Christology in liberation theology: an examination of the nature and role of christology in the latin American theology of liberation with reference to selected theologians, l. boff, g. gutierrez, and j. sohrino

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CHRISTOLOGY IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

An Examination of the Nature and Role of Christology in the Latin American Theology of Liberation with reference to selected Theologians, L. Boff, G. Gutierrez, and J. Sobrino.

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ABSTRACT

Liberation Theology is currently being subjected to a great deal of criticism, especially by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Rome. The theology of liberation is Latin American in origin. Situation of oppression and domination is the order of the day in Latin American Countries. As the poor are exploited in these countries which are dependent on developed countries, the christian community of this continent endeavours to identify with the aspiration and the struggle of the poor and oppressed for liberation. Liberation Theology is purported to be worked out from this 'preferential option for the poor'. It claims to be a new way of doing theology in which the concrete situation of the theologian plays an essential hermeneutical role. The hermeneutical key is the commitment to the struggle for liberation. Primacy is given to praxis which is an action towards transforming this unjust situation and to help build a kingdom of justice and peace.

In this thesis, we have undertaken to examine the Christologies of Jon Sobrino and Leonardo Boff which are purportedly worked out within the framework of liberation theology. In this thesis we have four main chapters besides the introductory and concluding chapters. In the introduction we see the origins of liberation theology. In the first two chapters we shall examine the main characteristics and the methodological claim of this theology in general. The third and fourth chapters compromise a critical examination of the christologies of Sobrino and Boff in relation to the methodological position of liberation theology 'in particular that of Gutierrez' who is selected for the purpose of specific references.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGINS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation Theology is Latin American in origin. This movement or new way of doing theology began to take shape in Latin America in 1970. It understands itself as a new theological discourse in which the concrete situation of the theologian plays an essential, hermeneutical role. It claims to have been worked out of the experience of the extreme kind of oppression that the poor of the continent have endured for so long. The situation in this continent where the majority of the poor are Christians is one of oppression. Hence the protagonist of liberation theology of Latin American tradition ask the question: How are people to be Christian and to find the relevance of their faith in the midst of an exploited and dependent continent, subject to the violence of the established order, under the sign of capitalist domination? In the middle of the 1960's the christian community in Latin America committed itself to the process of liberation by a conscious and clear identification with the interests and struggle of the oppressed. This experience of commitment, the 'eruption of the poor', is the basis on which the theological reflection that we call liberation theology (or the theology of liberation) is founded. Hence by way of introduction to the thesis on Christology in Liberation Theology we propose to examine the origins of this theology and briefly introduce the selected theologians, Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, S.J., and Leonardo Boff, O.F.M.

One only needs to look at the history of Latin America briefly to understand how the situation of domination has existed ever since the Spanish landed. After arriving in the Caribbean Region in 1492, Columbus placed the natives under the charge of his own people (encomenderos). It was here the subjugation of and domination over the Amerindians started, and the encomienda system began. The encomienda consisted in giving the colonizers control over the land and over the Indians who lived on it. The Indians were not paid for their work. In exchange for the economic benefit the encomendero was obliged to provide for the Christianization of the Indians. The Colonizers took Amerindian women as their concubines by force. Children born of this union were the mestizos.[1] This cruelty to Indian women was to continue over the centuries, so much so that Bishop Juan Ramirez of Guatemala wrote on March 10th 1603:

> "The worst forms of force and violence, unheard of in other nations and kingdoms, are perpetrated upon the Indian Women. The wives of Indian men are raped forcibly by order of the authorities - and they are obliged to work in the homes of planters, on farms and in Labour Camps where they live in sin with the master of the house, with mestizos, mulatos, blacks or with other cruel men".[2]

The Church in Rome enjoyed a good relationship with the Spanish crown. Papal bulls, Inter cetera of Alexander VI (1493) and Universalis Ecclesia of Julius II (1508), granted the Spanish crown the prerogative of nominating bishops for episcopal sees in Latin America. There was a council in Spain called the Council of the

Indies' which had charge of everything happening in Latin America. In many instances the Head or Director of this Council was a bishop, although the administration was done by lay people. Bishops had economic power because they collected tithes and had political influence.

By 1519 a good number of bishops had arrived in Latin America. With their arrival the age of 'splendour' began and the Church in Latin America began to organise itself. By 1551 the Colonial Church had two great centres in the capital cities of Mexico and Peru. Although evangelization en masse began in this period, the Church only managed to have an apparent success in evangelization, because for many of the Spanish missionaries, the spreading of christianity and the spreading of Spanish culture meant one and the same thing. They supported Patronato Real.[3] But their allegiance to the crown led them into a deep dilemma when the conquistadors raided, robbed and killed Indians, who came to identify Christianity with Spanish cruelty. Many tribes of Indians and blacks were made slaves and their plight at the hands of the conquistadors was miserable.

The Church began to resign itself to the defects of the conquest. It could not officially castigate the colonialists for their cruelty. Nonetheless, many bishops defended the rights of the Indians even to the point of martyrdom. More than twenty bishops spoke openly against the ill-treatment of the Indians. Bartolomé de las Casas was the most acclaimed of all who fought for the rights of the Indians. He insisted that social justice was one

of the demands of the Gospel. Justice, according to him, was closely bound to salvation. He could not accept that in the name of evangelization exploitation could be perpetrated. Hence he objected in strong terms when he wrote the following words to the Emperor:

> "It is not true that they want to save and convert the Indians, rather they want to protect themselves in this in order to rob, despoil, oppress and enslave their neighbours. They do not want to save the Indians, nor preach the faith, nor do any other good".[4]

Bartolomé de las Casas condemned the fact of the conquest and aimed to suppress the encomienda system.

In the seventeenth century a royal decree forced the Indians to learn Spanish. Many Indian Christians opposed to this attempt to impose Spanish Culture retreated to the hills and reverted to paganism. In the same period there were conflicting factions among the missionaries, namely between the Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans. The Jesuits had well established settlements for Indians. They were anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian. By their extraordinary projects they always stood apart. They had their own university in Lima and refused to join hands with the Dominicans to run a joint university. They would not force Spanish culture or language on the Indians at their settlements, the so called 'Jesuit reducciones'. Their experiments had led them to two conclusions: firstly, no effective evangelization within a colonial structure was possible, and secondly, theologically speaking, it was inadmissible to make an acceptance of christian faith

dependent on the abandonment of indigenous culture.[5] Eventually the Jesuits were expelled - in 1767 from Brazil and in 1769 elsewhere. While these things were happening, Rome never spoke directly with Latin America, but through the Spanish King and the Council of the Indies. Several bishops, however, never flinched from defending the Indians.

In 1808 events took a crucial turn, and the Church in Latin America began to face a greater crisis, for it was in this year that the struggle for independence began. The indigenous creole oligarchy began to revolt against the absolute authority of the Spanish Crown, especially its economic exploitation and monopoly. Between 1621-1630 alone the Spanish had exported from Latin America 19,104 million marvedis (the currency of the period) worth of raw material from private sectors. (For the Spanish Gold which they took from Latin America was the basis of their economy). For the raw material they took out of their country they brought back finished goods, about 27%, and the rest remained in Spain. This kind of exploitation was no longer acceptable to the creoles. They began to lead the revolt in 1808; and this revolt was to last roughly about seventeen years. The French Revolution, the North American Revolution and the Enlightenment in Europe seem to be some of the factors that opened the eyes of the people of Latin America to the need for revolt against colonial power and injustice. Because of economic benefits, many developing countries like England encouraged the creoles' struggle for independence.

Many of the clergy, most of whom were creoles themselves, got involved in the national movements. Over one hundred priests were in command of military groups in Mexico. Seventeen priests were members of the Revolutionary Assembly in Buenos Aires in 1810. In Argentina, fifteen out of thirty three representatives elected to the first Parliament of 1812 were clerics. Sixteen out of the twenty nine members of the Congress of Tucumán, who drew up the Argentina Declaration of Independence, were again clerics. The bishops disapproved of this and opposed the rupture with Spain with the threat of excommunication, although a good number of them, even those that were Spanish, did support the cause of independence. The thrust of the struggle for independence was, however, suppressed by the Spanish, who quickly reacted and regained control. By 1820, twenty eight new bishops were named by the King, to make sure that they had unanimous support.

A second thrust erupted after. Two key figures led this revolt. In the North, Bolivar (when in Europe he was known as Simon Carreno Rodriguez and was a disciple of Rousseau) was the leader of the struggle. He was probably a freemason. San Martín, also a freemason, was the principal figure in Argentina's struggle against Spain. At this stage there was not much anti-clerical or anti-religious feeling. In fact, most of the revolutionaries were staunch Catholics. The Church in Latin America was not sure of its position as it was caught between loyalty to the Spanish Crown and submission to the new Latin American revolutionary governments. There was no serious

theological reflection on the part of the Church; and hence the attitude of the Church towards the struggle between Latin American patriots and Spanish royalists was, for the most part, very ambiguous. There were no agreed criteria, at the episcopal level, for assessing the situation.

Given its ambiguous attitude to the independence movement, the status of the Church weakened considerably. When the first ever liberal government in Latin America was formed in Colombia in 1849, it proposed to sever the Church from the State and declared itself anti-Christian and anti-Catholic in particular. The new governments, especially in Argentina, Mexico and Honduras, began to impose stringent sanctions, but were, for the most part, anti-clerical rather than anti-religious. Argentina and Honduras allowed foreign missionaries to work in the country, but religious orders were suppressed and Church properties confiscated. Independence after 1825 had also meant that there was no Patronato from Spain, hence no missionaries would come even if Latin American Countries tolerated them. Local clergy were not well trained, and the number of vocations dropped dramatically. The situation of the Church deteriorated.

In the nineteenth century, powerful nations began to show interest in the immense resources of the Latin American Countries. A whole new project was sponsored by the liberal oligarchy of the continent. While conservative governments were slow in this regard, many liberal governments looked up to France for cultural ideals and to the

United States and Britain for theological ideas and assistance. Their project was to introduce the development scheme of these powerful countries into the Latin American system. The new and rising bourgeois oligarchy, being a late comer on the industrial scene in invitation of developed countries, proved fatal to Latin America and led to a very serious economic crisis. Liberal governments lost favour in the sight of the people, and from 1930 the anti-Catholic liberal class lost power. Conservatives began to form strongholds and the military class came to the fore. Attempts to revive Catholicism were initiated. According to J.A. Kirk, three significant moves were made to mobilize the Church to face the social change. They were 'Catholic Action' (C.A.), 'The Catholic Trade Union Movement' (CLASC) and 'The Christian Democratic Parties' (CDP). The first two were established by episcopal decision and the third by lay people. These were mainly due to the influence of one of the most crucial encyclicals written by any Pope, namely Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII (1891), and also Quadragesimo Anno of Pius XI (1931). These movements began to try for a 'New Christendom'. They wanted a Church with power.

The Catholic social teaching promulgated in papal encyclicals had a profound influence on these movements. Rerum Novarum concentrated on what was then regarded as the 'Social Question', the condition of the working classes. Since this encyclical the changes were reviewed and Quadragesimo Anno condemned the fact that immense power and economic domination were concentrated in the hands of a few. It also questioned the way in which

nations used their economic power to gain political influence at the expense of weaker countries. The message of these two encyclicals was particularly relevant to Latin American countries. The CDP took that message seriously and combined this Catholic teaching with a programme for social reform.

A new epoch began in the early 1960's. The events of the last two decades provide the immediate contest of the origins of the theology of liberation. The attitude of the Church to social problems began to change very dramatically in the person of Pope John XXIII and ever since his encyclical Mater et Magistra of 1961. It was a significant encyclical as far as Liberation Theology was concerned. It is expedient, therefore, to come to grips with the message of John XXIII. He inaugurated a practical optimism that broke with the old method of condemning theories current in the modern world. He changed the very tone of the Church's teaching and paid close attention to human realities, especially to new phenomena, the structures which aid or hinder justice and charity. He emphasized the demands of justice in the relationship between nations differing in economic development:

> "Probably the most difficult problem concerns the relationship between political communities that are economically advanced (progressis) and those in the process of development (quarum oeconomicae progressiones sint in cursu)."[6]

As a solution to the problem, Pope John XXIII suggested the following characteristics of 'development'[7]:

'Social progress (rei socialis incrementa) must be accompanied by a corresponding economic progress (rei oeconomicae incrementa), so that all classes of citizens can participate in the increased productivity. The utmost vigilance and effort are needed to ensure that social inequalities, so far from increasing, are reduced to a minimum'.[8] There was little comfort to conservative Catholics in this document of John XXIII as he had no desire to return to the static moralism and individualism which until then had been the characteristic of pontifical documents.

Two years later and a month before his death, John XXIII returned to the problem in Pacem in Terris. Here he emphasized the sectors where peace must be promoted. In the same vein he also hailed three splendid gains as a 'sign of the times': improvement of the working classes (No. 40); women's rights (No. 41); and the liberation of subject peoples, those colonized by others (No. 42). He established two principal distinctions: between 'error' and 'the erring' (No. 158), and between philosophy and programme (No. 159). In this way he opened the doors for dialogue and collaboration with non-Christians, including Marxists. He made concrete proposals which were to be reiterated by the Second Vatican Council and by Paul VI. He urged Christians to take on political responsibilities (No. 146): 'Once again we exhort our children to take an active part in public life'. He also clarified and refocused Pope Pius XII's radio broadcast of Christmas 1941 by extending the meaning of 'development'. His theology was a theology of progressive change.

The initiation of Vatican II was Pope John's supreme and final work.

Vatican II in the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et Spes), examined the whole of economic and social life in the light of development. The Council indiscreetly rejected ideologies that foster oppression and domination indirectly. It emphasized christian responsibilities in development and progress: "...it is clear that men are not deterred by the christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are rather, more stringently bound to do these very things".[9] The Council reiterates the principles of justice and equity. Number 65 of the constitution also most positively clarifies what man's control over the economic development and laws of economy are in general.

Pope Paul VI devoted a new encyclical to the theme that the Council had already treated. This encyclical, Populorum Progressio, is more incisive, more explicit, more imperative than the Council document. Paul VI did not use the term 'socialization' of John XXIII. Taking the lead from Gaudium et Spes, Paul VI tends to go beyond the idea of 'aid' and emphasized the idea of 'joint development'. He reminds the people of the rich nations of their duty and obligation towards the poor. He also teaches that the underdeveloped peoples should be "architects of their own destiny".[2] The encyclical also denounces the "international imperialism of money".

