

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION I

TO SPEAK of the *Theology of Liberation*¹ is to conjure up the figures of Camilo Torres, priestly apostle of revolutionary violence, and Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, the militant prophet of non-violence in the pursuit of justice for the oppressed in Latin America. Liberation theology is nothing if not active and actual. It is, then, with considerable diffidence that I approach this topic as a European brought up in the first-world tradition of theology. For behind the systematic reflection of this theology (which is not lacking and is increasing in volume) there lies the whole way of life of the third world, and a way of life is difficult to understand for one not immersed in it. Consequently much relevant material has been occasional, contained in mimeographed papers beyond my reach. Not least, one is deterred by the somewhat aggressive insistence that we in Europe cannot understand. At the end of a heated debate between European and third world theologians held in Geneva in 1973, the Brazilian, Hugo Assmann concluded that there existed a state of total 'incommunication'. 'We must end', he said, 'like an Italian movie – with a lot of questions. We cannot end with the kiss of love'. However, the movement is full of vigorous life and excitement and will repay involvement. These articles aim first of all to go to the heart of the matter and consider method; the claim of liberation theology to be a new way of doing theology. Subsequently, I hope to examine its content (a new view of man), and then the criticisms of it both from within and without, especially in regard to the issue of revolutionary violence.

The situation in Latin America out of which liberation theology has arisen in the last decade is basically that of a system of oligarchic and oppressive control of resources and of government, the result of a history of 'auto-colonialism'² reinforced by the economic imperialism of the countries of the first world:

In Latin American countries a minority of 5–10% generally controls half the wealth, whereas the lower third of the population may

¹ Sources for this section:

Berryman, P. E., 'Latin American Liberation Theology', in *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), pp 357–395. Bonino, J. M., *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age* (London, 1975), chs 1–3. Camara, H., *Church and Colonialism* (London, 1969). Cheerbrant, A., *The Rebel Church in Latin America* (eng. trans., London, 1974). Gutierrez, G., *A Theology of Liberation*, (London, 1974), chs 2, 6, 7. Kee, A., *A Reader in Political Theology* (London, 1974). Torres, C., *Revolutionary Priest: complete writings*, ed. J. Gerassi, (London, 1973).

² This refers to the analysis of Latin America by Joseph Comblin (a Belgian working in Latin America) as 'a colonial empire in which the conquistadors have become established': they are the oligarchy. Cf Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p 220.

receive only 5% of the wealth. Similarly the United States, with 6% of the world's population, uses 40% of its raw materials.³

Over the past fifteen years, experimental moves towards democracy – in education, through the 'conscientization' programme initiated by Paulo Freire; in government, in Brazil (Goulart), in Chile (Allende), in Argentina (Peronism) – have all been reversed by right-wing pressure and the system of dictatorships is stronger than ever. The situation is summed up in the phrase 'institutionalized violence', used by the latin american conference of bishops which met at Medellin in 1968. Even on the less negative side, efforts to build up the economies of third-world countries along the lines of development towards first-world standards have been less than successful. The hopes of the 'fifties gave way to the disillusion of the 'sixties as the gap between the developed and under-developed world actually widened.

To meet this challenge many in the Church – traditionally a pillar of the establishment – have begun to act by entering the development debate on the side of total human fulfilment. While Camilo Torres took the path of revolution and was killed in 1967, more and more churchmen were beginning to speak out. 1967 was also the year of the appearance of *Populorum Progressio*, which echoed Pius XI in speaking of the 'international imperialism of money', and of the appearance of the *Pastoral of seventeen bishops from the third world*.⁴ A watershed, perhaps the end of the beginning, came in 1968 with the Pope's visit to the Eucharistic Congress at Bogotá where he endorsed the theology of development. Immediately afterwards, the second conference of the latin america bishops at Medellin was not afraid to use, in a specific context, the word revolution.

