin Americans. By the time we finish his book, we are alienated human beings-Europeanized Latin Americans.

This is happening to us every day. If we do nothing but study a history that is not our own, we end up by being something *other than what we ourselves really are*. We must ask ourselves: What is it to be Latin Americans? We really do not know because no one has taught us.

The same thing applies to Church history. Professor Joseph Lortz, my teacher in Mainz, has written a great history of the Church. He is German, as Weber is, and his

work is a prime example of my point. Reading his great work, one might be inclined to think it really is a history of the "universal" Church. In fact, however, it is only a history of the European Church, of the Church in German-speaking areas and Central Europe. When Lortz gets to the era of the Reformation, he talks about Luther. (He is an expert on Luther.) Then he goes on to talk about the Enlightenment, Gallicanism, Ultramontanism, and so forth. He says nothing about Latin America. Thus the superficial, commonplace view within which we live our lives cannot be criticized because we study only about Europe. Our own cultural and ecclesial world lies buried under ignorance, indifference, and neglect.

Perhaps there is only one way open to us if we want to undertake critical thinking and engage in authentic historicity, if we want to "historify" what we have at hand and turn it into real history. Perhaps we must start over and try to work up a historical self-awareness that will redefine us in genetic terms.

Such an effort would certainly be "destructive" in many respects, authentically "destructive" in terms of the root, meaning of the Latin word from which it comes: *de-struo*. We would really be engaged in a work of "un-building" and "dismantling." We would be taking a critical look at things which confront us as a coordinated, unified whole. We would be taking them apart to see what might lie hidden behind them.

History and the study of history is not destructive in the everyday sense of the term. It is destructive in the sense that it is a probing and a catharsis. It is, in a sense, a collective psychoanalysis of our culture. When we want to know about the traumas we carry inside ourselves, we turn to autobiography and biography; we turn to the history of ourselves. Well, history is a collective psychoanalysis in which we examine our cultural traumas and our failures at adaptation. If we want to understand the crisis of Latin Ameri-

can Catholicism today, we may have to look back to the sixteenth century-or perhaps even to the fourth century. We do not really know for sure where to look. Or perhaps it would be better to say that we have forgotten where to look. We are somewhat similar to a child who got a traumatic clout from his father in the distant past. The blow itself is forgotten, but its impact remains present in his psyche. Perhaps our culture experienced an analogous trauma way back in the fourth century and is only now freeing itself from the effects; hence the frightful crisis we are now experiencing.

I am not trying to espouse or justify psychoanalysis here. My point is that the example may help us to see what history can do. History can help us to "see" the process at work; and the very act of seeing what has been going on is a major part of the cure. We see the real situation that we are in and we now know why we are in it.

FAITH AS SUPERNATURAL UNDERSTANDING OF EXISTENCE

What does it really mean to be a Christian in Latin America? First of all, we have to define in real-life terms what it means to be a Christian today in the twentieth century. Once we tackle the complex reality of Latin America, the whole question becomes even more complex. On the one hand, it seems clear that it is in the light of faith that we live out our existence here in Latin America. By the same token, however, we must re-define and re-conceptualize. That is one of the tasks that faces Catholic thinking today. It must probe the implications of historical interpretation of the faith.

I just said "re-conceptualize." Conceptualization is the process of passing from a *de facto* experience to an abstract, analytical expression of it. This process cannot help but be ambiguous at times. We must be very careful about the way

we conceptualize something, about the "how" of the process. Now traditional Christian theology, and of course Western philosophy, took its inspiration from hellenic thought. This mode of thinking seemed to be merely methodological and hermeneutical. In fact, however, a specific experience of life and a specific understanding of being was woven into that way of thinking. Conceptualization can indeed shed light on certain aspects of everyday life. In the absence of *de facto* experience, however, it may leave other aspects in the dark. Such was the case in the present instance. The process of conceptualization began to give special emphasis to certain Christian experiences to which it could give expression. Other Christian experiences, for which Greek philosophic thought could not find any expression, were not conceptualized in an adequate way. The Christian faith was conceptualized only partially.