During the Second Vatican Council several bishops from the third world met together informally. As a result of such meetings, eighteen of these bishops wrote 'A letter to the Peoplesof the Third World' (August 15, 1967), in response to the call made by Populorum Progressio. This letter was to provoke much discussion and had its great impact on the Medellin Conference which took place in 1968. The main message of the letter was an interpretation of Populorum Progressio to the concrete Latin American situation. The message was couched in unambiguous terms: "Peoples of the Third world are the proletariat of today's humanity" and "The Church must not be attached to financial imperialisms". This document judges the Latin American situation not from outside, but from within, from the point of view of those who share the experience and aspirations of the poor.[10]

This letter provoked such a response that the bishops of the Latin American Conference, which had been formed in 1955, decided to convene for a second time in August and September of 1968 in Medellin, Colombia. This second General Conference of CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latino-Americano) had a great contribution to make to the Church in Latin America. Pope Paul V's opening address to this Conference was a message of a pastor to his flock. But the bishops gathered there had more concrete things in mind. They gave concrete form and application to Vatican II, as their concern was to apply Vatican II to the Reality of Latin America. But to accomplish this task, they had to look at not only Vatican II, but the message of John XXIII, which seemed to them to speak more powerfully than Vatican

II. One of the working drafts of the Conference presents a critical overview of the Latin American situation (i.e. its population realities, economic, social, cultural, political and religious situation).

The documents of Medellin adopted the idiom of 'liberation'. It stresses the need to avoid the dualism that separates temporal tasks from the work of sanctification. It points out a theory of 'dependence' by which it means dependence of the under-developed countries on the developed countries, and views the under-development of the third world countries as the product of the capitalist countries. Like Quadragesimo Anno and Populorum Progressio, it condemns the 'international imperialism of money', especially the trading arrangements by which the countries that produce raw materials remain poor, while the industrialized countries enrich themselves. Hence a need for liberation from such dependence is emphasized.

Before their deliberations the bishops of CELAM gave a moving message to their people: "Latin America appears to live beneath the tragic sign of underdevelopment that not only separates our brothers from enjoyment of material goods, but from their proper human fulfilment".[12] "Our people seek their liberation and their growth in humanity, through the incorporation and participation of everyone in the very conduct of the personalizing process".[13] Their detailed assessment of the situation may be summed up in these words by Gutierrez: "What we are faced with is a situation that takes no account of man's dignity or his most elemental needs, that does not provide for biological survival or his basic right to be free and autonomous".[14]

Medellin condemned as 'institutionalized violence' the situation that was formed by a combination of poverty, injustice, alienation and man's exploitation of his fellow men. Medellin beckons 'the Christian Community of Latin America to respond to the message of the Gospel and to integrate their faith in their lives by commitment to a process of liberation.'

As a result of the new ecclesiastical awareness which was triggered by John XXIII, reiterated by Vatican II and fleshed out and endorsed in concrete terms by Medellin, several grass-root Communities arose in Latin America. These tended to be manifestation of the people committed to development, people who were conscious of the still unknown energies dormant in the passivity of the oppressed masses. The poor are not unaware any more of the causes of their situation. Hence their commitment to liberation: an 'eruption of the poor'.

Most of the influential Latin American thinkers, theologians included, studied in Europe in the 1960's. They have been much influenced by the 'political theology' of J.B. Metz and J. Moltmann. Though initially quite critical of this 'political theology', they have now become very sympathetic towards it. This will become more obvious as we proceed with our thesis.

These Catholic thinkers of Latin America began to study Latin American economists who rejected a purely functionalist approach to sociology and began to use Marxist categories. They were not pleased with the condition of their countries' dependence on other

developed countries, and the word 'development' was not radical enough to face the situation and challenge the exploitation. Latin American economists concluded poverty was the direct result of exploitation. In every sector of their lives the Latin American poor are oppressed. Superpowers, in the name of aid, have exercised control over the political and economic situation in Latin American countries, and this instead affects the poor rather than the elite minority. The upper five per cent control over half the wealth, and the lower thirty five per cent of the people, five per cent of the wealth. In the light of this reality of exploitation, Latin American theologians began to reflect on the meaning of Christian faith. The christian community's awareness, after Medellin, that underdevelopment was caused by dependence, and that Latin America should break away from the cycle of dependence on advanced industrialized countries, was a crucial one. This self-awareness of the christian community had two aspects, a new understanding of the Latin American situation and the quest for new ways in which the people of God might exert its presence therein.

Gustavo Gutierrez and several other theologians trained in Europe found that they could not directly apply what they had learnt to concrete situations in Latin America. Gustavo Gutierrez was attracted by the work of Augusto Salazar Bondy, a Peruvian philosopher, who called attention to the fact of domination over Latin America. A. Methol Ferré, a layman, criticized Cardinal Suenens' proposals relating to collegiality, episcopal conferences, nuncios, the Curia and the Pope as egalitarianism in the

style of the proclamations of the bourgeoisie.[15] It was people like Salazar Bondy and Methol Ferré who helped the theologians to think within the basic context of oppression. Moreover, the institutes, such as the ones established by CELAM (FERES (International Federation for Studies in Religious Sociology) ILADES (Instituto Latinoamericano de Doctrina Y Estudios Sociales)) and others, helped them to describe sociological structures in christian terms. These theologians, therefore, began to reflect on these things they saw in the 'eruption of the poor' and based their thinking on this factor, coupled with biblical themes of liberation. Liberation theology was expressed systematically for the first time in the classical work of Gustavo Gutierrez: A Theology of Liberation (Teología de la liberación, Perspectivas, Lima, 1971).

Having spoken at length about the origins of liberation theology of the Latin American tradition, we must now have a brief look at the definition of this theology. G. Gutierrez has defined it as 'a critical reflection on historical praxis'.[16] This definition has been accepted as axiomatic by the Latin American theologians of liberation. By praxis, Gutierrez means a 'transforming action', not any kind of action, but historical transformation. Historical Praxis means, according to him, a transforming change, a transforming action of history. In his 'Statement' in 'The Conference in Detroit' he says this:

> "When we speak of a historical praxis we are speaking of the transforming action of history understood as transformation of nature, as the relationship of the person to nature, and as the relationship of the

> persons among themselves. By transforming praxis we mean a transforming action by the poor and the humiliated, by the despised races and marginated cultures themselves".[17]

Theology is critical reflection on this historical praxis of the poor, says Gutierrez, as all do the theologians of liberation. Liberation theology is a theology of (and for) the poor and the oppressed. It gives primacy to orthopraxis over orthodoxy. By orthopraxis is means 'doing the truth'. In the light of Jn 3:21, it asserts that we can discover the message of the Gospel only by 'doing the truth'. A fundamental orthopraxis is required in order to remain in the faith. And according to this understanding of orthopraxis, the only valid truth is the effective truth which contributes to the liberation struggle of the oppressed poor. This means an active commitment to making the world a better place.

The primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy, Gutierrez argues, does not deny the need for orthodoxy (orthodoxy understood as a proclamation of and reflection on statements considered to be true). It means, on the contrary, that the goal is to balance the role of orthodoxy when it is properly understood, and to reject it when orthodoxy means fidelity to an obsolete tradition or a debatable interpretation.[18] This orthpraxis, in the light of the Gospel message of charity, leads us continually to identify with the poor and oppressed to seek a liberating opportunity, however partial and fragmentary it may be, because God who revealed himself in Jesus also reveals himself in and by the struggle for liberation undertaken

by all the poor of Latin America. Thus the liberation theologians define theology as thinking about a God who reveals himself in history. This theology has to comprehend and embrace the meaning of history; it has to 'read the signs of the times'. It is a theology of critical reflection on the historical praxis; it is a theology which is inexorably dependent on this praxis, which involves a commitment to faith leading to action. This presents a new way of doing theology. When primacy is given to praxis (the commitment to liberation), then theology as a scientific kind of discourse comes as the second step. Theology is a critical attitude; it follows the second step, says Gutierrez. His claim is as follows:

> "Theology of liberation offers not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology .... a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed".[19]

This claim is shared invariably by all the theologians of liberation tradition.

The purpose of our thesis is to examine some of the main strands of this theology of liberation and take a closer look at its methodological claim that commitment to action for transforming society must come first, and that theology comes as a second step of critical reflection upon what Jesus Christ and his gifts mean in the historical situation of struggle for liberation. For this purpose we have selected Gutierrez as the theologian who could provide us with a general framework of liberation theology; and

we have selected Jon Sobrino, S.J., and Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., for their Christology. And the task that lies before us is to examine carefully if these liberation theologians have come up with a Christology which does fit within the methodological claims of their theology. The fact that we have selected these three theologians does not mean that we will not be referring to the works of other liberation theologians.

Finally, we shall briefly introduce these theologians we have selected for the purpose of our thesis. Gustavo Gutierrez was born in Lima (Peru) in 1928. From 1951 to 1955 he studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Louvain. He did his theology at Lyon (France) from 1955-1959. His chief work is A Theology of Liberation, which is now the classic presentation of what is called the 'Theology of Liberation'. He first presented a sketch of a liberation theology at a Conference held in Chimbote (Peru) in July 1968. This was later translated into several languages, including English, (Notes on a Theology of Liberation). He is presently a Professor of Theology in the Catholic University of Lima, and a National Adviser for the National Union of Catholic Students (UNEC).

Jon Sobrino, S.J., is a Professor of Philosophy and Theology at the Centre for Theological Reflection, University of José Simeon Canas, San Salvador. His book, Christology at the Crossroads, is the product of a course in christology which he gave at the San Salvador Centre for Theological Reflection in El Salvador (1975). Several of the chapters from this book were initially published as

articles in various publications.

Leonardo Boff is a Franciscan of Italian origin, born in Brazil in 1938. He was a student of K. Rahner at Ludwig-Maximilian Universität in Munich, where he also took his doctorate in theology. At present he is a Professor of Systematic Theology at the Petrópolis Institute for Philosophy and Theology. He is a member of the Theological Commission for the Brazilian National Episcopal Conference (CNBB), the Brazilian Religious Conference (CRB), and the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR). We are examining his best known work, Jesus Christ Liberator, which was originally published as Jesus Cristo Libertador. Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica Para O Nosso Tempo. Recently he has been interviewed in Rome by Cardinal Ratzinger for his controversial views in one of his latest works.

INTRODUCTION : NOTES

1. It has been statistically shown that over 45% of the present population of the Latin American continent is of mestizo origin, Indians proper being about 20%, and the rest of some kind of mixed origin.

2. ARCHIVO GENERAL DE INDIAS SEVILLE AUDIENCIA DE GUATEMALA 156, as cited by E. Dussel in 'Domination-Liberation', CONCILIUM, 6/10, 1974, p.37.

3. Patronato Real was the prerogative given by the Church to the Spanish Crown to name bishops for Latin America. King Ferdinand made the most of such a prerogative.

4. "Entre los remedios" (1542) O.E., V, p.118, as cited by G. Gutierrez in 'Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem' in LIBERATION AND CHANGE, Ed., R.H. Stone, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1277, p.62.

5. This was the approach of several Jesuit missionaries in India as well.

6. 'New Light on Social Problems - Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII', MATER ET MAGISTRA, No. 157, CTS, London, 1961, p.43.

7. The term 'development' is relatively new in the Magisterium of the Church in relation to social problems. Pope John XXIII was the first to broach the subject in MATER ET MAGISTRA. PACEM IN TERRIS would also give special attention to it.

8. Ibid., No. 73.

9. Gaudium et Spes , No. 34, para. 3. THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II. Ed. Walter Abbot, S.J.

10. "A Letter to the Peoples of the Third World" in BETWEEN HONESTY AND HOPE, Peruvian Commission, Maryknoll Publications, Maryknoll, New York, 1970.

11. "The Working Draft of the Medellin Conference" in BETWEEN HONESTY AND HOPE, p.171-192.

12. MEDELLIN CONCLUSIONS, Secretariat for Latin American National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington D.C., 1979, p.19.

13. Ibid., p.20.

14. G. Gutierrez, 'Introduction', in BETWEEN HONESTY AND HOPE, op.cit., p.XX.

15. Alberto Methol Ferré wrote an article 'Iglesia Y Sociedad Opulenta: Una Critica a Suenens desde America Latima' in a special supplement to Vispera, September, 1969.

16. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, SCM, London, 1974, pp.6-15.

17. G. Gutierrez, 'Statement', in THEOLOGY IN THE AMERICAS, Ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1976, p.310.

18. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., p.10.

19. Ibid., p.15.

* Cf. E. Dussel, HISTORY AND THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1976.

Rev. John Murray, S.J. 'The Problems of Clergy in Latin America - II' in THE CLERGY REVIEW, July, 1958, Vol. XLIII, No. 7, p.404-415.

These two and:

G. Gutierrez, 'Freedom and Salvation' in LIBERATION AND CHANGE,

provide a good historical background of the origins of the Latin American theology.

CHAPTER I

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theologians are united in their claim that their theology in the Latin American context is not another system or a new school of theology, but a distinctively new way of theological knowing and understanding. They also claim that the starting point of their new way of doing theology is the commitment to the liberative struggle of the people of God. From a European point of view the theologians of Latin America may seem to be something of a 'school'. But it is by no means certain that the liberation theologians themselves would agree with this. While there are important differences in individual authors,[1] there are some basic themes that form a common framework. It is with these basic themes or characteristics that we would like to come to grips in this first chapter. An examination of these characteristics will provide us with some sort of a framework to investigate the christological position of the Latin American liberation theologians.

(i)

VOICE OF THE POOR

It is a familiar saying among liberation theologians that theology is the voice of the poor, who had no voice hitherto. This is the first characteristic we should like to examine. Theology, these theologians claim, arises

directly out of the experience of the oppressed. The poor, by that process of education which Paulo Freire has called 'conscientisation', have become committed to a process of liberation. They are summoned by their conscience to help wipe out humiliating oppression and be involved in creating better human conditions.[2] In this context the poor are not only hearers of the Gospel but its 'privileged bearers'; they are no longer unaware of the causes of oppression, and so they commit themselves to a struggle for liberation, an 'eruption of the poor'. It is this self-awareness and experience of the poor themselves that is at the root of the theology of liberation. Hence the subject of this theology is not the academic theologian but the exploited sectors of society, the despised races, the marginalized cultures; the oppressed themselves are the historical subject of a new understanding of theology. For theologians familiar with Marxism, this perspective of liberation theology may seem to be a projection of a self-understanding into the minds of the poor, the imputation of a consciousness that is not actually present. This may even seem parallel to the situation under Marxism - Leninism where the party intellectuals stand over against the proletariat in whose name and interests the party operates.[3]

However, the liberation theologians themselves deny that they are guilty of such elitism. Theology arises directly out of the experience of the oppressed, and according to this understanding no one can claim to be a liberation theologian who is not personally and concretely

identified with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. Latin American theologians claim that they reflect on the basic theological question from the perspective of their own awareness of oppression and their involvement in the struggle for liberation; they therefore resist the temptation to make themselves the subject of theology. They consider their own position at best transitional. So the view that the poor are the historical subject of a new understanding of the faith has an important implication: praxis must have priority.