Liberation theology is now ten years old. It is first of all a practical reflection on the agonizing situation. Its roots lie, certainly as regards much theological content, in the main development of theology which is worldwide; but its method and cutting edge were forged out of the marxist-christian dialogue begun in eastern Europe in the late 'fifties, and have grown dialectically out of the theology of revolution and the theology of development. 'Revolution', though stressing the real need for qualitative change, was, as such, too narrow a concept; while theological reflection on development theory (advocating change into the likeness of a developed country) was judged as ineffective. There emerged the theology of integral liberation, arising from the complex state of oppression and dependence. Underlying all, as a constant theme throughout, was the exploration of God's entry into history, which began under the impulse of a renewed theology of grace and revelation; this new theology saw mankind as living in a world which is itself the sacrament of God's presence, word and saving action. All this is vital background⁵ and could occupy several articles. But what I want to

³ Berryman, *op. cit.*, p 386.

⁴ Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p 170.

⁵ Discussed by Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, chs 2-7; and Bonino, *op. cit.*, chs 1-3.

concentrate on now is the method used in liberation theology and its claim to be a new way of doing theology, for this is its most distinctive characteristic.

Liberation theology is primarily a method for liberating theology, a way of doing theology arising out of the urgent problems of real life – resorting thence to the traditional means of theologizing: to biblical and dogmatic tradition.⁶

The principal new means in this enterprise is marxist social analysis, which will occupy us for the rest of this article. I am not offering at this stage a criticism of the method, or of the means, but attempting to answer the question, What place does marxist analysis occupy in liberation theology? Before answering this question, it seems useful to ask three prior questions: What is the basic structure of a theological method? What is the marxist analysis? and, How far is this analysis compatible with christian theology? I say ‘useful to ask’ because I find that even the most lucid books on the subject presuppose so much, both about method and about marxism, that perhaps a brief and inadequate treatment of these may be of assistance.⁷ Let me say at once that we are talking about the ideas of Marx and subsequent expansions of them as contributions to sociological theory; and not of a dogmatic system, still less the politico-economic system of the Soviet Union which, far from being marxist and pragmatic, is a monolithic and totalitarian exercise in fascism. Here we are talking about ideas which can be used eclectically and on their own merits.

What is the basic structure of a theological method?

Here the question is, How does one set about doing theology? Of course, there are many answers, but a general description of theology like that of Anselm’s ‘faith seeking understanding’ will serve as a starting point. Traditionally, theology has been seen in various ways as a reflection on the complex reality of christian experience in the light of the bible-in-tradition, in an effort to understand or put some order into the ultimately ineffable richness of that experience. One group of methods, used from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, was limited to reflection on the ‘two sources’ of the bible and dogmatic tradition (if they were roman Catholic), or on the bible alone (if they were Protestant). In other words, the dimensions of present experience were ignored. The most jejune method of all is that of fundamentalism, which seeks an eternally valid meaning for all men, read straight from the biblical text. A more sophisticated approach also seeks a timeless meaning, but read from texts already recognized to be (as indeed they are) interpretations of the Christ-event, and so subject to literary and historical criticism, the discovery of literary genres, and so on. This we have

⁶ Segundo, J. L., *The Liberation of Theology* (New York, 1976), ch 1.

⁷ In view here are Segundo, *op. cit.*, Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, ch 1; and *id.*, Notes for a ‘Theology of Liberation’, in *Theological Studies* 31 (1970), pp 243–61; Bonino, *op. cit.*, ch 5.

seen in much contemporary exegesis and historical theology.

A significant advance on this type of method would recognize that there is no timeless reading; that the meaning sought and expressed is itself time-conditioned with its own perspective and limited viewpoint. The meaning of the sources is already clothed in interpretation, and our own interpretation of those sources is equally culturally conditioned. For the very questions we ask, the very meanings we seek and find, are conditioned by what we already accept, by what we regard as important and by what we are predisposed to see.

A second group of methods, usually combining with the principles described in the previous paragraph, would widen the material and the sources for reflection, to include the present world of experience and human history as the 'sacrament' of God's presence and action. This wider perspective stems from the renewed theology of grace already mentioned which found formal expression in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II. Hence the question asked is not only, what is the christian understanding of the bible-in-tradition, but what are the 'signs of the times', or what is the divine and Christ-centred meaning of the present situation? This meaning remains in itself implicit and so help is needed from the other sources to interpret it.