Today faith is described by some theologians as a "supernatural existential," although they do not always mean what I mean by the term here. People familiar with contemporary philosophy appreciate the import and thrust of this term as an attempt to describe the essential nature of our faith. It enables us to work out a more exact understanding of faith. Human beings have an understanding of what things are that is existential, matter-of-fact, ontic; it is called *Verstehen* in German. But faith is some kind of *new* existential understanding, as it were. Living in the "world," I have a pre-conceptual understanding of being. Faith is a *new* "world" in a sense. Thus we can take everything that is described and discussed in phenomenology and the existential thought of people like Heidegger and Jaspers, and then turn it into a completely new treatment of faith.

The term "*new* world" does not refer to a theoretical viewpoint or perspective. Faith is not a *habitus* of the theoretical mind or intellect. Faith is something that opens me to a whole new horizon of existential understanding; and it presupposes the whole of man in his pre-Christian

world. "To be a Christian in Latin America" is to understand Latin American existence under *a new* light. But if we want to analyze this experience theologically, if we want to be able to express it to students and the people, then we must carry out a whole hermeneutical task that still remains to be done. We must attain a *new* understanding or comprehension of existence. And this new understanding must be *dialectical*, in the sense that the original Greek word *dia-logos* suggests "moving from one horizon of comprehension to another horizon of comprehension." As a form of understanding or comprehension, faith can never get to its last and ultimate horizon because that horizon is historical. When I think I have reached the point of understanding everything around me with full and complete clarity, time has passed and God has already revealed himself to man in another, more mature way. Faith, like understanding, is dialectical and hence historical.

But what do we do? If we want to train people, we send them to Europe. There they study liturgy, catechetics, theology, and a host of other subjects. When they come back, they are completely lost in Latin America. They are out of touch and never get their feet back on the ground. They are Frenchified, Germanized, Italianized, or otherwise alienated. It is not simply a matter of reading the Gospel message. We must read it *within tradition*. And tradition has come down to us, not through Italy or Germany, but through a Spain that came to America and through a concrete Church in Latin America to which we belong.

The fact is, however, that theology at some point came to lose its rootedness in history, its primary theological experience. The Hebrew way of thinking in the Old Testament and Christian thinking in the New Testament were almost exclusively history-minded or "historical" in nature. Note that this was real "thinking" because it is precisely a *logos* about God we find in the Bible. We are used to hearing and imagining that the apostles were uneducated, unlettered

fishermen who did not know a great deal. We feel that Jesus' message was for simple people and hence had no developed methodology to it. We feel that way because we have come to equate the methodology of Greek thought with theological thinking as a scholarly discipline or science. What has happened is that we have lost sight of a different but perfectly sound and coherent logic-the logic used by the prophets and by Jesus in his preaching. Their methodology is a strictly theological one. It is a process of thinking which is experientially aware of its course, but which had not spelled out its methodology as Greek logic did.

I cannot explain the methodology of Hebrew thinking in a few brief words here.¹ What is clear is that it is not the same as that of the Greek *organon*. But it is a coherent and organized way of thinking even though it differs from that of Aristotle. This "Hebrew theology" always contemplated history. The Hebrews thought something like this: "What is happening to us today is akin to what God did with Moses and our people in the desert of Sinai. "In other words, the Hebrews found the meaning and import of the present moment in the past history of their people. When the people of the nation are being sent off into exile, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah tell them that their imprisonment and exile are due to their sinful actions. The meaning of what is happening to them is to be found in history, always in history.

From the days of ancient Israel on, historical self-awareness comes to exist as a reality in the world. In the eyes of the Old Testament prophets, the history of Israel is the revelation of Yahweh. In and through this concrete history, the nation progresses in its self-awareness. The Jew in exile in Babylon around 550 B.C. was reflectively aware of his nation's past, a past that began with Abraham. For him Abraham was not a mythical figure but a concrete being in actual history. And after him came Isaac, Jacob, and all the

other great forefathers of Israel. The book of Chronicles, for example, offers a theological interpretation of Israel's past history. Past events are recalled in order to discover some *meaning* in them. Thus the Babylonian exile is interpreted as a punishment inflicted on the Israelites by God, through an alien nation, for their sinfulness.

In short, ancient Israel continually strove to give some meaning to its past history. On the basis of this past and its meaning, Israel also tried to explain the present and glimpse the import of the future, and this is again prophecy. Israel was fully aware that its concrete existence here and now, its present safety and salvation was determined by its link to the past history of its patriarchs and forefathers.