There are two points in the paragraph above that need clarification. The first is, what do the liberation theologians mean when they say that theology arises directly out of the experience of the oppressed? They mean simply that theology is done from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. The life of the Christian Community gathered by the word of God is the locus theologicus, the context of theology in the life of the Latin American Christian Community, which is conscious of, and clearly identifies with, the interests and struggle of the oppressed people of the continent. Theology, however, being reflection, a critical attitude, on this praxis, this commitment to transform the present reality. The first step is this commitment. The second step is 'theology' as a critical reflection. The function of theology is basically to re-read and re-do history in terms of the humiliated and rejected. Hugo Assmann asserts that liberation theology demands theological reflection on the faith to become a critical reflection on historical process; moreover, he argues that the proper subject-

matter of theology is the complex totality of human activity.

It seems to be agreed that theology arises from the struggle for liberation among most liberation theologians. H. Assmann emphasizes that it is the historical situation, the context of reflection, which should be the primary object and focus of theological reflection. We may allude to a similar tendency noticeable in black liberation theology and in feminist liberation theology. However, this is a dangerous and problematic position. In Assmann's case it leads to theological relativism:

> "The text we repeat is our situation. This is the first theological reference point. The other reference points (Bible, tradition, magisterium, history of doctrine).....are not the first reference point, a sphere of truth-in-itself, unconnected to the historic 'now' of truth-praxis".[4]

This is a very dangerous statement indeed. It sounds like a totally unchristian interpretation of what christian theology is all about, for it seems to subordinate the authority of scripture, tradition and the magisterium to the demands of the historical situation. However, Assmann goes on to assert, somewhat confusingly, that:

> "Critical reflection on human history becomes theological to the degree that it looks for the presence of the christian faith in historical experience".[5]

This would seem to contradict the previous statement, since it implies that the historical situation is not absolute and needs to be interpreted and judged by

objective Christian criteria. He asserts that critical reflection on human history, if it is to become theology, must have the distinctive characteristic of reference to faith and the historical embodiments of this faith, i.e., the Bible and Christian tradition. Liberation theologians, even those who urge direct attention to the problem content of oppression itself, (Assmann himself, for example), do not deny that the objective focus of theology should be the gospel vision of liberation and not the context of oppression.

What, then, exactly is their attitude towards scripture and tradition? Some points related to the answer to this question will become clearer in the latter part of the thesis. As far as Scripture is concerned, the liberation theologians' position has been under criticism for its political interpretation. They assert that the Bible has to be interpreted in the historical situation, but without the concrete exigencies manipulating the message of the Scriptures. Their basic conviction is that it is impossible to approach the Scriptures without presuppositions. Moreover, they claim that the concrete situation, the particular historical context, is the hermeneutic for knowing the gospel in the first place. Whether it is possible and whether they themselves have lived up to their claim is disputable. However, it must be stated that their concern is to use this hermeneutical key to the Scripture within their perspective of liberative struggle. One implication of the understanding of theology as arising out of the experience of the poor is the primacy of praxis, which aims at the transformation of society.

In the next chapter we shall consider the primacy of praxis in more detail. What can be said at this stage is that the liberation theologians have not worked out a proper hermeneutics. They speak of a 'hermeneutical circle', but this is not clearly spelt out by them. According to Gutierrez, there is a circular movement:

> "....from people to God and from God to people; from history to faith and from faith to history; from the human word to the word of the Lord and from the word of the Lord to the human word; from fraternal love to the love of the Father and from the love of the Father to fraternal love; from human justice to the holiness of God and from the holiness of God to human justice; from poor to God and from God to poor".[6]

The implications of this hermeneutical circle, as well as the role within it, have not been worked out by these theologians, though they themselves are aware of the deficiency; H. Assmann has spoken of a 'hermeneutical gap'.[7] Hence liberation theologians are subject to criticism as far as their hermeneutics of Scripture is concerned.

As for their attitude towards tradition, Sobrino has said that European theology is a dialogue with the tradition of theology, whereas Latin American theology is a confrontation with reality. Segundo would seem to have misgivings about the role of tradition in defining theological problems when he observes that theology is not chosen for theological reasons. Assmann admits that tradition is necessary to make theology christian, but the necessity is historical rather than theological. Most of the theologians of Latin American tradition show some discomfort and dissatisfaction with tradition, and yet

they also claim that they are faithful to tradition and that they are simply re-expressing the tradition in their Latin American situation. Liberation theology on the whole has an ambiguous attitude to tradition. The liberation theologian may have some reservations, and rightly so, about attending directly to tradition as if it were the object of his search, but he will be wrong if he does not claim it as a tool and indwell it so fully that he can attend to the reality as a Christian. For he is a christian theologian only if his wisdom of reality is given him in and through the christian tradition.

Having examined the implications of the priority of praxis for their approach to scripture and tradition, we shall now consider the liberation theologians' claim that their position as professional theologians is at best transitional. Gutierrez remarks as follows:

> "If our present theology of liberation, with all its limitations, help to further that process (process of liberation) and thereby open the way for a new understanding of the faith, then it will have fulfilled its role as a transitional step".[8]

Once the task is completed of re-reading, indeed re-doing, history in terms of the poor and humiliated, the theology of liberation will have achieved its goal. Gutierrez observes that the expression '<u>re-reading history</u>' can appear to be an exercise for intellectuals if we do not understand it as the result of '<u>re-doing</u>' history by being present in the successes and failures of the liberation struggle.[9] This may seem to be the Marxist - Leninist notion of the education of the new man.

The creation of the 'new man' was placed high on the list of the ideological tasks of the party at the important 22nd Congress of the CPUSSR 1961. The congress avowed that:

> "The Party regards the education of the new man as the most difficult task in the Communist reshaping of society. Until we remove bourgeois moral principles, roots and all, train men in the spirit of communist morality and renew them spiritually and morally, it will not be possible to build a communist society".[10]

In this we can recognize a messianism that is characteristic of Marxist revolution of the proletariat. However, in the theology of liberation there is no messianism of this kind. When it argues that 'conscientization' and political action are necessary in the creation of new man (in the Christian sense) it is not asserting that man has a role that is absolute to himself. On the contrary it is saying that the poor and the oppressed have a role to play in the temporal progress which is related to the growth of the Kingdom of God. It is this relation between the temporal progress and the growth of the Kingdom we shall be considering in the next section.

(ii)

HISTORY IS ONE

Liberation theology is based upon a 'political interpretation of the Gospel' which maintains that 'history is one'. We must now come to grips with what the liberation theologians mean by this phrase. They use the word 'political' in a comprehensive sense which includes all that pertains to building a better world. This understanding of the word 'political' was introduced into theology by

J.B. Metz in the 1960's. As we have discussed in the introduction, the liberation theologians are indebted to Metz for this understanding. According to this point of view the Gospel is viewed as 'subversive' in the sense that it has the power to destroy all those structures which are obstacles to the full human and spiritual development of human beings. Politics is not considered as standing in opposition to the Gospel nor as an appendage to it but as an essential part of it.

This understanding, according to many authors, is central to the theology of liberation and is fundamental to their view of history. The narrow interpretation of God's saving intervention as limited to the confines of Judaeo-Christian tradition and to the internal affairs of the Church is regarded by them as outmoded. The salvific action of God embraces the whole of humanity and indeed the whole of human history. Salvation history is not to be equated with the 'history of salvation' as outlined in Judaeo-christian tradition but is to be more broadly understood as 'salvation of history'. For these are not too parallel histories, one 'sacred' and the other 'profane'. 'The temporal-spiritual and profane-sacred antitheses are based on the natural-supernatural distinction'.[11] This distinction of planes model is eroded by a process of 'secularization', a process of 'break away from the tutelage of religion as a desacralization'[12] and by a proper understanding of man's relationship with God, while maintaining God's gratuitous gift of grace. 'Secularization' is the result of man's self-understanding as a creative subject. He becomes an agent

of history responsible for his own destiny. 'This new self-understanding of man necessarily brings in its wake a different way of conceiving his relationship with God.[13] This 'secularization' is not opposed to, but coincides with, a Christian vision of man, of history, of the world, as both contribute to the possibility of being more fully human. The Latin American forms of secularization are revolutionary ideology, and political radicalization. This point of view is similar to that of J.B. Metz as expressed in his Theology of the World, where he argues as follows:

> "The task of theology is to show that the historically irreversible process of secularization does not mean that christianity is disappearing, but that it has become truly historically effective".[14]

> "The secularity of the world should not reveal itself to us primarily as a dethroning of Christ within the world, in an historically intensified protest against him, but as the decisive point of his dominion in history".[15]

Another solution that challenges the distinction of planes model is the idea that there is 'one call to salvation'.[16] As a result of man's infinite openness to God (in his desire for God) and God's gratuitous intervention there is a proper communion:

> "In concrete situation there is but one vocation: Communion with God through grace. In reality there is no one who is not invited to Communion with the Lord, no one who is not affected by grace".[17]

This is a recovery of a historical and existential viewpoint. From this view one can assert that the God of salvation can be encountered in every concrete situation. God is at work in human history, thus dualism is avoided. Karl Rahner would also argue in similar vein as follows:

> "The history of salvation as the concrete accomplishment of God's transcendental saving will, which by the term on which it bears is itself historical, forms a unity. Moreover, it is constituted in its unity by all the dimensions of man".[18]

Christianity, in keeping with the rich biblical tradition, believes that salvation orients, transforms and guides history to its fulfilment. Gutierrez emphasizes the need to place the historical destiny of humanity in the salvific horizon. The salvific action of God, which is actualized in the redemptive work of Christ, embraces all dimensions of human existence. Therefore, according to Gutierrez, there is only one history, the history of salvation, which is the very heart of human history, and it is a 'Christo-finalized history'. Liberation theologians emphasize the idea that the full significance of God's action in history is understood only when it is put in its eschatological perspective. Gutierrez argues that:

> "The Bible presents eschatology as the driving force of salvific history radically oriented towards the future".[19]

Gutierrez argues for the concept of promise as that which characterizes eschatology. He understands this very

much the way J. Moltmann has defined 'promise' in his Theology of Hope. It is the same understanding of eschatology as promise that is prominent in Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection of Christ. This eschatological perspective which presents God as God of the future is not a denial of God's action in history. The transcendent God with whom full encounter is possible only in the future is also encountered in concrete historical situations. God encounters man in history and calls him to respond to his transcendent will. Man responds and participates in God's process of salvation by his action in transforming the society. There is a risk, however, of identifying God's transcendent will with a particular position. Concern about this risk has been expressed by Peter Hebblethwaite.[20]

In developing the idea of the unity of history, the theologians of liberation have also emphasized the conception of man as a co-creator with God in nature and history. Man is seen as the agent of history. They do not by any means devalue the concept of divine agency in salvation but in maintaining the gift nature of salvation they also emphasize human freedom. God's freedom and action are not set over against, or alongside, man's freedom and action. The gift of God is given within the freedom of human persons. Man responds to the gift of God not only by his attitude but also by his action. By his labour he takes control of and transforms nature (a work of creation), and by trying to build a society more just and worthy of man, he links his work of creation to the liberating process and shares in the redemptive work of

Christ. In the bible creation and salvation are considered as a single salvific act of God. And, "creation and salvation have....in the first place, a christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been served in him"(Col 1:15-20).[21] Man has a proper role in participating in the work of Christ. "To work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save".

In this connection 'sin' has to be understood, liberation theologians insist, in a collective and concrete perspective and not merely as a personalized (i.e. individual) spiritualized concept. Medellin speaks of a 'situation of sin'. Gutierrez says that sin is evident in oppressive structures and is at the root of a situation of 'injustice and exploitation'. It cannot be encountered in itself but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations.[22] We shall have to examine the concept of sin as understood in liberation theology in the fourth chapter of our work. At the moment it suffices to say that man as co-agent with God participates in the salvific work of God in Christ by challenging and destroying structures that have their roots in sin. We may allude here to the concern that is expressed by the recent Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation (Libertatis Nuntius) about this idea of the social nature of sin. The concern is expressed in the following words:

> "The full ambit of sin, whose first effect is to introduce disorder into the relationship between God and man, cannot be restricted to Social Sin".[23]

It is not true, however, that the theology of liberation does not have the notion of sin as separation of man from God. All that Gutierrez emphasizes is that this sin is manifested in the world through the break of communion between men creating oppressive structures. Man's participation in the process of salvation takes nothing away from Jesus' work of Redemption on the Cross but is its realization in history and a movement towards new creation. There is no Prometheanism of a Marxist kind in this basically christian understanding.

(iii)

USE OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS

There is another main characteristic of liberation theology to be considered. This third element is connected with the methodological claim of the liberation theologians that theology, properly speaking, is the critique of the praxis of the life of the Christian Community. Liberation theologians have accepted Gutierrez' definition of theology as critical reflection on historical praxis. What is new in liberation theology is that theology as a critical reflection on praxis is required to keep a closer relationship between itself and the human and social sciences, than is usually granted in other theologies. Charity and justice have, for instance, both objective and subjective dimensions. While the subjective dimension can be scrutinized in terms of relationships of dependency and freedom that are created by interaction, the objective dimension has to be tested by statistical and scientific analysis of outcomes.

Once charity's objective dimension has been accepted one could not acknowledge conflict as a universal condition of human history. Human misery and conflict cannot be explained away. Questions such as this must confront the social sciences that are observations of human experience. Praxis is therefore properly observed and critically analysed by social sciences before it becomes a matter for theological reflection. Whether this is really the case in the theology of liberation is disputable. It at the very least seems to be the greatest concern of the theologians of liberation. Sociology for instance can play three roles in facilitating the work of the theologian: a) it can provide the raw material for theologizing; b) it can help theologians who are interested in relating to men of their own time to understand who the men of their own time are; c) it provides a perspective on the meaning of religion that ought to enable the theologian to escape from many of the difficult controversies in which he and his predecessors have been enmeshed for the last several centuries.[24] Considerations similar to these have led liberation theologians into a situation of a very close relationship with Marxist economic and social analysis.