But what are the means for interpreting the sources in these various methods? They too are various. It is universally true that we do not interrogate the sources of revelation simply from raw experience, but from within some framework which already makes some sense of our world, and *this* is our interpretative or hermeneutical means. If we had no such framework, we would hear of apocalyptic signs in the bible, of scholastic definitions at Trent, and they would mean nothing to us. An interpretative means must be an already authentic interpretation of one's own experience. The Greeks found the hebraic thought-framework a mystery, and set to work to interpret it in the light of their own world view, largely a platonic, philosophical framework. Many modern theologians have taken the existential analysis of experience and done likewise. And this speaks to a fair number of people, though by no means all. If one can understand the crises of one's own life in terms of an existential 'gap' between one's possibility of achievement and the still greater needs one has, one can begin to see the meaning of the gift-quality of life and hence of the meaning of grace, forgiveness and redemption. Liberation theology comes forward to criticize such a method on the grounds that it is individualist, or, at best, socially oriented within the existing structures of society. Thus it cannot interpret the need for structural change (particularly acute in situations of gross poverty and oppression), where the problems are structural ones. Still less is it a means to change those structures. For the sort of tools used hitherto have been philosophical ones, and have remained on a broad level of generality, allegedly applicable in every situation (to assist both rich *and* poor). But if you want social justice you must change things; you must make a choice. Hence the appeal to another sort of tool,

to sociology. But this anticipates. We need to ask how do the tools work, for one may have a framework of interpretation, a philosophy of life, and yet the sources one turns to for inspiration still remain meaningless.

Essentially the method is one of *questioning* the sources (in their interpretative garb) 'from within': that is to say, interpretation of experience (it may be partial or complete, an insight couched in a proverb or a whole philosophy of life) is already grasped as meaningful. Here a danger presents itself. If we are too insensitive to the source, or if our tool is too blunt and we employ it there without any circumspection, we shall obliterate the source and be left with nothing but our own philosophy. This is reductionism. To give an example from the not too distant past, if we use the principle of empirical verification and impose it on revelation, God will not be verified empirically and we shall be left with the 'theology' (*sic*) of the 'death of God'. It is true that every means (being a partial interpretation of reality) will eliminate something in the source. How then are we to know that we do not falsify? By the process of *mutual* questioning: of the (already interpreted) source by our interpretation of experience and *vice versa*; by also trying to understand the other interpretation; by seeing differences and anomalies in the comparison (and so asking further questions); in a word, by ensuring that the frameworks of interpretation, the means, remain *open* frameworks and not closed systems. All this feeds into the process of understanding and begins to *disclose*, incompletely of course, something of the total reality imperfectly captured in the varied interpretations. What, therefore, liberation theology is claiming is that through the experience of trying to assuage hunger and overcome oppression, interpreted through the marxist sociological (rather than philosophical) 'tool' of class warfare leading to the classless society, it can make sense both of the experience of the third world and illuminate (and be illumined by) the total christian tradition of redemption understood now as liberation. The questions then are: Does the interpretative framework of marxist analysis remain open, or is it dogmatic and closed; and in what sense do the liberation theologians use it?

*What is the marxist analysis?*⁸

i) Marx accepted, as the foundation of his system, the dialectical principle from Hegel, but came to reject the hegelian primacy of ideas. In the 1840's Marx was a member of the group known as the 'young hegelians', and was deeply impressed with Hegel's framework of interpretation of reality as a dialectical process, a process of development, of becoming. Everything that becomes 'is', and at the next moment 'is not' what it was. Any description of process involves the recognition of the emergence of the contradictory at every point, and the synthesis of the contradictions in the further development.

⁸ Helpful here might be: Jordan, Z. A., (ed) *Karl Marx, in The Makers of Sociology Series* (London, 1971). Girardi, G., *Marxism and Christianity* (Dublin, 1968). Delfgaauw, B., *The Young Marx* (London, 1967). Marcuse, H., *Reason and Revolution* (London, 1963).