Such was not the case with Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks did have people like Herodotus and Thucydides. They recounted things that happened in history, but they stayed on the anecdotal level. We are told, for example, that ten thousand warriors trekked so far, were defeated in battle, and then marched home again. But the doings of those ten thousand soldiers do not constitute, for someone like Aristotle, an ontological level which is adequate for defining man. Mankind is not seen to be dependent on historical happenings. Instead man is seen to be dependent on mythical happenings; i.e., the fall of a soul into a body. Because this soul is divine and therefore transhistorical, nothing that happens in time is part of its essential constitution. The Greeks were never able to get beyond anecdotal history because certain events recalled by them would inevitably be repeated again in the endless cycle of eternal return. These events did not have anything definitive in their nature. Nothing happened "once and for all."

In the writings of Saint Paul, by contrast, the notion of "once and for all" (Greek *hapax*) is very prominent. He applies it to the historical reality of Christ, and it is a central notion in his whole theology. In his book entitled *Christ and*

Time, Oscar Cullmann gives a clear exposition of the notion.² But the notion of *hapax* does not appear on the scene only with the coming of the Word. For the Jews, Abraham himself had been a *hapax* too in some sense; and so was every event from day to day.

This is so because "once and for all time" there existed this concrete human being to whom a promise was made. By associating oneself with him, one became a member of the covenant and an object of the promise; one could be saved. History becomes the constitutive element on the metaphysical level, because one cannot obtain salvation if he is not associated with Abraham and the covenant. Such could not be the case with the Greeks. It is among the Hebrews that the notion of sacred history or salvation history takes root and develops. The Psalms reiterate the theme endlessly: Our forefathers were released from Egypt and went through such and such experiences, all of which proves God's providence and his love for us. Interpreting history in their own age, the prophets propose revolutionary reforms. For the people of Israel, in short, history is a sacred history, a reflection on the past in which here and now existence takes on meaning.

HISTORICITY IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

Now that is precisely what the New Testament proposes to us. The most clearcut example is Luke, who wrote a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He describes a real-life history. The life of Jesus begins in Bethlehem, continues in Nazareth and other parts of the nation, and culminates in Jerusalem. The book of Acts picks up the subsequent life of his Church. From Jerusalem it spreads to Samaria and Antioch. Through the missionary work of Saint Paul, it eventually reaches Rome. Luke's narrative depicts the historical growth of Christianity as a widening expanse of

concentric circles, which start in Bethlehem and eventually end up in Rome. Rome is seen as the center of world history and the culmination of the process.

Here Christianity begins to take cognizance of its temporality, to interpret its own evolution and growth, thereby providing itself with a theology of history. The book of Revelation, like the works of Luke, tries to engage in historical self-interpretation also. In a prophetic vein it attempts to interpret very real events that were happening to Christians in the first century A.D. It interprets the persecutions suffered by the faithful along the line of Hebrew apocalyptic theology, which is another way of theologizing in terms of the concrete, sacred happenings that are befalling a community. The whole process of objectification within the Jewish communities of the Old Testament and the early Christian communities of the New Testament is a process of historical hermeneutics. Jesus is a real, concrete child who grows in wisdom, age, and grace; and after him, the Church grows in like manner. These primeval events are described, not in anecdotal terms, but in a way *that gives them meaning and sense*. The "description" is actually a theology of history.

This process continues in the movement known as Judaeo-Christianity, which begins around 60 A.D. and continues to 100 or 120 A.D. It is noteworthy because it is a Christian movement, but a Christian movement with a Jewish apocalyptic theology. The logical instrumentation for giving expression to its experience continues to be that of Hebrew thinking; hence it continues to operate on an historical level. Revelations are offered to the community which help it to interpret the course of certain Christian phenomena. Theology is still the description of a sacred history, of liberation.

At the end of the first century after Christ, however, there is a break. Theology, which had been the description or explicitation of God's revelation in history, begins to be hellenized. There is a shift from reflective consideration of

the history of God's revelation to his people to a systematic theology which presents its argument in the manner of the Greeks.

THEOLOGY IS HELLENIZED

Clement of Alexandria, with his theory of *gnosis*, is a perfect example of the new approach. But even before him we have the early apologists, who bear clear witness to the gradual transition. They do not neglect history completely. Justin, for example, takes the history of the chosen people into account. He, like other writers, used the argument from antiquity-trying to show that the Jews were more ancient than Homer and the early Greek sages because they originated with Abraham.