How far do these theologians go in, as it were, 'borrowing from' Marxism? The work of Louis Althusser, a French Marxist theoretician, has become the most popularized form of Marxism in the Latin American countries. And the universities of Latin America use his structural Marxism, his idea that Marxism is essentially a 'science' and that Marxism easily works on alienation and humanism

represent a romantic, pre-scientific approach. Althusser defines ideology as follows:

> "An ideology is a system (with its own logic and vigour) of representations (images, myth, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society".[25]

We will do well to indicate that Althusser argues that the historical materialism if Marx cannot conceive of even a Communist society without ideology, be it ethics, art or world outlook. Althusser would also want to argue that if we are really determined to defend an existing science against the ideology that threatens it, it is important to determine what really forms part of an ideology; otherwise we may end up by mistaking something genuinely scientific for an ideology.[26]

The distinction between scientific analysis and ideology has enabled many christians to look more favourably on Marxism.[27] Moreover Gutierrez considers the confrontation of theology with Marxism as fruitful:

> "Contemporary theology does in fact find itself in direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism, and it is to a large extent due to Marxism's influence that theological thought, searching for its own sources, has begun to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of this world and the action of man in history".[28]

Recently the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Instruction mentioned above has expressed concern about the use of Marxist analysis of society. Liberation theologians seem to favour in general a distinction between the acceptance of the Marxist

ideology on the one hand and a rational, critical acceptance of the political-economic functioning of society on the other. However the recent document from the Vatican argues for the inseparability of the ideological principles from the study of the social reality. It asserts that no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. To support this assertion it cites the warning from Paul VI (Octogesima Adveniens):

> "It would be illusory and dangerous to ignore the intimate bond which radically unites them, and to accept elements of the Marxist analysis without recognizing its connections with the ideology, or to enter into the practice of class-struggle and of its Marxist interpretation while failing to see the kind of totalitarian society to which this process slowly leads".[29]

This question of the inseparability of the ideological principles and the categories used to analyse society is an open question. There is still much work and dialogue that needs to be done. Hence it is impossible for us to enter a full discussion of it within the scope of this thesis.

However, we will do well to outline briefly one or two of the Marxist categories employed by the theology of liberation. Marxist emphasis on the primacy of action can be discussed in the next chapter as it is the category that bears very much on the methodology of the liberation theology. The other categories that are diversely used by these theologians are class struggle and the common ownership of the means of production. As far as class struggle is concerned, for Gutierrez it is a reality which is the product of the effort of those who willingly keep the working class in an unjust situation. He argues that

such an unjust situation cannot be ignored. He emphatically states that:

> "To advocate class struggle, therefore, is to reject a situation in which there are oppressed and oppressors..... To build a just society today necessarily implies the active conscious participation in the class struggle before our eyes".[30]

This class struggle is a fact and neutrality in this case is not possible, says Gutierrez. The normal christian objection from the point of view of the Church is that promoting class struggle promotes violence, and the basic notions of love and unity in christianity are undermined. But the reply to this objection from the theologians of liberation is that to love all men does not mean avoiding confrontations, or preserving a fictitious harmony. Guttierez would argue that 'to participate in class struggle is not only not opposed to universal love, this commitment is today the necessary and inescapable means of making this love concrete, as reconciliation is the overcoming of conflict'.[31] The promise of unity is at the heart of Christ's work. And the Church is a sign of unity. However, argues Gutierrez, it is not something given already but a process inaugurated by Christ and into which man enters. These are some main points of the category of class struggle that are emphasized in varying degrees by theologians of liberation. And these are some of the points that the Church must analyse to see what challenge such categories as class struggle offer to christian notions of love, unity and brotherhood and justice.

By way of conclusion to this chapter, we must remind ourselves that these three main characteristics (the voice of the poor, the claim that history is one, the use of Social Analysis) have various underlying strands and implications, to develop all of which is impossible within the scope of this chapter. The purpose of outlining these main characteristics is not to deny diverse emphases that are advocated by the theologians of the Latin American tradition, but to provide ourselves with some sort of a framework to understand the Christological statements of these theologians.

CHAPTER 1 : NOTES

1. These important differences become obvious when we read FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA, ed. Rosino Gibellini, SCM, London, 1980.

2. 'Conscientization', 'conscience', are two words that should not be confused in spite of their etymological relation. By the use of the word 'conscience' we are referring to the normal sense of conscience, which is of course aroused by the consciousness of the oppressive situation.

3. Leszek Kolakowski, MAIN CURRENTS OF MARXISM, 3. Breakdown. Tr. P.S. Falla, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 117 ff.

4. Hugo Assmann, OPRESIÓN-LIBERACIÓN, p.141 as cited in J.A. Kirk's LIBERATION THEOLOGY, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London, 1979, p.36.

5. H. Assmann, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, Tr. Paul Burns, Search Press, London, 1975, p.62.

6. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem" in LIBERATION AND CHANGE, Ed. R.H. Stone, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1977, p.83.

7. H. Assmann, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., pp.104-105.

8. G. Gutierrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith" in FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA, op.cit., p.25.

9. G. Gutierrez, "Statement" in THEOLOGY IN THE AMERICAS, Ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, Orbis Books, New York, 1976, p.310.

10. As cited in George Patterson, "Marxism: The Twentieth Century Religion", CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM, Ed. A. Scarfe & P. Sookhdeo, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1982, p.19.

11. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, SCM, London, 1974, p.69.

12. Ibid., p.66.

13. Ibid., p.67.

14. J.B. Metz, THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD, Tr. W. Glen-Doepel, Burns & Oates, London, 1969, p.16.

15. Ibid., p.19.

16. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., pp. 70-72.

17. Ibid., 70.

18. K. Rahner, "Salvation", in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THEOLOGY, Ed. K. Rahner, Burns & Oates, London, 1975, p.1525.

19. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., p.162.

20. P. Hebblethwaite, THE CHRISTIAN MARXIST DIALOGUE AND BEYOND, DLT, London, p.47.

21. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., p.159.

22. G. Gutierrez, ibid., pp.175-176.

23. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, INSTRUCTIONS ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION (LIBERTATIS NUNTIUS), Do 560, CTS, London, 1984, p.12.

24. A. Greely, "The Uses of Sociology" in THE MONTH, vol. CCXXX, February, 1972, pp.48-53.

25. Louis Althusser, FOR MARX, tr. Ben Brewster, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1965, p.231.

26. Ibid., p.232.

27. Gutierrez criticizes the Marxism of Althusser for its dependence on the scientific knowledge of an elite. However he suggests that something of this position of distinction should be retained.

28. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., p.9.

29. LIBERTATIS NUNTIUS, op.cit., p.18.

30. G. Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, op.cit., p.274.

31. Ibid., p.276.

CHAPTER 2

THE METHODOLOGY OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The method adopted in the theology of liberation can be seen as focussed in a single postulate: 'critical reflection upon action'. The Latin American christian experience of commitment to struggle for liberation is seen as the praxis upon which theology as a theory must reflect. Primacy is given to this praxis and theology comes as a second step. In this chapter we shall attempt to examine this methodological claim and its implications: do the theologians of liberation mean that there is a pre-theoretical, i.e. pre-theological, praxis of the historical process of liberation? It is our purpose as well to relate the christologies of J. Sobrino and L. Boff to this methodological claim.

(i)

> "Theological thought right from the beginning is a hermeneutical exercise directed towards the Church's contemporary witness, not, as has often been the case in Europe, a self-contained academic hermeneutical procedure. It should not begin with an intellectual debate about the application of christian faith to modern problems but with a project to change an unjust society into a just one, using the accumulated wisdom of christian reflection to illustrate, penetrate, challenge and modify a praxis already engaged upon".[1]

Gutierrez says in the following words what theology and its methodology mean:

> "Theological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they are called and addressed by the word of God; it would be a critical theory, worked out in the light of the Word accepted in faith and inspired by a practised purpose - and therefore indissolubly linked to historical praxis".[2]

Important points highlighted in these words of Gutierrez are that the community and the society in general are addressed by the word of God; it is the word of God that guarantees the theological character of christian praxis; once the word is accepted in faith it inspires one to action. Therefore, theology is, according to him, a critical reflection, a theory indissolubly linked to praxis. Primacy is given to praxis, which consists in active commitment to the process of liberation.

Underlying Gutierrez' argument here is the idea that theological reflection must begin with 'historical reality', which in turn presupposes the principle of the unity of theory and practice. It is, however, not a unity of identity, but a unity conceived in terms of their inseparability. Liberation theology holds this principle in common with the German form of 'political theology', the inaugurator of which is J.B. Metz. In this sense Alfredo Fierro is right to call liberation theology a political theology.[3] However, it is quite a different kind of political theology from its counterpart in Germany. As we indicated earlier in the thesis, liberation theologians were initially influenced by, but became critical of, German political theology. According to Professor Charles Davis, Metz in his work Glaube in

Geschichte und Gesellschaft (1977) states that 'the starting-point of political theology was the primacy of practice, so that for it the basic problem of theology became, not the relation between dogma and history, but the relation between faith and social practice'.[4] Both German political theology and liberation theology emphasize the relation between theory and practice. However, Metz has been heavily criticized for being inconsistent in his treatment of it, whereas the theologians of liberation establish a more direct relationship between faith and political action than the Germans are prepared to admit. However the basic principle of both positions is the unity of theory and practice.

Both of them, in using the principle of unity of theory and practice, have drawn inspiration from the Marxist concept of critique. Karl Marx rejected the notion of theory being divorced from practice. He refused the claim that theoretical thought is presuppositionless, contemplative recognition of a stable object, and affirmed that theory and practice are independent. In his Theses on Feuerbach, K. Marx says what is meant by praxis: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'.[5] In the same work he adds:

> "The question whether objective (gegenständliche) truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. In practice man must prove truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness (Diesseitigkeit) of his thinking. The dispute

> over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question".[6]

Marx gives priority to practice; according to him, it is practice that verifies the truth. Even Marx did not go as far as saying that truth is created by praxis, but that knowledge of truth originates in praxis. He did not start any project of revolution unless there was an implicit theory. There was a dialectical relation between this theory and praxis.

The liberation theologians attempt, as do the German political theologians, by the use of the (Marxian) dialectic of theory and practice, to give systematic expression to the conviction that the identity and truth of Christian faith can no longer be maintained by doctrinal assertions of orthodoxy or by theoretical interpretation, but only by the experience of that identity and truth as mediated in and through a social practice of liberation, which means 'doing the truth' (orthopraxis). Segundo represents the position in the following words when speaking about Cone's black theology:

> "....Orthodoxy possesses no ultimate criterion in itself because being orthodox does not mean possessing the final truth. We only arrive at the latter by orthopraxis. It is the latter that is the ultimate criterion of the former, both in theology and in biblical interpretation. The truth is truth only when it serves as the basis for truly human attitudes".[7]

Segundo goes on to argue that:

> "Interaction between social praxis and theology is the most decisive methodological fact for actual and future Latin American theology".[8]

By 'social praxis', Segundo means what Gutierrez means by 'historical praxis', i.e., action that is oriented towards transforming the society. There is an interaction between this praxis and theology. The experience of this praxis leads to doing the truth (orthopraxis). And this doing of the truth contains in the very act the correct understanding of God for today, in the here and now. And in this praxis the role of sociology is to combat the 'ideological infiltration of dogma'. There is a need to study and to unmask 'the human attitudes that are bound up with social structures'.[9]

To analyse the social structures, Marxism or Neo-Marxism is used as a sociological tool or instrument. If such a tool is used in the case of praxis, then this praxis of commitment to the process of liberation is not a fore-theoretical commitment. Being concerned with transforming society, liberation theology is particularly attracted to the Marxist analysis of society. Liberation theologians use this Marxist analysis as an instrument and a pre-requisite in the hermeneutical task of reading the signs of the times. They emphasize the scientific character of Marxism and use it as a means of detecting and liberating every false ideology. Libertatis Nuntius has strong objections to the attribution of the term 'scientific' to Marxist analysis of society. It points out that a preliminary critical study by way of careful epistemological critique is missing in more than one

theology of liberation.[10] This problem of the inseparability of Marxist analysis of society and the ideological presupposition will have to remain an open question.

The basic concern of liberation theology to help transform the society is the reason why primacy to praxis is given in liberation theology. As José Miguez Bonino has said: 'They are saying, in fact, that there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents', and 'there is, therefore, no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of transforming the world through participation in history".[11] The first thing is a commitment of charity, of service. Theology comes after, according to Gutierrez and the other liberation theologians. Some critics of liberation theology have raised the question: "Does this mean that theology has the task of finding reasons for what one has already decided to do on other grounds? Is it a matter of post factum realizations?"[12] We may rephrase the question in broader terms: when does this critical reflection on historical praxis acquire its scientific character together with christian content so that we can call it theology? Can there be a theological method grounded ostensibly on praxis alone? By what right and to what degree can theology start from human experience, and ought it to do so?

An attempt to answer these related questions is important if we are to come to grips with what liberation theologians mean when they say that the christian experience of historical praxis is the starting-point.

Experience is the immediate consciousness of reality. It is characterized by immediate contact. It is always felt and lived. Experience and reason as far as human knowledge is concerned are elements which can be isolated from each other. They are distinct but not divided. Liberation theologians suggest that there is an implicit theory in experience of struggle for liberation. It is not a praxis without a theory. Praxis of transformation of society is based on an implicit theory that is not worked out. Therefore in the method of liberation of theology there are two levels of theological activity. Charles Davis, in his book Theology and Political Society,[13] has called these two levels 'original theology' and 'scientific or (better) critical theology'.

What Davis means by original theology is 'theology as immediately bound up with religious living, a theology that accompanies action'. As every human action has meaning, theology begins from christian action, which has a content of christian meaning. Christians are addressed by the word of God. In all his actions, therefore, the christian has a distinctive way of life. This original theology, which has not yet fully entered a reflective stage, is, nevertheless, articulated consciousness of christian practice (the meaning is unarticulated in action). This theology is the creative source and origin of all the rest of christian thinking, and it is to this original theology that one must constantly return. The next stage of theology is when theology, like all forms of knowledge, becomes methodical or scientific. Original

theology which is articulated consciousness of human experience gives rise to scientific theology. To quote Alfredo Fierro's words:

> "We can and must have a second-stage of reflexive, disciplined and critical language that focuses on first-stage theological language as its object and tries to work out its theoretical and scientific import. Only then do we have theology in the strict sense, which is not a language about God but a metalanguage.... Theology as a second-stage discourse has to do with relationship existing between two empirical social realities: 'that is between the profession of faith espoused by Christians, and their political praxis".[14]

This critical theology is distinct from scientific theology, which is normally understood as an elaboration and grounding of the christian tradition as a place of truth and value. Critical theology on the contrary acknowledges that the christian tradition, like other traditions, is not exclusively a source of truth and value. Thus we come to understand the method of liberation theology and recognise the point of calling it a theologically new method. However, within this methodology, liberation theologians have not yet provided a satisfactory hermeneutical procedure for interpreting scripture. Being conscious of this problem we should ask where christology comes into this methodology of liberation theology? We shall briefly consider below Sobrino and Boff from the point of view of their methodology.

(ii)

SOBRINO AND BOFF : METHODOLOGY

Sobrino describes the Latin American Christology as 'christology at the crossroads'. For he feels that it has a long christian tradition behind it, and in front of it there is a new horizon, a new and authentically Latin American christology which does not yet exist.[15] He also claims that the theology of liberation serves as the general frame of reference for Latin American christology. In this section, therefore, we shall examine the claims of Sobrino and Boff as far as their methodological approach to Christology is concerned. These two theologians' works, Christology at the Crossroads and Jesus Christ Liberator,[16] respectively, are the most systematic statements on christology claimed to have been worked out in the specific context of Latin American struggle for liberation. We shall examine how far they are faithful to the methodological claims of liberation theologians as examined above. This examination should provide us with some insights that will help us to analyse the christological dimensions spoken of and the various categories employed in liberation christology.