The seed becomes the bud, becomes the plant. Each stage negates the previous one, but the next negates the negation in a synthesis. Following Hegel in this way, Marx analysed all processes 'dialectically'. Later, he would analyse the development of society in these terms.

ii) At this period, Marx also accepted the primacy of ideas from Hegel, and on the political plane, he accepted the place of ideas in human social development from Saint-Simon. For the latter, ideas were the moving force of human social organization. A social order is the application of a philosophical system, which must therefore have been thought out first. It is this, however, that Marx came to reject. He pointed out that ideas were an expression of social relationships in conceptualized form. Being expressions of these relationships, they cannot transcend the conditions in which they arise. They change in conformity with these same relationships. Thus he rejected idealism, basically because of the correlation he observed between thought and life. For him thinking is a function of life, and has significance only in relation to life; whereas the thrust of idealism is to make thought an end in itself and make it the judge of life.

iii) This belief in the ultimacy of 'life', of man-in-nature, earns Marx a place among 'natural philosophers', at least in the period up to 1848. He is not a materialist in the sense of maintaining that material conditions account for the existence of the human mind and of society. He is not a 'reductionist', reducing the reality of mind to the mechanical laws of inanimate objects. In fact he combatted materialism and mechanism. Rather, he is rightly called a 'naturalist'; for him, nature as a whole is the ultimate, and cannot be explained by matter alone, nor, equally, by intelligence alone. But nature is the basis of the latter, and consciousness develops out of nature. In this perspective, man is as much a natural entity as any other being; though as 'nature' he is not mere body, but a unity of body and mind.

iv) It is these principles which ground his fundamental and momentous affirmation that action (*praxis*) precedes and determines thought. 'Action' here means the whole living process, the progress towards the total man, which is the overall goal of mankind. Hence thinking is a function of action. And this is expressed in his famous *thesis eleven* against Feuerbach: the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it. Some implications of this primacy of *praxis* need to be drawn out at this stage. In the first place, practice and theory are in diverse ways inseparably bound up. There is a necessary connection between the theory a man or a group professes and the way they behave, both in the sense that practice tests theory ('by their fruits you shall know them') and that action reveals theory, whatever one may say ('if anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar'). Even more important still, practice develops theory: by 'doing the truth' one comes to know truth; and correlatively, no theory escapes into timelessness, but is always conditioned by one's way of life. Lastly, practice validates theory: good practice is what is true. It is the interpretation of this which is the crucial issue, and the question will come up again.

v) A closer definition of the relation of nature to thought is expressed in the terms sub- and super-structure. The sub-structure is the material conditions, primarily the economic conditions, of nature and of life, and these determine the super-structure of social organization, of art, law and history. This perspective is fundamental to the 'economic interpretation of history'. It should be stressed that the ultimacy of economic conditions allows a relative transcendence to the realm of ideas; but Marx himself came to deny absolute transcendence, namely the existence of God. How far this was a practical rather than an absolutely necessary inference, a matter of history rather than of logic, due to his 'observational starting point' and the religious conditions of his day, we may be able to determine later.

vi) A further implication of the determinative character of practice, of life in action, is the rejection of utopian idealism as a method of social analysis. In essence this latter approach forms a speculative and ideal picture of society (on the lines, say, of *Plato's Republic*) and may then seek to implement it or at least get others to assent to its rightness. But this procedure ignores the fact that the formation of such a theoretical ideal pattern of a society is itself determined by the thinker's actual life and experience. He cannot lift himself out of the stream of history, and whoever has a different experience will form a different ideal. Equally, society cannot be re-made according to an abstract ideal. This would be to play God, to re-create the world afresh. We do not ever stand outside society: in fact, we are society. What alternative is there to the idealist model? One can be found in the *scientific* model, an option reinforced by Marx's naturalist philosophy, according to which man, being a part of nature, should be investigated by the same methods as apply to any other natural object; by empirical methods, and not by speculative metaphysical deduction. Hence the investigation will begin with data, form hypotheses on the basis of the data, and test the theories in action. In this way we can begin the much harder task of understanding society and how it really works. Such a procedure shows what is *de facto* possible and enables its practitioners, as ideals do not, to co-operate with the processes actually at work. Sociology has been born, and Marx, together with Comte, are its founding fathers.