Here we can see continuity in Christian consciousness. The Christian feels a sense of fellowship with Abraham, not with Homer. At the same time, however, Christians begin to accept the instruments of Greek logic and to argue in syllogisms. They still say what the prophets had said before them, but now they do so in Greek terms. Tatian, for example, tries to show that one cannot possibly regard the sun as a god-as contemporary Greeks did. The sun is a creature of God, something created "for us." The same holds true for the moon and the stars. Using this approach, Tatian gradually tears down all the Greco-Roman gods.

This may seem to be rather innocent play to us, but it entailed great culture shock at that time. Indeed it was a critical and essential moment in the history of the Church, for Judaeo-Christian thought met hellenic thought head on and criticized its very foundations, its "ethico-mythic nucleus." The fundamental values of the Greco-Roman world were gradually undermined until no one believed in them any more. People ceased to live in the Greco-Roman worldview. In 529 B.C. Justinian closed the Platonic Academy in Athens, sounding the death knell of hellenic

thought as *an existential, lived reality*, as something which real people believed and lived.

The reason that hellenic thought as living belief died out was the thoroughgoing criticism of the apologists. This fact is of great interest and relevance to us as Latin Americans because a similar process has not taken place here. Living within the culture of Greece and Rome, Christians transformed that culture by changing the shape and import of its ultimate values. A similar process did not happen here because the native Indians-the Aztecs, the Incas, the Calchaquis-did not have apologists. There were no people living within these native cultures who had grasped and lived their values in such a way that they could change their world for a new one without having to abandon their own civilization. The Amerindian cultures had not evolved to the point where people could make such a transition, "passing over" from one culture to another in this way.

The apologist is a person who is in the *world* and transforms it. This is the first and primary tenet of any mission, even today. But this could not occur in the case of our native Indians. Instead things were "imposed" on them "from above." The name San Salvador was imposed on the name Guanahani, and the latter name simply disappeared. In the era of ancient Roman dominance, by contrast, it was really the autochthonous people and their world that grew into being Christian.

HISTORY IS FORGOTTEN

The task of the apologist was to gradually transform his culture from "within." In the hellenistic empire the apologist was surrounded with a whole panoply of logical tools.³ But gradually the historical dimension of theological thought was forgotten; theology became more and more a kind of logical argumentation.

In his *Stromata*, Clement of Alexandria talks very ex-

plicity about this science (Greek *epistēmē*) that he wants to put together. He has in mind a type of reflection that will be on the level of scientific knowledge, that will be Aristotelian in cast. It is to be a theology based on logical argumentation. It starts out with reflection on first principles; this is followed by logical argument which leads to a theological conclusion. Thus people begin to bypass and overlook the kind of theological reflection which takes history as its point of departure.

To be sure, reflection on history is not abandoned completely. Now, however, it is not really on the theological level any more; it is simply a commentary on Scripture. Such commentaries on Scripture now begin to proliferate alongside theological tracts of a logical cast. What remains of historical reflection in theology is to be found in the scriptural commentaries. During the Middle Ages, the latter become so scholastic that they lose all sense of history. The biblical commentaries of Saint Augustine, however, are an important exception to the general trend.

Above I mentioned Clement of Alexandria and his desire to fashion a Christian *epistēmē*, but he is not the first to start this tradition. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, was the first major theologian to propound a systematic theology based on the model of Greek logic. Gradually the Christian sense of history was lost, and so was the Christian sense of prophecy. I remember talking to Pere Pierre Benoit in Jerusalem one day. He said to me that the scriptural exegetes are the prophets of today, because they are the ones who are interpreting the word of God *today*. But I think this view is very limited, reducing prophecy to something much less than it really is. The prophet does not simply interpret the "written word"; he also must interpret present history, the "word as lived today." The exegete simply tries to become acquainted with God's "written word"-up to the first century A.D. But doesn't the history of God's people continue after that? Doesn't it remain as real and lofty as it was

before? Isn't Jesus still present in his Church through his Spirit?

The sacred history of Cod's people and the "written word" of the New Testament have their continuation in the history of the Church, and exegesis of Church history is a task incumbent on the prophet. The prophet is the prototype of the Church historian. It is he who discovers the *serue and meaning* of the present-not on the basis of some "happening" but on the basis of faith and its logic, that is, on the basis of the revelation that Cod grants us about history, about here-and-now history.