Sobrino and Boff are at one with the rest of the liberation theologians when they assert that liberation theology is a by-product of a concrete faith that is pondered and lived out in terms of the question raised by involvement in the praxis of liberation. "Pondering the real-life situation only after it has been experienced in concrete terms, Latin Americans have been prompted to

see Christ in very new and different terms ",[17] says Sobrino. Boff puts it rather more straightforwardly, "It is the overall context of dependence and oppression at every level of life that prompts christology in Latin America to ponder and love Jesus Christ as 'liberator'."[18] While his basic affirmation is that Christology is an ordered and elaborated knowledge of the faith and that it takes shape within the content of a particular moment of history, Boff goes on to add, "This brand of christology presupposes and depends on specific social practice designed to break with the existing context of domination". By this, Boff as well as Sobrino, seem to fit their christology within the general frame of liberation theology and its method.

They also fit their christology into the dialectical nature of liberation theology by emphasizing the dialectical character of christology. To quote Boff:

> "Liberation Christology presupposes an option for the dialectical approach to social analysis and for the revolutionary project of the dominated. To say 'liberation' is to express a well defined option that is neither reformist nor simply progressionist. It is truly liberative because it implies a break with the status quo".[19]

Sobrino recognises, as does Boff, the ambiguity that lies in the fact that not every kind of liberation signifies a present anticipation and concretization of the kingdom of God and that no liberation can be absolutized in and for itself. The salvation proclaimed by christianity is an all-embracing one. It is not restricted to economic, political, social and ideological emancipation but neither

can it be realized without them. Sobrino quotes Boff[20] to make this point of the tension that exists. According to Sobrino, on the one hand, the Kingdom of God becomes a hermeneutic principle of the study of christology (a point we will be developing in the next chapter) as it expressed man's utopian longing for liberation from everything that alienates him; on the other hand, the kingdom is not a mere organic extension of this world, as it is encountered in history. The kingdom does not evolve but breaks in. This tension is already present in the life and proclamation of Jesus. Boff puts it thus: "There exists a dialectic between the salvific proposal of God and the human response between the concreteness of reality and the transcendence of human liberty".[21] And as Sobrino expresses it, "The basic quandary that inspires Latin American theology is summed up in the term 'liberation'. It is embodied concretely in the coexistence of two fundamental and contradictory experiences: the felt need for liberation as an absolute necessity on the one hand, and the impossibility of achieving it in history on the other".[22] By preserving this tension in the language of liberation, both Boff and Sobrino seem to be at one with all the liberation theologians.

However, when Boff and Sobrino argue for the Jesus of history, the historical Jesus, as the starting-point of christology they seem to fit in more with some European progressivist theology than with the methodological framework of liberation theology. For Sobrino, the proper key to the understanding of Christ as

totality is the historical Jesus. "If the end of christology is to profess that Jesus is the Christ, its starting point is the affirmation that this Christ is the Jesus of history".[23] Boff also stresses the Jesus of history over the Christ of faith.

By quoting statements from H. Assmann, Gutierrez and Ignacio Ellacuna, Sobrino argues that there exists a consensus among Latin American theologians as to the historical Jesus being the starting point for christology.[24] This theme and concern, he says, are constant in the work of Latin American theologians, at least in so far as concretizing the figure of Jesus is concerned. But it is not very clear in the case of such methodological theorists as Gutierrez, Assmann and Segundo, who seem to be making a different claim from that of Boff and Sobrino. Sobrino and Boff give priority to Jesus and so apply the insights derived from Jesus of Nazareth to the situation in Latin America, whereas the theorists we have just mentioned make the claim that our image of God, and so of Jesus, will appear differently at different historical situations. Is there, therefore, a divergence from the methodological claim of the theorists we examined in the first section? Or, to put it differently, do Sobrino and Boff explain the relation between praxiological starting-point and starting with the historical Jesus?

"In Latin America, liberation theology has focused spontaneously on the historical Jesus for guidance and orientation", says Sobrino. What he means by 'spontaneously' is not entirely clear when he adds:

> "Since it arose out of the concrete experience praxis of faith within a lived commitment to liberation, it soon realized that the universality of Christ amid those circumstances could only be grasped from the standpoint of the concrete Christ of the historical Jesus would serve as a midway point between two extremes; turning Christ into an abstraction on the one hand, putting him to direct and immediate ideological uses on the other".[25]

It is not quite clear how Sobrino sees the relationship between the general starting-point in praxis and his own starting with the historical Jesus.

A closer examination of this problem is necessary. There are two aspects of the starting-point of Christology, according to Sobrino. They are subjective and objective. While the subjective aspect of the starting-point is faith as lived experience of christian discipleship, and the objective aspect is to look from Christ's own total reality by starting to look at the historical Jesus. His approach, he says, asserts that both for reflection and life it is the historical Jesus who is the key providing access to the totality of Christ. Sobrino is to point those traits of Jesus which are most securely guaranteed by exegesis and which offer a most trustworthy image of the historical Jesus. However, when he looks more closely, the reader discovers that Sobrino's development of the 'historical Jesus' theme is entirely dependent on Mark's Gospel, in specific terms the Markan pattern of Jesus' ministry. In doing so, Sobrino overlooks quite a few problems posed by exegesis. He himself admits that his book stands in need of more solid exegetical grounding.[26] Leaving on one side this

exegetical deficiency in Sobrino, there seems to be a discrepancy when he says:

> "We want to see what really happened rather than to ponder the historical Jesus directly in terms of our own situation and what he can mean for us. But that does not mean that we will not be looking at the historical Jesus from the standpoint of our own situation. Certain traits of his will take importance precisely because we will be viewing them from the concrete situation of Latin America".[27]

Hence to the question, "which is prior: the situation of Jesus or our own?", the answer one receives from Sobrino is that the situation of Jesus is prior. Therefore there seems to be a divergence from the general methodological claim that it is the Latin American situation in which is first.

When one reads Boff's treatment of the gospel material of/the historical Jesus, one finds him squarely within some European progressivist world of theologians. His uncritical use of historical-Jesus material is, however, debatable. But what one could criticize him most of all for is the simple lack of any concrete reference to the situation in Latin America. Boff says that Christ is the 'absolute reference point' whose humanity is the bridge to our contemporary understanding of him. Christ, as always, is a challenge to our contemporary situation. Therefore Jesus Christ and his historical situation seems to be Boff's chronological starting-point. Boff emphasizes that the social setting of liberation[28] is the point of departure for christology

and is therefore determinative of it; there can be no neutrality. For him, the question is who or what cause is served by a given christology, as every given christology, according to him, is relevant in its own way, depending on its functional relationship to the socio-historical situation.[29] All this seems to be in agreement with the theorists of liberation, Gutierrez in particular. However, Boff seems to diverge from them when he goes on to claim epistemological 'autonomy' for christology in terms of 'its own methodology'. According to him, although christology presupposes and depends on a specific social practice, such commitment does not guarantee the intrinsic quality of any christology. Considerations of relevance and social setting seek to point up to the inevitable link between practice and theory, politics and christology. He distinguishes between the area of autonomy and the area of dependence in christology and theology in general.

> "Christology enjoys autonomy in elaborating its discourse in line with its own methodology. It has its own mode of theoretical praxis, and it does not have to justify itself before some outside tribunal".[30]

The social setting becomes a matter of 'external' dependence of 'outward reference'. According to him, the socio-analytical articulation is required by christology as a hermeneutics and has theological relevance. But the theological movement is from the light of Christ to the socio-analytical text:

> "Liberation Christology is fashioned through two basic mediations on the theoretical level. One is that of social analysis concerned with the reality to be changed; the other is hermeneutics, which considers the theological relevance of the social analysis. It considers the socio-analytical text in the light of Jesus Christ the Saviour and the word of divine revelation thereby guaranteeing the theological character of liberation theory and praxis".[31]

Boff's questions - "What image of Jesus appears when we examine him in the light of this liberation interest? What interpretation do we get of his message and his salvific praxis?"[32] - imply that a new christology is developing out of concrete reflection. His elaboration of his christology, however, makes Jesus' proclamation and praxis, culminating in the definitive liberation of the resurrection, the absolute reference-point. The actual situation in Latin America recedes into the background.

Our conclusion is, then, that Sobrino and Boff seem to be making different methodological claims. The more radical implications of the method as proposed by Gutierrez, Assmann and Segundo do not appear in the christological productions of Sobrino and Boff. The question that remains open is the methodological consistency of liberation christology in the light of what the more radical theorists of method are proposing. In the next two chapters, in considering the christological dimensions of liberation theology, we shall critically examine the claim that this christology is derived from reflection on the Latin American situation.

CHAPTER 2 : NOTES

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11. J.M. Bonino's words from REVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY COMES OF AGE, SPCK, London, 1975, is cited by P. Hebblethwaite in THE CHRISTIAN MARXIST DIALOGUE AND BEYOND, DLT, London, 1977, p.46.

12. Such a concern is expressed by P. Hebblethwaite in his book, THE CHRISTIAN MARXIST DIALOGUE AND BEYOND, p.45.

13. C. Davis, op.cit., pp.23-24.

14. A. Fierro, op.cit., pp.316-317.

15. J. Sobrino, CHRISTOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS, SCM, London, 1978, p.XV.

16. J. Sobrino, ibid.,
Leonardo Boff, JESUS CHRIST THE LIBERATOR: A critical christology for Our Time, SPCK, London, 1980.

17. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.33.

18. L. Boff, op.cit., pp.266-267.

19. Ibid., p.274.

20. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.37, cf. also Gutierrez, op.cit., p.117.

21. L. Boff, op.cit., p.41.

22. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.35.

23. Ibid., p.XXI - Preface to the English edition.

24. Ibid., pp.9-14.

25. Ibid., p.10.

26. Ibid., p.XXVI

27. Ibid., p.14.

28. L. Boff, op.cit., pp.264ff.

29. Ibid., p.266.

30. Ibid., p.267.

31. Ibid., p.272.

32. Ibid., p.278.

CHAPTER 3

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

While Sobrino claims that his starting-point of Christology is the historical Jesus, by which he means:

> "the person, teaching, attitudes and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as they are accessible, in a more or less general way, to historical and exegetical investigation",[1]

Boff asserts:

> "The liberation Christology elaborated from the standpoint of Latin America stresses the historical Jesus over the Christ of faith".[2]

Both these theologians would want to argue that starting from the historical Jesus one can arrive at the same christological dimensions as that of traditional christology. However they insist that the traditional dogmatic stand can be reinterpreted and the truths contained therein expounded in a radically different language, employing different categories to those found in traditional christology, without nonetheless losing sight of the truths. For instance, they do not want to use Chalcedonian concepts of 'person' (hypostasis) 'nature' (phusis) and the traditional notion of 'hypostatic union'. We have already discussed in the chapter above the difficulty of relating this starting-point of the historical Jesus with the general methodological claims of the liberation theologians. Our purpose in this chapter is to investigate the category or the categories employed, as far as the person of

Christ is concerned, in the works of two liberation theologians, Sobrino and Boff, and see if traditional dogmatic elements of christology find expression in their works. We shall also endeavour to examine their position and see how far it is radical in the sense they claim that they consider Christ from the standpoint of christian ecclesial praxis at a given concrete moment in history.

(i)

THE RESPONSE TO TRADITION

Sobrino and Boff have chosen categories that are different from those of traditional dogmatic statements. Before we go on to summarize and examine their statements on christology purported to have been worked out in Latin American perspective, we should see in this section how they look at traditional dogmatic statements based on the Chalcedonian formulation of the person of Christ, which they prefer to re-express in different categories. Sobrino declares that the christology presented in his book Christology at the Crossroads is to be first of all ecclesial. By ecclesial christology he means:

> "on the one hand, the way Christ is conceived on the basis of the concrete life and reality of a given community, and on the other hand, the meaning of a given community's life and activity as seen from the standpoint of Christ".[3]

> "It seeks to provide the christological underpinnings for all that Latin American theology of liberation has to say about the nature of ecclesial theory and activity".[3]

Sobrino, however, by defining his christology as ecclesial, is forced not to deny another sense of ecclesial christology which is based on the conciliar and papal magisterium of the Church, although he views it as a second stage in the ecclesial nature of christology. To him, the first stage in the hermeneutic circle, according to which one reconsiders Christ from the standpoint of christian ecclesial praxis at a given moment in history, is more important. However, according to him, christology from the standpoint of dogma cannot be evaded, and he gives reasons why this must be so. First of all, because the dogmatic definitions are authoritative declarations of the magisterium which are solemnized embodiments of the christological reflection based on the ecclesial life. Secondly, because of the pastoral reason that dogma gives legitimate unity to the expression of the christian faith. Thirdly, it is also a historical necessity, as the dogmas provide an important historical perspective as well as some precious content, and as authoritative words they give expression to our faith that can be reciprocally communicated. Stressing the necessity of dogma, Sobrino goes on to speak of the significance of dogma which he defines as: "A doxological statement in which we seek to formulate the mysterious reality of God himself".[4]

According to him, dogmas are doxological statements as opposed to historical statements about God where one does not talk specifically about God in himself but about God in relation to some historical event. Sobrino has borrowed this terminology of 'doxological statements' and 'historical statements' from Pannenberg and Schlink.[1]

He illustrates the distinction by alluding to the event of the Hebrews being liberated from the Egyptian slavery. He says:

> "Historically speaking, we can say that they were liberated. This merely historical statement becomes a historical statement about God when the whole historical process of liberation is attributed to God's intervention".[5] .

And on the other hand, when the Psalms repeatedly call God 'Yahweh who is merciful, kind and just', such affirmations are doxological statements according to Sobrino. And he would add that doxological statements cannot be intuited in themselves; they are possible only on the basis of historical statements. Two basic conclusions that Sobrino derives from such a distinction are that, first, dogma is a doxological formulation that marks the culmination of a whole process of christian living and christian reflective thinking; second, even though the historical statement may make the doxological statement reasonable, it does not strip the latter of its character as a mystery, for dogma is not a straight line continuation of a historical statement.

Although such a distinction as outlined by Sobrino seems necessary, nonetheless, as I see it, such a distinction is not easy to make in theology. Taking Sobrino's own example of the Exodus, one can illustrate this difficulty. In the quotation we have just cited from Sobrino, he says that a merely historical statement becomes a statement about God, when the historical process is attributed to 'God's intervention'.[6] The point is that by mentioning 'God's intervention' one makes a highly

theological statement, which, I feel, cannot be made without a doxological implication. Any event remains purely history; but as soon as one attributes it to God's intervention there is much faith and hence doxology is involved. The historical minimum available in the synoptic gospels because of their theological (doxological) character will again illustrate this difficulty.