vii) In summing up so far, it should be pointed out that, running through all the principles already outlined, from the dialectic to naturalism and scientific method, is the philosophic notion of *process*. For Marx, nature and human history are fundamentally an organic process, developing dialectically like an organism by adaptation to the environment, to economic conditions. And this brings us to Marx's social analysis. Previously, we have been concerned with his philosophical and methodological assumptions.

viii) One of Marx's major contributions was to help to reverse the tide of individualism which flooded the world in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, for him, as for Comte and Saint-Simon, man is essentially a social being and never anything else, and this is demonstrable by empirical observation. Society is, by implication, prior to the individual, for men become

truly human and self-conscious only through their fellow-men. There is a more specific theoretical articulation of this basic insight. Society is itself a natural phenomenon, an organic process, brought about by natural causes, and subject to law in the same sense as are other phenomena of nature, regardless, that is, of what men intend or fail to do. The fundamental governing factor is human need; most basically, the need for the means of livelihood. Because production of the means of subsistence is a collective activity, society is formed. 'Society is the product of men's reciprocal action'; this organic process develops and evolves. The mutual dependence of men on each other increases through the progressive division of labour (a process noted in the *Republic* also). In this dynamic process, therefore, the sub-structure of economic conditions determines, through the human need for subsistence, the super-structure of social organization, thought, language and history. This general framework, the 'economic interpretation of history, is applied by Marx in his analysis of the nineteenth century capitalist society.

ix) He singled out two fundamental social classes which were defined primarily by their relation to the economic realities which lay at the source of this society, the means of production. Thus the two classes were the men who owned property and were independent (capital), and those who lived by selling the power to work (labour). The difference is between those who would not starve if they did not work, and those who would. Vital to the passion and effectiveness of Marx's appeal is the realization that to understand a social crisis we have to analyse it, not in terms of trade returns, the money supply and the movement of prices, but in terms of starvation, ill-health and other personal changes. (As E. Schumacher has remarked: 'Prices do not rise; people put them up'.) In this situation, and given the determining power of the need to live, there is struggle and competition, not rational co-operation, between the classes, in order to control the means of production. This is the *de facto* situation, a matter of observed process. The struggle itself is fed by bitterness due to the exploitation of those without power by those with power; Marx sees that dehumanization necessarily produces reaction. He claims that it necessarily produces revolt. This is the ultimate tendency, but he recognizes that the conflict will not be entered on unless the exploited class reaches 'self-consciousness' and becomes a class in his full definition of the word. Hence, on his analysis, the situation of class struggle, a 'given' of the nineteenth-century situation, leads to revolution and, in order not to lead to further frustration of human values, ultimately to total equality in respect of the means of production, which is the classless society. That revolution is the way forward is also a deduction from the observable fact that no significant human group has ever relinquished power voluntarily.

How far is this analysis compatible with christian theology?

It would be possible at this stage to take the points in the last section one by one and apply our third question to each one in turn. But this would be repetitious. I would like, therefore, to go to the heart of the matter and ask

another question which will, I hope, help us to answer the question placed at the beginning of this section. Is the notion of *organic process* compatible with christian theology, and if so, with what qualifications? For if marxist analysis affirms organic process as an absolute metaphysical determinant of all thought and social life, then it is not compatible. Does it do so? Does it necessarily do so? Or does it rather fulfil the role of social science, which rests on organic process, but not as absolutely determinative? This in turn raises the question about the nature of sociology in general, and marxist analysis in particular, as a science on the analogy of natural science. For natural science presupposes regularity to be at work in nature or organic process.