When this prophetic sense is lost, all one can do is engage in philological exegesis of the Bible. At the same time theology becomes more and more a process of ratiocination. Attention is focused on the inner coherence of dogma; all its parts have to fit together logically and consistently. But this may easily lead to mere logicizing, and in fact it did. The various facets of a statement or argument may be perfectly coherent and consistent, but sidestep or overlook reality completely. Today, for example, there is a brand of geometry that is non-Euclidean. It "operates" perfectly without in any way being "real." The same approach has sometimes occurred in theology. Taking over certain axioms from the past, axioms which had a very different sense and import in that past, we have fashioned a whole panoply of theological argumentation that leaves present reality completely to one side.

The prophet is a person who "touches" or "puts his finger on" here-and-now reality. He takes it as the point of departure for further reflection. The theologian, on the other hand, may get tied up in his crystal ball and fall prey to merely abstract logicizing, somewhat in the manner of Hegel. Hegel propounds his view of the world process and absolute spirit in a system that is logically coherent but unreal. In like manner a theologian may analyze the various facets of the Old and New Testament in an axiomatic way

which strips them of all historical import and reduces them to hellenistic logicizing.

That tendency is now on the wane. But you should see how biblical texts were used by theologians right up to recent times. Scriptural verses were turned into first principles for a theology that was totally out of touch with reality, that showed no interest in history or the task of prophecy. Concrete history, which should have served as the starting point, was confined to the realm of hagiography. The end result in that realm was stereotyped accounts of the lives of the saints.

In the Middle Ages, then, we find little more than anecdotal history. Historical chronicles reported when a certain convent or bishopric was founded. Alongside these chronicles, we find various accounts of the lives of the saints riddled with fantasy and myth and totally out of touch with reality; they completely lacked any *fundamentum in re*.

CHURCH HISTORY BECOMES MERELY PROFANE HISTORY

Christian culture as a whole came to lose touch with reality more and more; and at the same time, paradoxical as it may seem, its history became more and more identical with profane history. This is because it could not help but be profane history insofar as it ceased to be sacred history.

The process of secularization began as far back as the eleventh or twelfth century after Christ, in the dispute over investiture. It gradually gave rise to written history that was profane in nature and that had little to do with the history of the Church. Ecclesial problems were gradually left out of written Church history so that it ceased to be sacred history. By the end of the nineteenth century, the only kind of history to be found was profane history. Whether they realized what they were doing or not, those who chose to keep writing Church history actually ended up writing a

secular depiction of that history. They narrated the history of the "institutional Church" as one would narrate the history of any institution. They treated such questions as these: Did Saint Paul get to Spain? If he did, in what year did he arrive? Did Boyl have a certain papal bull when he reached the court of Isabella or not? Did he try to work against Christopher Columbus or not? In short, their histories are merely secular recountings and descriptions of events; yet they pretend to be Church history. The few histories of the Church in Latin America which are in print are almost entirely of this cast.

That should not be the case, because history is the concrete locale, the horizon and *locus*, the *ubi* and source, of theology. Without history there is no theology; history is the starting point and end point for the abstract conceptualizing of theology. This history must of course be something more than merely anecdotal. It must be sacred history, liberation history. The past, from the time of Abraham to today, must have *meaning* in the present so that it can provide an eschatological thrust towards the future. It is history understood in this sense which is the real and preeminent *locus* of theology.

LACK OF ROOTS AND ALIENATION

When a nation or a people is not familiar with the evolution of its community, when it does not know how it fits into the history that goes back to the beginnings of Christianity, then its theologizing is unreal. Theologians will only alienate those who study under them, propounding notions that are current in Japan or Europe or North America but that don't "work" here. Once we realize that these notions do not work here, we turn to sociology. We will do "religious sociology," we say to ourselves. But that won't work either. Such "religious sociology" often remains at the level of mere statistics. It is not really sociology; it is sociography. In

other words, it stops at the level of description and does not explore or explain reality in depth. For an in-depth study and explanation of reality, we must appeal to the human sciences as a whole; we must include economics and politics. We must appeal to the whole history of a culture. When this history is reconsidered in the light of faith, then we are beginning to theologize, to work out a theology of the present moment in history.

Theologians today are well aware of the fact that history is the privileged *locus* of theology. In Europe, for example, this is taken for granted; it is quite normal and logical. The European theologian is solidly integrated and rooted in history, whether he adverts to the fact or not. Such is not the case, however, in Latin America.