After such a distinction, defining Christian dogma to be a doxological statement, Sobrino goes on to verify the truth of the christological formulas on the basis of the things said about the person of the historical Jesus and his destiny. He undertakes this task first of all by criticizing the basic christological dogmas in general and the Chalcedonian formulation of the dogma of the person of Christ in particular. It is pertinent that we quote the Chalcedonian formulation before we see Sobrino's and Boff's criticism of it.

> "Following therefore the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body, the same one in being (homoousios) with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity like unto us in all things but sin. (cf. Heb. 4:15) .....".

> "We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one

> person (prosopon) and one hypostasis. He is not split or divided into two persons, but He is one and the same only begotten, God the word, the Lord Jesus Christ.....".[7]

Sobrino summarizes this formulation thus:

> "There exists in Christ only one person, one ultimate principle of subsistence: but on the other hand, the two natures are not separated nor intermingled".[8]

Sobrino does not question the fact that the formulation contains the truth which is valid for all ages. But he emphasizes that in order that it may continue to do so, it must be historically mediated in and through every kind of cultural, sociological, philosophical and theological analysis; hence the need for reinterpretation or reshaping of the dogma of Chalcedon.

The basic difficulty with the Chalcedonian formula, according to Sobrino, is not the difficulty of the modern mind in understanding certain terms such as person, nature and hypostatic union, although it remains a difficulty, but it is the fact that the formulation gives the impression that one knows at the very outset who God is and what it means to be a human being. But the problem that christology poses to us is quite the opposite, says Sobrino:

> "For it tells us that it is on the basis of Christ that we know who God is and what it means to be a human being".[9]

Sobrino, by this, makes the point that God is not known simply as a deity, as he is not just any deity, but he is known first and foremost as the Father of Jesus. And the

other point in this connection, which Sobrino considers crucial to Christology, is that christology calls into question the assumption of men that they know what human nature is and what divine nature is.

The second difficulty that Sobrino observes in the Chalcedonian formulation is that it suffers from lack of historicity. He says that while the concepts of nature and person are used to explain the mystery of the incarnation, the humanity of Christ is subsumed under the conceptual category of nature. The formula does not do justice to the humanity of Christ, and hence the concept of history is missing entirely. The conflict-ridden reality of Jesus, his temptations, his ignorance, and the internal and external process of development that he experienced, which are the historical categories highlighted in the New Testament, do not find expression in the Chalcedonian formula. Even his sinlessness is presented in abstract language understood as part of his divine nature.

The third and final major difficulty with the Chalcedonian formula, according to Sobrino, is that it suffers from lack of relationality. Although it does talk about Christ as the Son, and that implies a relationship with the Father, the analysis of the reality of Christ it makes is an emphasis on the relationship between humanity and divinity in Christ himself. It is the formal relationship of the Son as 'God of God' and 'Light of Light', and so on, that is preserved. Sobrino reckons that the fundamental datum of the Synoptic Gospels, that the truth about Jesus is to be found in his relation to his Father, is lost sight of in the Chalcedonian formula:

> "Insofar as the dogmatic formula centers on the relationship between divinity and humanity in Christ himself, it prompts us to overlook or forget the more basic relationship in Jesus' life: i.e., his unconditional trust in the Father and his complete obedience to the Father in his mission of proclaiming and realizing the Kingdon of God".[10]

Sobrino continues:

> "The New Testament tells us that the humanity of the eternal Son has a concrete, well defined history; and that the reference-pole of that history is the Father and the Kingdom of God".[10]

Having seen Sobrino's view of dogma and his criticism of the Chalcedonian formula in particular, we now briefly outline the criticism that Boff has to make of the definition of Chalcedon. The most basic limitation of the Chalcedonian formula, according to Boff, is that, when it speaks of the natures of Jesus, divine and human, it runs the grave risk of placing God and humanity, the infinite and the finite, the creator and the creature, within the same horizon and on the same level. This observation, however, is not peculiar to Boff. Friedrich Schleiermacher (d.1834), who set a tone of uneasiness with the traditional formulation of Chalcedon, undertook a critical examination of its language. His question as regards the Chalcedonian use of the term 'nature' was this:

> "How can divine and human be thus brought together under any single conception, as if they could both be more exact determinations coordinated to each other, of one and the same universal?"[11]

This tone of uneasiness with the language of Chalcedon continued in the Protestant tradition and was highlighted

by the rise of biblical research and its application to the person of Jesus in christological discussions. Some Catholic theologians also have joined in criticism of this kind. P. Schoonenberg, E. Schillebeeckx and Rahner are worth mentioning.

Boff rightly observes, as do most modern theologians, another difficulty with the formula of Chalcedon. No attempt was made by the definition of Chalcedon to elucidate how the hypostasis of the Logos assumes, appropriates and unites itself with the human phusis:

> "This dogmatic formula does not try to explain how God and man cooperate to form One and the Same Jesus, but to settle the criteria that ought to be present in every attempt at explanation, that is, the complete humanity and the true divinity of Jesus ought to simultaneously be maintained without dividing his fundamental unity".[12]

Like Sobrino, Boff also points out that the Chalcedonian formula does not take into account the evolution in Christ that is characteristically depicted in the Synoptic Gospels. Nor does it perceive, says Boff, the transformation that took place at the resurrection, where the Logos-flesh (sarx) became Logos-spirit (pneuma). He reckons that as far as the content of evolution is concerned, the incarnation as presented by Chalcedon does not help us to understand fully the Kenosis of God who humbles himself and makes himself anonymous.

Another observation Boff makes by way of criticism of Chalcedon is phrased by him rather polemically. I would rather quote his own words:

> "In the Chalcedonian formula one also notes an absence of a universal, cosmic perspective. It is a christology without a Logos. The Incarnation not only touches Jesus of Nazareth but all humanity".[13]

It is difficult to see what Boff means by calling Chalcedonian christology a 'Christology without a Logos'. Behind Chalcedon lies a whole tradition of discussion of the Logos-sarx and Logos-anthrōpos. This Logos had always been understood as the Logos of God the Creator, who created the Universe with this Logos. Moreover, the Logos was the reason behind everything that exists. This Logos was seen as a divine person, the second person of the Trinity, who is of the same essence (homoousios) as the Father. Hence it is difficult to see what on earth Boff means by calling Chalcedonian Christology as christology without a Logos. Perhaps, what he means is that if the nature or essence of Christ is under discussion, then for many a modern man this is no longer concerned with our existence, and it represents Christ to us merely as an object of knowledge. That such a view detaches christology from soteriology might be the objection that lies behind Boff's polemically expressed statement.

These points of criticism of Chalcedon from these two theologians, Sobrino and Boff, do not exactly arise directly from the Latin American situation. There is nothing specific about their criticism that could be considered peculiar to Latin American theology. In fact, this sort of criticism is common among quite a few Catholic theologians, let alone liberal Protestant theologians. For the purpose of our main discussion, I do not consider it necessary to go through

even a summary list of them, and their criticisms. However, one point that should be strongly emphasized before we proceed any further is that both Boff and Sobrino admit their strong belief that the Chalcedonian formula contains the truth about the person of Christ, although they feel the need to re-express it in a language quite different from that of Chalcedon. Our next step in this chapter is to summarize their statements as far as the person of Christ is concerned and examine the category they employ in their attempt to re-express the truth of Chalcedon.

(ii)

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF SOBRINO

Sobrino asserts repeatedly that dogmatic statements (which he calls doxological statements) about Christ can only be obtained indirectly through the history of Jesus:

> "We are justified in starting our christology with the historical Jesus; that is the only way in which our dogmatic formulas can have any real meaningfulness".[14]

Arguing vehemently that for him the starting point of christology is the historical Jesus, Sobrino relies heavily on Mark's gospel, as we indicated in the previous chapter. He traces stages of Jesus' life and ministry which, he claims, is christological. (His view of chronology as far as the Synoptic Gospels are concerned is problematic).[15] Using the Markan framework of Jesus' life, he studies the figure of Jesus and, in doing so, he concentrates on the 'relationship' of the figure of Jesus with the one he calls his Father.

> "Jesus' distinctiveness and uniqueness shows up first and foremost in his distinctive and unique relationship with the one he calls his Father. To the latter he shows complete confidence. To him he offers perfect obedience in carrying out his mission to proclaim and realize the Kingdom of God. This relationship can be described as one of filiation or sonship".[16]

Sobrino expounds the person of Christ with this relational category which has two aspects to it: one, Jesus in his relation to the Father, and the other Jesus in his relation to his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom. We shall have to examine in the following few pages this 'relational category' that Sobrino employs:

> "In historical terms we can only come to know the historical Jesus in and through the notion of God's Kingdom. By the same token, we can only come to understand what is meant by the kingdom of God in and through Jesus".[17]

According to Sobrino, the most certain historical datum about Jesus' life is that the concept which dominated his preaching, the reality which gave meaningfulness to all his activity, was 'the Kingdom of God'. To understand the figure of Jesus in his relation to the Kingdom of God, Sobrino feels compelled to follow the framework that Mark's Gospel provides. Starting with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, as suggested by Mk 1:14, he traces two distinct stages in his life: one, the period that extends till the crisis in Galilee and the other the period that follows it. In these two phases Sobrino recognises a rupture that, according to him, affected Jesus' attitude not only towards his life and mission but also in the very

depths of his person and his conception of God and his kingdom.

Considering the first stage of Jesus' ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God, Sobrino emphasizes the eschatological character of this kingdom. In doing so he calls Jesus the bringer of eschatological crisis who preached that things could not go on as before and that there was a need for conversion: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14), for the end was now at hand. Sobrino reckons that theology always has interpreted this eschatological crisis in two ways, either in temporal terms which meant that the chronological end of history is now imminent, or in anthropological terms which meant that the ultimate reality of humanity and history is now at hand. Sobrino avers:

> "The common feature in both interpretations is the fact that Jesus offers us the possibility of attaining our true identity by facing up to a crisis and undergoing a conversion. Only in that way can the kingdom come about".[18]

Sobrino points out that this notion of the Kingdom of God was not a new one for the contemporaries of Jesus. For the Hebrews, the original expression Malkuth Yahweh had a dynamic, as opposed to static, meaning. As a dynamic concept, it meant that God is he who acts, he who acts with power, and also that the existing order has to be transformed. Jesus faithfully observes the Jewish traditional expectations of the Kingdom of God as they are embodied in the prophetic and apocalyptic formulations. Yet Jesus seems to make some implicit claims at least in his relation to the kingdom that

make his proclamation of the kingdom distinctive. Hence there is a need to examine the self-awareness of Jesus in relation to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Sobrino speaks at length about Jesus' own consciousness vis-à-vis the Kingdom. For Sobrino, the study of human consciousness is vital to examine the category of relationship which he uses to expound the person of Christ.

Several theologians have attempted to reconstruct a christology based on the self-consciousness of Jesus. Sobrino has also endeavoured to show that one way of coming to know the reality of Jesus is to become familiar with his consciousness. The problem of Jesus' own consciousness is much debated in both enegesis and systematic theology. The question normally raised is: "To what extent is Jesus' human consciousness accessible to us?" Sobrino shows that he is quite aware of this problem.[19] He rightly points out that modern exegetes rule out the possibility that one can know for certain what Jesus must have thought of himself, from what he said about himself, and that they also show the difficulties in any attempt to discern the explicit consciousness of Jesus on the basis of the christological titles he himself may have claimed or permitted others to ascribe to him. The problem in brief, according to Sobrino, is:

> "The absolute self-awareness of Jesus can scarcely be derived directly from the data provided by the New Testament".[20]

Sobrino also argues that the traditional theology began with the supposition of Jesus' personal union with the eternal Logos. It sought support from Johannine

passages like "I and the Father are one", (Jn 10:30 and also 10:36, 38), and the so called Johannine logion in Matthew. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son (Mtt 11:27). Traditional theology held that this union had to be an object of awareness in the human condition of Jesus. Sobrino is at one with many modern theologians in asserting that the traditional dogmatic supposition that Jesus had explicit awareness of his divine Sonship is no longer tenable. Sobrino holds that the problem as regards the self-awareness of Jesus can be solved by focussing on relational consciousness (Jesus' consciousness of his relationship with the Father), and not on absolute consciousness (what Jesus might have explicitly thought and said about himself). He maintains that this relational consciousness, which is Jesus' own distinctive consciousness, can be deduced from his general attitudes and actions toward the Father and the Kingdom of God.

What are these attitudes and actions towards the kingdom that give us an insight into his self-awareness? Jesus' actions included miracles, casting out devils, pardoning sins, standing by the side of the helpless and defeated and throwing in his lot with the outcasts and sinners (hamartōloi).[21] Jesus' action and words indicate some awareness on his part that he himself had a decisive role to play insofar as the right moment or the proper time (kairos) as he knew that the arrival of the kingdom had its own kairos. The Synoptics use to denote miracle - by using terms like dunamis (act of power) ergon (work) and semeion (sign). These terms indicated signs of the breaking in of

the kingdom as God's gracious act of salvation. By proclaiming the approaching of God in grace,[22] both by his words and his whole activity of miracles and pardoning sins, Jesus showed that in his person the kingdom was already breaking in. Hence he says: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out devils, then the reign of God is upon you". (Lk 11:20).

Sobrino therefore goes on to assert:

> "Both his miracles and forgiveness of sins are primarily signs of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. They are signs of liberation, and only in that context can they help to shed light on the person of Jesus".[23]

The whole point of Jesus' authority, which exceeds that of any figure of the Old Testament, is that, in all he does, Jesus shows awareness of the fact that people's ultimate salvation or condemnation is functionally related to his own person.[24] Hence Jesus calls people to conversion: "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14). While Jesus proclaims the Kingdom as God's drawing close in grace, he also demands radical conversion. This means that passive acceptance of God's grace, even confidence, is not enough. The Kingdom of God presupposes a radical change in one's form of existence. Jesus invites everyone to follow his life in all its radicalness. Their discipleship is typified by Jesus in all his historical correctness. Jesus seems to show awareness here that he himself is the only way to enter the kingdom. As Sobrino puts it:

> "Though he himself is distinct from the thing they

> hope for, his person and course is the only way to enter the kingdom. No longer is Jesus simply the one who proclaims and anticipates the Kingdom. Now he is also, the new, unknown, and painful way - the only way - in which one can come to understand that God is drawing near to human beings and how he is doing it".[25]

These considerations on the relational consciousness of Jesus as far as the kingdom of God was concerned makes Sobrino conclude that any initial attempt to approach the historical Jesus must be done from the standpoint of the kingdom. And his first basic thesis about Jesus is:

> "He did not preach about himself, or even simply about God, but rather about the kingdom of God".[26]

The next pole of reference for Jesus' relational consciousness is the Father. In his pursuit of the investigation of Jesus' relationship with the Father, Sobrino examines the concept of faith as that which characterizes the life of Jesus and his relation to the one he calls Father. The prayer life of Jesus is also seen by Sobrino as a feature that throws light on the person of Christ. Sobrino's investigation may be summarized as follows. The concept of faith is to be understood in its Old Testament sense. It is seen as a way of life vis-à-vis God:

> "Faith is seen to be a way of life vis-à-vis God, quite in line with the Old Testament view. Faith is trust in God, a way of life grounded in Another who gives security and meaning to one's own existence".[27]

Faith is not an act of cognition but of loyal surrender of self to God and the mission entrusted by the same, which implies fidelity to them both. While on the one hand Jesus had unconditional trust and absolute obedience, his faith on the other hand had to undergo growth and development because it was immersed in history.