Can christian theology accept, first, that there is *process* at work in human social history? In general terms, of course, it can: '... the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...' (Rom 8, 19ff). The kingdom of God is being established, but is not some purely spiritual ultra-mundane reality. It has already broken into history, *already* been established in Christ, and it is in process of reaching the fulfilment *not yet* achieved. It is for this reason among others that theology would join in rejecting hegelian idealism, which in method is pure reflection uncontaminated by empirical fact, and in ultimate principle is pan-idealist and allows no significant reality to the contingent creation of matter and created spirit. But the difficulty here is precisely to *identify* the 'kingdom-process' in history. It is not a 'blueprint' with specific content, but (like the command to love in all things) is normative and in a real sense 'empty'. It is precisely in the search for content that theologians turn to history, and more recently to psychology and then sociology, as interpretative tools. But the natural sciences, and the social sciences analogously, need *organic* processes and regularities in order to function. So we are almost back at the beginning. Can theology accept that there are *organic* processes at work in history? where by 'organic' is meant a process of adaptation to environment (on the analogy of biology), which takes place regardless of human will? It would seem obvious that it can, so long as it is stipulated that this cannot be a total or adequate analysis on its own. Not only does human society adapt to material conditions according to certain observed regularities, but as part of the process of social development man adapts the environment to himself, and so escapes from the merely organic process (for instance in learning to fly). Human factors control and are not simply controlled. Furthermore, there are relationships in society which are not determined by environmental development, such as personal relationships of friendship. Most fundamentally from the christian point of view (to return to the notion of process in general) the ultimate principle of history is the tri-personal God. Thus the process is itself 'personal' in its transcendent origin and ultimate goal, and this it is which defines the concrete goal of the processes at work here and now (animate and inanimate) as 'personalization', as the winning of human and personal meaning, as liberating man to love and be loved and so to escape the dialectical process of adaptation. One might add: it is, on the contrary, where the personalization fails (where sin inter-

venes) that merely organic process takes over again. So these processes do exist in the imperfect world we know, and can be incorporated, first in a sociological analysis (in fact they make sociology a science), and then, through sociology, in a theological analysis. As for sociology, *how far* it is a science is the basic question, and a satisfactory answer depends on the existence and interaction of organic processes and human freedom; neither element is ever in isolation (and so open to direct inspection), but both are elements or 'remainder concepts' in one complex analysis of the human situation. Sociology is thus analogously a science when compared with purely natural science, but it would be obtuse to deny that there is a science of sociology. Yet it must be concluded that its nature as science does depend on the *interdependence* of organic processes and free human factors, not on the *total* determination of the latter by the former. As for theology; if it can admit a 'kingdom-process' and concede that the process is in some sense incarnated in human history, then it would seem a logical step to use sociological analysis of the human situation as an interpretative tool for understanding this incarnation.

It has already been indicated that organic processes cannot be said totally to determine human social history, and therefore their recognition can be compatible with theology. But let us look at this aspect again. Does *marxist* theory affirm in fact, or necessarily, that organic process is determinative? Or can a marxist analysis be content with the description of sociology advanced above? If it cannot, it might be possible to adopt elements of marxist social theory, but it would hardly be a matter of adopting marxism. In Marx's own terms, this is the question whether the economic sub-structure *determines* the super-structure of thought and history. Here everything depends on the interpretation of the word 'determine'. Do economics, according to Marx, determine history in an absolute sense, as cause and effect? If they do, then we have a metaphysical principle which can act as the basis for a rigorous scientific interpretation of history and can formulate a law quite as rigorous as the laws at the basis of the natural sciences. For this would mean that reality in its ultimate constitution would be an organic process. This is, in fact, the position of the dogmatic system of dialectical materialism. It has already been pointed out that it could not be held to be true by a christian. But did Marx hold it to be true? Some affirm, others deny. It does not seem to be true of his earlier writings, which are more empirically based. It is said to be true (not without reason) of writings subsequent to the Communist Manifesto of 1848. But at the end of his active life, Engels denied that he and Marx had held it in this strong sense. This I take to be the case. Another reason for taking this position is that Marx held that the dialectical organic process would cease with the establishment of the classless society, with the end of 'pre-history'. Therefore the 'principle of process' is an interpretation of society and not of reality as a whole: it is a sociological and not a metaphysical principle. This view would, incidentally, presuppose a view of sociology as a science in one point, at least, similar to that proposed above,

in that sociology would cease *as science* in a world totally personalized and ruled wholly by cooperation and love.