Here I do not intend to give an anecdotal account of the facts of Church history in Latin America. Instead I shall try to contemplate and explicate the meaning and import of certain facts and events. These particular facts and events will serve as the starting point for my theologizing. That is precisely what I will be doing when I try to ponder the meaning of historical facts and events. And when I sum up in my concluding remarks, I will be repeating myself to a certain extent. For the initial exposition itself will provide us with a theological interpretation.

TOWARDS A LATIN AMERICAN THEOLOGY

A Latin American theology can appear on the scene only after we have tried to comprehend our day-to-day life in history. This would include our economic, political, and cultural life. It is from this that theology arises. Europeans have always been formulating a European theology, a theology which takes everyday life in Europe as its starting point. We Latin Americans have merely aped that theology, alienating ourselves in the process. Only recently have we turned our attention back to our own real life here, discov-

ering a history that has lain buried in obscurity since the sixteenth century. Once again theology has become a real possibility in Latin America, and that in itself is cause for rejoicing.

It was only in 1968 that the first Latin American theological texts began to appear. When I say "Latin American" here, I mean that these texts contain reflections that are peculiar to this segment of the Church and that are different from the thinking of other segments of the Church. Our thinking is so different, in fact, that theologians from other parts of the world do not understand it when we try to explain it to them; sometimes they do not feel it is any concern of theirs at all. In Quito I had a conversation with a German theologian. I was telling him that we were now reflecting on the whole matter of liberation. He expressed surprise and interest, and he asked me to tell him more about it. But do you know what was really on the top of his mind at the moment? Hans Kung's book on papal infallibility. The problem of liberation that occupies us right now – was far from his thoughts. Europeans are down to splitting hairs while we must find out whether we even possess a head of hair; and if we do, we must find out how to help it grow.

In short, the situation is very different in the two cases. They are already at the point of engaging in tired subtleties while we are at the point of dawning awareness and new beginnings. Marcuse, for example, is now asking how one can get people in affluent societies to eat less. We are trying to figure out how to make sure that starving people get enough to eat. It seems to me that the person who is desperately trying to find enough food has more passion and enthusiasm in his quest than the person who is beginning to eat less without knowing exactly why. The hippy movement is a rebellious movement within the affluent society. Our rebelliousness is quite different, and it is much more meaningful. Mankind is able to express itself much more com-

pletely and much more spiritually in the movements that now mark Latin America, Africa, and Asia than it can in the movements that mark affluent societies.

I shall go into this matter more fully as we proceed. Right now the point is that if we manage to recover our own past history, we will find ourselves with a new and different way of looking at things. Our point of view and our thought will necessarily be quite different from, or even opposed to, the viewpoint and thinking of people in dominant countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the United States. Our questions and problems mean little to them. They will show an interest in hearing from us only when we take the trouble to ponder our own reality. Only then will they begin to respect us as theologians and as a Church, according us some of the rights that go with adulthood. The Latin American Church must find out what mission is properly its own in the near future. It cannot permit other segments of the Church to point out its road to it.

In 1969 a layman wrote a critical article about Cardinal Suenens in the periodical *Vispera* (Methol Ferre, "Critica a Suenens desde America latina," *Vispera*, no. 12, 1969, Montevideo). His criticism of certain statements by the great Belgian Cardinal can be summarized briefly. Ferre maintains that underlying Suenens's words is a whole world which is not the world of the Latin American. Hence the conclusions drawn by Suenens are ones with which a Latin American cannot agree at all. There are two different theologies involved because there are two different cultural worlds involved and two different political backgrounds. This article by Ferre heralded the start of autonomous theological thinking on the part of Latin Americans. Although Columbus arrived in the new world in 1492, we might well be justified in saying that we are just beginning to "discover" America-Latin America, in particular. The statement is not as absurd as it might seem at first glance. A child grows up slowly. It does not really discover its self until

sometime around adolescence. Only then does it realize that it is "other" than its parents. That is why the adolescent begins to show rebelliousness.

The discovery of self goes hand in hand with the initial steps towards full adulthood. The human individual now realizes that he or she is a new and novel being, and has been such from the very start. In the last couple of decades we have come to realize that our culture is distinct from every other culture. "From the very start," for us, means from the start of our history in 1492. Our mother is Amerindia, our father is Spain-or vice versa, if you will. But the child of this union is something *new*. It is not the culture of Amerindia, Spain, or Europe; nor is it the culture of the Incas or the Aztecs. It is a new culture, a mixed culture, a creole or mestizo culture.