Sobrino alludes to chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel, where the evangelist narrates Jesus' leaving Galilee and heading towards Caesarea Philippi and Jerusalem, and argues that Mark, like the other Synoptics, each with its own theological interest, depicts a crisis which is based on some historical event in Jesus' life. There is a rupture, therefore, in his own consciousness and external activity. This suggests also a rupture in his faith. His absolute confidence, an aspect of his faith, which was characteristic of the first phase of his life undergoes a crisis. Jesus predicts his passion, as death seems to stare him in the face. His mission seems to have failed as it leads him to death. There is some confusion and doubt on his part as far as the imminence of the kingdom is concerned. Although the basic elements of absolute trust and confidence in the Father and total obedience to his mission seem to continue, it was not a direct continuation, but a rupture due to the crisis; however, it was not a complete rupture either as the second phase of his life was not completely opposed to the first. Thus Sobrino would like to maintain that Jesus' faith went hand in hand with his concrete history, and that it grew in the historical mediation of conflict-ridden situations.

Sobrino views the faith of Jesus also from the point of view of the human condition of Jesus. Two elements of this human condition on which he focuses attention are the temptations and the ignorance of Jesus:

> "Faith does not signify possession of God and his kingdom but rather an ongoing search for them. And paradoxically enough, temptation and ignorance are part and parcel of the historical completion and perfection of this search".[28]

As regards the temptation scenes found in the beginning of the Synoptic Gospels, Sobrino admits that they are anachronistically placed at the start of Jesus' public life, as they are the result of theological reflection rather than historical description of what happened at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The temptations of Jesus offer a key to understanding his faith in its aspects of trust in the Father and obedience to the mission of the kingdom. Jesus was tempted with a choice of either surrendering to or rejecting the Father and he also had a choice between true and false messianism. Sobrino observes that after the Galilean crisis there is the growing satisfaction of Jesus' conflicts, the climax of which is depicted in the temptation scene of Gethsemane, and on the cross, where he feels abandoned by the Father (Mark 15:34). Temptation as a pervasive atmosphere historically-conditions Jesus' faith:

> "The concrete actualizing of the basic sonship which he experiences at the start (Mk 1:11) takes place through the overcoming of temptation in history. It is this process that gives him a new concrete Sonship (Mark 14:37). The faith of Jesus is fashioned through his history".[29]

Sobrino considers the positive features of Jesus' ignorance as they are portrayed in the Gospels. On the anthropological level there is no reason to be surprised about some possible ignorance or error on the part of Jesus, says Sobrino. Jesus was ignorant not merely in matters of incidental detail but right to the core of his own person and mission. He was ignorant of the day or time of the arrival of the kingdom and of the day of revelation of the Father. Sobrino asserts that while ignorance may be an imperfection according to the Hellenistic conception, such ignorance and error on the part of Jesus, in terms of biblical faith, lead to the height of perfection, as it is the essence of faith to let God be God. While the ignorance of Jesus presents him as fully human, yet it supports him in his faith in a transcendent God.

Sobrino also briefly considers the fact that Jesus addresses the same transcendent God as 'Abba', showing filial relationship. Joachim Jeremias, in his scholarly works The Prayers of Jesus[30] and New Testament Theology I,[31] has examined the distinctive character of the use of 'Abba' in his prayers. His conclusions are accepted by most scholars as presuppositions for their study of the filial relationship of the historical Jesus with his Father and of his consciousness of this relationship. Sobrino also uses the conclusions of Jeremias as presuppositions for his consideration of Jesus' life of prayer which again shows an explicit relationship between Jesus and the Father. Jesus' prayer implies that the meaning of his life cannot be complete without reference to someone else, even though Jesus himself is gradually fashioning the meaning of his life, says Sobrino.

From these considerations of Jesus' relationship with the Father, Sobrino attempts to bring out the implications of such an understanding for systematic christology. He reckons that although classical christology points out that the human and divine elements in Jesus are indivisible and unconfusedly united, it does not give an adequate explanation of the categories used to explain this union. Sobrino proposes, therefore, to reformulate the divinity of Jesus Christ in 'relational categories':

> "From the standpoint of the history of Jesus' faith, however, the first evident thing is that it is the Father, not the eternal Logos, that is directly correlated with Jesus. It is his relationship to the Father that constitutes the essence of his person".[32]

> "The divinity of Jesus consists of his concrete relationship to the Father. This unique, peculiar, and unrepeatable way of being in relationship with the Father is what constitutes his concrete way of participating in divinity".[32]

Asserting that Jesus' relationship to the Father is the history of that relationship, Sobrino goes as far as to say that Jesus becomes the Son of God rather than that he simply is the Son of God. Jesus of Nazareth becomes the Son of God in and through his concrete history. Sobrino is aware of the implications of this statement, which might shock some theologians, as it has a strong 'adoptionistic' tendency. He confesses that both in classic christology of descent, as well as in his own christology of ascent, there is the limitation of the human mind in trying to understand what 'becoming'

might mean in God.[33] The advantage of his own model, he says, is that it does justice to the history of Jesus as presented in the New Testament. Our discussion however of Sobrino's adoptionistic tendency will have to wait until our criticism of his position in the last part of this chapter.

The second important implication of this sort of understanding of Christ's person is that Jesus reveals himself as the Son, as the way to the Father, as the way one becomes Son of God:

> "Jesus does not reveal the absolute mystery. He reveals how one may respond to that absolute mystery through trust and obedience to the mission of the Kingdom".[34]

This is an operational or functional understanding of Christ's person, because according to Sobrino this also is a very important aspect in our understanding of Jesus' divinity. In this model Jesus is seen as the 'first born' as it signifies his sonship as well as his brotherliness, thereby suggesting his relationship with other human beings.

> "Hence being the 'first born' is part and parcel of Jesus' divinity. He traverses the way to God and makes it possible for his brothers and sisters to do the same".[35]

In this relational category, therefore, his approach to the person of Jesus is to find out to whom Jesus surrendered himself and how he did it. Underlying this approach is the Hegelian understanding of what the person is: Jesus is a person who becomes the person he is

precisely through his surrender to the other, who is the Father. Sobrino cites Hegel:

> "In friendship and love I renounce my abstract personality and thereby obtain a concrete personality. The authentic reality of the person, then, consists in submerging oneself ontologically in the other".[36]

Sobrino's exposition of the person of Christ in this relational category as above, still raises a question in the mind of the reader. And the question is, what is the difference between Jesus and us? How does one arrive at the uniqueness of Jesus by using this relational category in historical terms?

> "The fundamental difference is that", says Sobrino, "Jesus is the one who has lived faith in all its pristine fullness, who has opened up the pathway of faith and traversed it to the very end. We might also say that he is the one who has lived hope absolutely, precisely insofar as he experienced the Father's total abandonment on the cross, whereas in the case of the christian we find that the kingdom has become something definitive, at least as a promise".[37]

This explanation of Sobrino's does not bring out the uniqueness of Jesus as the God-Man.

From the examination above we can summarize Sobrino's position as follows: The person of Jesus is essentially relational, not absolute in itself. Jesus should be understood in terms of something quite distinct from, nonetheless quite bound up with, his self, i.e. God and his Kingdom. We may just allude here that Sobrino is heavily dependent on W. Pannenberg's way of understanding this

relational category. For Pannenberg argues that the Son-ship of Jesus can adequately be understood only in terms of his relationship with God the Father, and that only the personal communion of Jesus with the Father proves that he is one and the same as the Son of that Father.[38]

(iii)

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF BOFF

In this section we shall briefly examine the christological statements of Boff as far as the person of Christ was concerned. Boff is in full agreement with Sobrino when he asserts that his starting-point of christology is the historical Jesus himself. He says his attempt to understand the human being and God with Jesus himself as his starting-point is an inverse route when compared to the route of most other attempts that begin either with the human or divine nature or the meaning of person.[39]

It is the Jesus of Nazareth who is his starting point. In his study of the Jesus of history, Boff, like Sobrino, examines the relation of Jesus to God and the Kingdom. This Jesus of Nazareth, according to him, as it is also according to Sobrino, is to be seen in terms of the Kingdom. For Jesus preached the kingdom of God and understood his own person and mission in relation to the kingdom. The kingdom of God, according to Boff, signifies total liberation:

> "Kingdom of God signifies the realization of a utopia cherished in human hearts, total human and cosmic liberation. It is the new situation of an old world, now replete with God and reconciled with itself".[40]

And he adds:

> "Total liberation and its attendant freedom is the essence of God's kingdom, and that is an eschatological favour from God".[41]

Boff emphasizes that when Jesus preached the kingdom as an eschatological gift against the back drop of the apocalyptic vision of reality, he understood himself as the essential element of the kingdom:

> "Christ understood himself not only as a preacher and prophet of this good news (Gospel) but as an element of the new transformed situation. He is the new human person, the kingdom already present though veiled in weakness".[42]

It is in this sense that Boff describes Jesus as the liberator. He argues against regionalizing the Kingdom of God in one way or another, for the Kingdom, he says, retains its totality and universality. The liberation that Jesus preaches is a total liberation of all history, not just part of it. The kingdom of God he announces is not a liberation from this or that evil, from political oppression of the Romans, from the economic difficulties of the people or from sin alone. However, from Jesus' point of view, says Boff, the total liberation was anticipated in a process inaugurated in his own person, and this process embodied partial liberations that remain open to fulfilment.

As Jesus understood himself in relation to the kingdom, he comported himself with extreme sovereignty. He spoke with God and of God in a manner regarded as blasphemous by his contemporaries (Mk 2:7, Jn 5:18). He seemed to act in the name and the place of God. He spoke with such authority that possession of the kingdom was made dependent on adhesion to his own person. If Jesus comported himself with such sovereignty, then the question is 'how did he understand himself?'. Boff like Sobrino reflects on Jesus' attitude, actions and words. He argues that Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels never directly applied the expression 'Son of God' to himself. He also asserts that it was the post-resurrection faith that was to confer this title on him.[43] According to Boff it was the profound experience of the Father, as well as the corresponding sonship, that constitute the basis of Jesus' awareness of being the messenger and the inaugurator of the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not use the title 'Son of God' to express this profound experience of his. It is not clear, however, how Boff arrives at the conclusion that Jesus had a profound experience of the Father. It seems to me that he is making the same assertion that Sobrino also makes when he speaks of the relational consciousness of Jesus in terms of absolute obedience. Boff is also indebted to J. Jeremias for the understanding of Jesus' use of the term 'Abba' to address his Father. On the whole Sobrino and Boff are similar in their understanding of the historical Jesus' consciousness of himself in relation to the Father and the Kingdom.

From this understanding of the 'relational category' (although he does not use this phrase explicitly) with

regard to the historical Jesus, Boff moves on to expound theologically his understanding of the person of Christ. According to Boff, Jesus is the man who is God. Before we see the way he explains this, it must be said that Boff acknowledges the mystery of the truth contained in the traditional presentation of Christ, especially in the Chalcedonian central thesis which affirms the unity of the concrete being Jesus: 'one and the same Lord'. Boff affirms that the person (hypostasis), according to the dogmatic formula, is the principle of unity.

> "Person (hypostasis) in the dogmatic formula only seeks to express the principle of unity in being, that which makes anything one".[44]

This is a datum which must not be lost, says Boff. Thus his assertion seems to be soundly based on the traditional position.

Although he seems to assert the truth and the traditional formula, a closer look at his exposition of the person of Christ is necessary. Christian dogma always reiterated the truth that Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, and that consequently human nature cannot of itself mean human person. According to this traditional position, Christ is a human being but not a human person. . According to the Chalcedonian formula only the divine person and not the human one subsists in Jesus. This point is not denied by Boff. In fact he affirms the traditional position in a more specific way as follows:

> "The eternal Person assumed to itself the 'human' person of Jesus; this human person was not annihilated but totally realized, not in itself, but in the divine Person.... The basis of his life (the man Jesus' life) did not reside in himself, but in the divine Person".[45]

Thus Boff's understanding of the person of Christ is in keeping with the traditional concepts of hypostatic union and enhypostatos. Boff however moves from the traditional concepts of nature and person which are static. His definitions of nature and person are as follows.

Nature as a dynamic concept, says Boff:

> "....consists in all that is physically, psychically, historically, sociologically, and spiritually given - all that which precedes a free decision and makes it possible".[46]

From this dynamic concept of nature in human beings he goes on to define person thus:

> "'Person' is this same nature thus marked, insofar as it is in possession of itself and realizes itself dynamically and relationally in communion with the totality of surrounding reality".
> ".....Person is possession of self, self-consciousness and interior autonomy".[46]

The notions of self possession and relationality in self-awareness or consciousness are important to underline in this definition of person by Boff. Although 'person' is an 'I' in itself and for itself, it is a relational reality, says Boff:

> "The 'I' exists and subsists only if it opens itself to a 'You'. The original word is not 'I' but 'I - You - We'. It is only by means of the

> 'You' that the 'I' discovers itself as an 'I'. The person is indeed autonomy and freedom though not freedom from others but freedom for others".[47]

This is not a new and original insight of Boff. Many modern thinkers have come to understand human personality as a centre of relationships through self-consciousness (self-possession) and self giving. A person in the modern understanding is someone complete in himself but also someone who is constituted by his relations.

Based on this modern dynamic concept of person Boff would want to expound the person of Christ as follows. The more the human beings relate to others and go out of themselves, the more they grow and become human; and the more they are in the other the more they are in themselves and become themselves. So it was the case with Jesus. The more he resided in God the more God resided in him. Boff also adds:

> "The more the man-Jesus dwelled in God, the more he was divinized. The more God existed in Jesus the more God was humanized".[48]

In this use of relation category the personal-identity of Jesus with the eternal Son means, according to Boff, that Jesus was a human being who could relate to God and be in God to the point of being his Son. If we understand him rightly, Boff seems to say that it was when Jesus' openness to the point of becoming fully human, and the self-emptying of God coincided, that God became human in Jesus of Nazareth. This is the dynamic way in which Boff would like us to understand the incarnation. For him the concept of incarnation signifies not merely that

God assumed and penetrated the concrete human reality of Jesus of Nazareth, but that Jesus also actively assumes and penetrates the divine reality of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

That Jesus assumes and penetrates the divine reality of the eternal Son is explained in terms of kenosis. There seems to be a twofold kenosis in the incarnation as understood by Boff. While he does not deny the self-emptying of God on the one hand, he affirms on the other hand the kenosis of the man Jesus. Jesus does not have an 'hypostasis', a subsistence, enduring in himself and for himself. He was completely emptied of himself to be completely filled by the reality of the Other, of God the Father. Boff goes on to emphasize that Jesus realized himself radically in the other; and that he was not anything for himself, but all for others and for God. This understanding of the kenosis of Jesus of Nazareth is not without problems. We shall discuss these in the final section of the chapter.