Another sense of the word 'determine' is less rigorous. Do economic conditions determine the *origins* of the super-structure, but in such a way that the latter is not reducible to these conditions? This would seem to be the sense in which Marx held the principle (Marx as natural philosopher). This means that it is material conditions within nature which are the origins of all thought. This amounts apparently to a denial of absolute transcendence, to an affirmation of atheism; and again, Marx held it in this sense. But the principle under discussion *need* not lead to atheism, even with this intermediate sense of 'determine'. All depends on the level of thought on which one is operating. The principle certainly amounts to a rejection of supernaturalism, of an 'interventionist' God; but if it begins simply with the observation of human experience as a scientist would, it does not imply a denial of God as the absolutely transcendent, since it is not speaking of the transcendent dimension either in affirmation or denial. Once again, if taken in a scientific sense, the principle can be compatible with belief in God.⁹ What the christian will want to affirm, on the level of implicit affirmation, about Marx's own analysis, is that it did not offer an adequate account of the humanity it sought to interpret; it ignored our human experience of transcendence which discloses absolute transcendence as the condition for making possible all our particular experiences, as the bounds within which all our experiencing takes place. But the aim of this section is simply to establish compatibility or incompatibility between marxism and theology, and not yet to give a positive theological content. This remains to be done under the title 'a new concept of man'.

There is a third and looser sense in which 'determines' can be used. That is, as equivalent to 'conditions': an interpretation which allows mutuality of influence and a transcendence to the realm of thought. It was in this sense that the principle that economic factors determine history was interpreted earlier in this article when speaking about sociology in general. This seems empirically grounded, but it is hard to call this interpretation marxist. It would be possible to call it marxist-inspired, however, and, as a general socio-logical economic principle, it is often so called.

So much for the general principles of organic process. There remain two further points which need to be clarified. Is the view of the relation of *praxis* to theory compatible with a theological view; and as regards the specific marxist social analysis, is revolution compatible with a christian affirmation? As for the principle of the priority of action or practice, the first thing to be said is that the main implications drawn from it above are acceptable (hence the illustrations from scriptural quotations!), provided the enunciation that

⁹ For a discussion of this, see: Girardi, G., *op. cit.*, pp 130-137. Lochman, J. M., *Church in a Marxist Society* (London, 1970), pp 174-77. Gollwitzer, H., *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp 87-103. Cf Kee, A., *op. cit.*, section 1.

practice determines theory is taken in the intermediate or weak senses outlined above, allowing for mutual interaction in different ways. Equally valid is the inference that thought does not escape into timelessness above history, but remains always a particular, time-conditioned tool at the service of life. For the basic affirmation remains: that thought is not an end in itself but exists at the service of the whole person, and the intellectual virtues are not absolutes. But finally, and most controversially: Is good practice the measure of truth? Marxists interpret this to mean that what advances the class struggle is true, but disregarding this misuse of the principle, it is possible to ground it more adequately in an epistemology which gives priority to ontological truth: truth is first of all harmony within being, it is the fidelity of what is real, to itself; and then, secondarily, it is correspondence between mind and the real. On such a basis, it can be affirmed that what *is*, and what is *done*, is true (under appropriate conditions), and can consequently be known as such. This is something that is compatible with theology. One might say it is demanded by it.

Lastly, that revolution is a valid aim in principle would be clear from the notion of revolution, as enunciated for instance by Moltmann in his 'first thesis' on revolution: 'I understand revolution to mean a transformation in the foundations of a system, whether of economics, of politics, of morality or of religion'.¹⁰ Christianity itself is such a transformation. But this does not decide the further question of violence as against non-violence and this will have to be discussed.

In conclusion, we have been concerned in this section simply with the question whether a marxist analysis is in principle compatible with christian theology, and in general the answer has been that if regarded strictly as a sociological analysis it may be compatible. Its usefulness will depend on how effective it is in a particular situation. But it is not ruled out *a priori*. Yet one major problem must be admitted: marxism is normally taken as a dogmatic system entailing atheism. It has a dynamic which is not purely scientific and which mobilises people's commitment. But in the situation of Latin America it is becoming less clear that the commitment has to be to the dogmatic system, since marxists and christians are finding themselves closer together in practice, than to their respective traditional orthodoxies. The question for liberation theology is: In what sense does it adopt marxist analysis into its method, and is it possible to adopt it at all without being submerged in marxist dogmatics? This is the question for the next section.

Joseph Laishley S.F.

¹⁰ Moltmann, J., *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (New York, 1969), p 130.