A child is not its mother or its father. But while it is being brought up, it is very much the same as its father or mother. It discovers its distinctness only when it attains its independence. That is what is happening to us today. Discovering ourselves to be an "other," we are turning our eyes back to the past and beginning to discover our own history. That is why we could not really have had a written history of our own before this. One must first discover his own otherness before he can really begin to explore who he is and what his past means.

The existing histories of the "universal" Church are not histories of the "universal" Church at all. If you don't believe me, read what they have to say about Latin America. There is a history of the Church in twenty volumes published under the direction of Augustin Fliche and Victor Martin; it is in French. Latin America is discussed in brief appendices to various chapters, which were written by my professor at the Sorbonne, Robert Ricard. He simply was not able to consider our historical process in its totality, so it is reduced to a missionary adjunct. But the fact is that the Latin American Church is not simply a mission Church. It

has its own distinctive institutions. As we shall see, it is a colonial version of Christendom with its own peculiar and distinctive features. It deserves more than an appendix in Church history.

The existing histories of the "universal" Church are really histories of the European Church for the most part.. Little or nothing is said in them about Latin America. We cannot comprehend Ourselves in these histories because they do not see us as distinct. It is only when we discover we are outside history that we can ask ourselves who we really are. Only then can we turn our gaze back to the beginning of our history and thereby interpret our life here and now. This process is already a process of theologizing, and it cannot help but be Latin American in nature. It will be different because we will be pondering things from a historical perspective that has not been taken into account before.

Whether they now really want that role or not, Europeans have been assigned the role and the responsibility of being the dominating people in the unfolding scheme of world history. It is they who discovered the other "ecumenes" and who gained domination over them by technology, force of arms, and the impact of horses, gunpowder, and caravels. This domination led them to ponder reality from the standpoint of domination, even where theology was concerned. But if we start to ponder things from the other end, from the standpoint of those dominated, then we see everything in a very different light. The theology formulated from the standpoint of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt was hardly akin to that formulated by the pharaoh and his priests.

So we soon find ourselves facing a new horizon and a whole new set of issues. Everything shows up in a very different light, as I shall try to show later. When we recover our past history, we will have a solid foothold for undertaking a new and innovative line of thought. The result will necessarily be new because we ourselves are something new

whether we wish to be or not. We will have to explore this newness and see what it is all about. We cannot ask Europeans to explain the meaning of what has happened to us; instead we must explain to them what has happened to us and what it all means. Indeed, it is my opinion that we may be able to see a great deal more clearly from our standpoint here. Looking at things "from the bottom," we may well be able to see more clearly into the universal human condition and to determine which human project should capture the attention of Europeans and others in the near future.

Consider the pharaoh and the Hebrews seeking freedom. Which party possessed the life and vitality that would move the process of liberation forward? Which party would move history further on into the future? The answer is clear. The Hebrews, in their quest for liberation, would give new life and impetus to history and its forward movement. It is they who were the critical factor in history at that moment. That may be true of us today. Living in a situation of oppression, we may be destined to find a way out for the universal Church. We live in a privileged situation: "Blessed are the poor." We are poor. The poor, living in the desert, have fewer possessions to clog up their ears. They are better able to hear the divine message that calls forth and summons onward. They "comprehend" the oppressor and realize that they themselves are oppressed. The oppressor, by contrast, "comprehends" only himself and gags the oppressed. In the last analysis, he does not comprehend anything at all. It may well be that our Latin American theology will prove to be very important, that it will not only reflect on our own situation but also explain a great deal more than European theology does.

Such is my belief, although I have only offered a few general remarks so far. In the words that follow, I shall try to show that I am not dealing in vague, unfounded hypotheses, that there is something to what I have been saying.

NOTES

1. See my book, *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, vol. 2, chapter 6, the section on the "metodo analectico."

2. Original French edition published by Neuchatel-Delachaux; English translation, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

3. A philosophy seminar on this question, the adoption of hellenic logic and its instrumentation by Christian thought, was held at the University of Cuyo during the first semester of 1968. See my *El dualismo en la antropologia de la Cristiandad* (Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1974). It treats this problem in greater detail.