One positive point of Boff's dynamic concept of the incarnation is to be noted. While affirming that the incarnation was not over when the Word was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, he also asserts that God assumed, not an abstract humanity, but rather a concrete, individualized, and historically conditioned man, Jesus of Nazareth. In the growth and the historical development of this Jesus a truly incarnating process exists. God is seen in this understanding as God who went on assuming the human concrete nature of Jesus according to how this manifested itself and developed. The inverse

also is true that the human nature of Jesus revealed the divinity according to how it increased and matured.[49] Jesus did have temptations but he conquered them from within. Jesus was without sin. Boff alludes to W. Pannenberg's understanding of sinlessness of Jesus.[50] According to Boff, the sinlessness of Christ came not from a special quality of his nature, but from an intimate and uninterrupted union with God. Boff understands sin as follows:

> "It (sin) consists in closing in on oneself to a point where one excludes God, in a centering of the 'I' on itself, an incapacity to love without egoism".[51]

By arguing that Jesus emptied himself of his own self and completely entered in God so as to be without sin, Boff would say in what exactly the sinlessness of Jesus consists:

> "....the sinlessness of Jesus does not consist so much in the purity of his ethical attitudes, in the rectitude of his individual acts, but in the fundamental situation of his being in God's presence and united with God".[51]

Considering this more positively, Boff asserts the sinlessness of Jesus as a more deeply rooted reality which is based on the fundamental fact that there was no separation from God in the life of Jesus.

The implication from all these considerations of the person of Christ is, according to Boff, that like Jesus, all human beings find themselves in a situation of openness to all of reality. Through love we can open ourselves, adds Boff, in such a way to God and others

that we completely empty ourselves and fill ourselves in the same proportion with reality of others and God. Boff sums up his dynamic and relational concept of the incarnation as follows:

> "The Incarnation contains a message that concerns not only Jesus Christ but also the nature and destiny of every person. By means of the Incarnation we come to know who in fact we are and what we are destined for. We come to know the nature of God, who in Jesus Christ comes to our encounter with a face like ours - respecting our otherness - in order to assume human nature and fill it with his divine reality".[52]

(iv)

A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Having examined the christologies of Sobrino and Boff in the last two sections of this chapter, we shall now attempt, in this last section, a theological assessment dealing summarily with their positions. As is obvious from the sections above, their positions are basically similar. Hence a summary dealing with them would be sufficient for our general argument. Both Sobrino and Boff employ, as we observed above, the relational category to expound the person of Christ. Sobrino alludes to St. Augustine's use of this category in the psychological models of his exposition of the doctrine of Trinity. Since St. Augustine, the Church also has used this category as far as the doctrine of the Trinity was concerned. However, when we analyse this category as used by Sobrino and Boff there are some

problems. We shall consider these briefly in the remaining few pages.

a) THE DIVINITY:

Sobrino and Boff speak of the divinity of Jesus in terms of his relation to the Father, which was characterized by absolute obedience, unconditional trust and confidence. These characteristics of his relation to the Father and his kingdom are traced from the general attitude and actions of the historical Jesus. By this term 'general attitude' they mean, not the assured facts about his words and deeds, but the manner in which he preached the kingdom and the relational awareness of the mission entrusted to him by the Father. Our objection is, can we speak of the absolute obedience of Jesus on the grounds of this so called general attitude. Is it not the case that only in the light of the total Christ, encountered by the first christians as the Risen Lord, that we can affirm with theological certitude that Jesus lived to the end a life of absolute obedience and unconditional child-like trust and confidence. Sobrino in particular seems either to confuse the term 'historical' with the term 'kerygmatic' in this case, or to claim too much about the historical Jesus without sufficient evidence. Now I am by no means suggesting that these should be a sharp distinction between the historical Jesus and the Risen Christ as suggested by Harnack.

It is one thing to be a man and another to be God. How then can it be established simply from Jesus' general

attitude and actions that he is the eternal in the midst of time? Sobrino's answer seems to be given in the following statement which we have cited earlier:

> "The divinity of Jesus consists of his concrete relationship to the Father. This unique, peculiar, unrepeatable way of being in relationship with the Father is what constitutes his concrete way of participating in divinity".[53]

This statement of Sobrino, in spite of the terms 'unique', 'peculiar', and unrepeatable (the terms he does not explain), does not make it clear how Jesus, although he was one of us, was also different from us. Moreover it is not clear how he could use the terms 'unique', 'peculiar' and 'unrepeatable' on the basis of the historical investigation, which could never conclusively demonstrate Jesus' consciousness (the relational awareness) to be unique. Sobrino as we cited earlier on page 84, argues that Jesus was different from us in the way he lived his faith to the pristine fullness. There seems to be some sort of reductionism in this understanding. It seems similar to the reductionism of Dr. J.A.T. Robinson when he refers to the 'adequacy' of Jesus' moral quality and stature.[54] Professor S.W. Sykes has argued that such terminology is inadequate,[55] a criticism that holds good against Sobrino's reduction of Jesus' divinity to his faith lived in pristine fullness. It is true that 'christologies from below' endeavour to establish the fullness of Christ's humanity; however, as Professor Sykes has indicated, the difficulty is when one has asserted that Jesus was one of us and yet goes on to say

that Jesus was different from us in that he was God. The two liberation theologies, Sobrino and Boff, seem to want to argue on the one hand that there was nothing remarkable about Jesus' history and yet, on the other, that it points to the absolute so that we can say that to have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father (cf. Jn 14:9), and that indeed Jesus was divine. To make such statements much more is needed than the reductionistic assertion that Jesus' concrete faith lived in pristine fullness constituted his divinity. It is true, but not sufficient, to say that Jesus was different from us merely in the way he lived his faith.

When discussing Jesus' faith in terms of obedience and trust, Sobrino uses language which shows some tendency towards adoptionism.[56] Although Boff also shows the same tendency, in Sobrino's case it seems to be more obvious. When using the relational category, Sobrino actually suggests that Jesus becomes the Son of God rather than that he simply is the Son of God. When he says this he seems to say much more than that Jesus becomes aware that he was the Son of God. It is one thing to suggest that Jesus gradually became aware of being the Son of God, and yet another to claim that Jesus becomes the Son of God. Although Sobrino tries to avoid all ontological categories and prefers the relational, yet when he uses the word 'becomes' he holds on to an ontological term. Moreover he emphasizes that some language of 'becoming' is necessary, and that this 'becoming' is a mystery. However, from our point of view, Sobrino seems to suggest some sort of adoptionism when he says that: "Jesus gradually

fashioned himself into the Son of God, became the Son of God".[57] And the explanation he gives for the need to use such a language, as we indicated here and in page 83 , is not convincing enough.

Boff in his turn seems to soften out such adoptionistic tendency in his approach to the person of Christ. In his use of the concept of kenosis, for instance, Jesus of Nazareth is seen as emptying himself to such an extent that he is filled by the Second Person of the Trinity. Boff seems to imply that God's self-emptying and the man-Jesus' self-emptying reach a climax at some point when Jesus actually becomes the Son of God.[58] As we indicated earlier, Boff uses kenosis in a twofold way, the kenosis of God and the kenosis of the man Jesus. He argues that Jesus of Nazareth realizes himself radically in the Other, the Other being God. This language, with its Hegelian connotation of the spirit coming to realize itself as the other, seems to suggest that there was a person of Jesus of Nazareth who emptied himself so much as to become the Son of God. Thus we could see an underlying tendency of adoptionism in Boff as well.

b) THE HUMANITY:

As far as the humanity of Jesus is concerned, Sobrino and Boff have endeavoured to maintain the fullness of humanity of Jesus. In point of fact, as we indicated above, they seem to have argued for Jesus' humanity even at the expense of a good explanation of his divinity. A closer look at the way they speak of the human consciousness of Jesus is necessary. Some comparison with

European discussion of this issue, in particular with that of K. Rahner, may throw light on the approach of these theologians of liberation. First of all, it should be reiterated here that neither Sobrino's discussion, nor that of Boff, is concerned with the explicit self-consciousness of Jesus as that is not available from the New Testament data. Their discussions are based on what they call relational consciousness. According to them, Christ's knowledge as being 'immediate' has no credibility if we have to maintain that Jesus was truly human and that he grew as normal human beings do. They also assert that Jesus had limitations to his knowledge even regarding his own future. They, like Rahner, would see it not as a sign of imperfection, but as a necessary condition for true freedom and total surrender, in faith, to his Father. They also deny, as K. Rahner does, the traditional idea of the 'beatific vision' as conferring on Jesus an immediate and adequate knowledge of God and his own identity.

In this regard we will do well to summarize K. Rahner's views on the human consciousness of Jesus.[59] He speaks of a multilayered consciousness of Jesus, and draws a distinction between objective and unobjective human knowledge. He argues that in Jesus' case the consciousness of his being one with God was not in the sense of God's essence being before his mind's-eye, as it were, as an object, as if standing opposite an object. Emphasizing the concept of hypostatic union as

an ontologically highest possible union, he argues that Christ's human spirit was aware of God unobjectively, in a manner analogous to the awareness which human spirits have of their own purely human spirit and of its capacity to transcend. Rahner would say, therefore, that Jesus thematized and interpreted to himself this unobjective knowledge in proportion to his growth according to his circumstances. On this view, Jesus had to go through a history of self-interpretation and was thus capable of a genuine dialogue with God.

This understanding of his consciousness also portrays Jesus as the recipient of revelation. And this is important to the understanding that Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation. Jesus did not merely bring revelation, rather he is the revelation. He is the focus of revelation history in person. And Christ had to interpret this to himself in the concrete historical conditions of his human growth. In this connection Rahner indicates that the basic factor of the incarnation was not the idea of 'assumption' in the sense of taking on something completely in itself as an alien element; but rather the idea of the self-emptying and becoming of the logos.

When we compare Rahner's concept of the self-emptying logos with the concept of the self-emptying of Jesus, which according to Sobrino and Boff constitutes his divinity, the two approaches seem to have much in common: the same dynamic concept of the incarnation is found in both cases. What is more, according to Sobrino and Boff, Jesus is a recipient of revelation who interprets the

revelation to himself in every concrete situation. But, on the other hand, there seems to be some difference in their positions. Rahner, following the Johannine formula, 'the Word became flesh', boldly asserts that God who is unchangeable in himself can change in another. This change is not an imperfection, but on the contrary is a mark of perfection. Rahner thinks in terms of the pre-existent Logos becoming man, the humanity not in any way existing prior to the becoming, whereas Sobrino and Boff seem to think in adoptionistic terms of a prior humanity (concrete in the person of Jesus of Nazareth) which by self-emptying becomes God.

One positive point, however, in Boff's is his view of the sinlessness of Jesus. Of course sinlessness is one of the most powerful ways of speaking of the communion between Jesus and God. It is not to be understood merely as moral rectitude. But rather as a reality robbed in his manner of living a life in which as a recipient of grace and revelation he responds to God in the most perfect way possible. This sinlessness again should not be taken to mean that Jesus did not experience temptation. The temptations that Jesus had indicate, not that Jesus could not sin, but that he did not sin. The truth is not that Jesus was not able to sin (non posse peccare) but that Jesus able not to sin (posse non peccare).

From these considerations in the four sections of this chapter our assessment can be summed up as follows. There seems to be nothing particularly original that these Latin American theologians, Sobrino and Boff, have

contributed to contemporary discussions of christology. They use mostly the language used by many contemporary theologians from elsewhere. Many of these theologians have drawn insights from new perspectives on human personality. These theological insights have resulted in a new vitality in theological discussion of the person of Christ. They have considered the new perspective of human personality seen as a centre of relationships through self-consciousness (self-possession) and self-giving. A person is therefore someone complete in himself but also someone who is constituted by his relations. Sobrino and Boff by using the same relational category in terms of self-possession and self-giving have fallen in line with these theologians to a certain extent. However they become radical when they suggest that Jesus becomes the Son of God. This seems not only reductionist but dangerously close to the language of adoptionism.

CHAPTER 3 : NOTES

1. Jon Sobrino, S.J., CHRISTOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS, SCM, London, 1978, p.3.

2. Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., JESUS CHRIST LIBERATOR, SPCK, London, 1980, p.279.

3. J. Sobrino, op.cit., XX.

4. "These two authors" (W. Pannenberg and E. Schlink), says Sobrino, "distinguish between ontological statements and kerygmatic statements. I call the latter "historical" statements for the sake of a more readily available nomenclature. Cf. Note 6, ch. 10 in CHRISTOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS, p.344.

5. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.322.

6. ibid., p.322

7. Neuner & Dupuis, THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, The Mercier Press, Dublin, 1976, p.147-148.

8. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.328.

9. Ibid., p.323.

10. Ibid., p.332.

11. F. Schleiermacher, THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, Ed. H.R. Mackintosh, J.S. Stewart, T.N.T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1966, p.392.

12. L. Boff, op.cit., p.190.

13. Ibid., p.193-194.

14. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.334.

15. Sobrino seems to confuse here chronological analysis with synthetic judgement. One may reconstruct and so retrace the movement from the historical Jesus through the cross and Resurrection to its climax in the early Church's proclamation of the same Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God in an analytic fashion. But the question still remains: "What is the decisive factor in this development that allows one to integrate all the four elements of the historical Jesus, the Cross, Resurrection and Incarnation?"

16. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.335-336.

17. ibid.,

18. ibid., p.355.

19. ibid., pp.67-70.

20. ibid., p.70.

21. hamartoloi is normally translated 'sinners', but it is better translated as those with whom no respectable Jew would have anything to do. William Barclay translates it so.

22. J. Sobrino, op.cit., pp.46-50.

23. ibid., p.48.

24. ibid., p.69

25. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.59.

26. ibid., p.60.

27. ibid., p.88.

28. ibid., p.96.

29. ibid., p.100.

30. J. Jeremias, THE PRAYERS OF JESUS, SCM, London, 1967.

31. J. Jeremias, NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, SCM, London, 1971, pp.61-6

32. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.105.

33. ibid., p.338 - 'becoming' is seen as containing an element of mystery. This word as used by Sobrino is to do justice to the history of Jesus. Nonetheless, how he avoids adoptionism is not clear.

34. ibid., p.105.

35. ibid., p.107.

36. ibid., p.141, No. 24 - cited from Vodesungen über die Philosophie der Religion III, vol. p.239

37. ibid., p.107.

38. Wolfhart Pannenberg, JESUS - GOD AND MAN, SCM, London, 1968.

39. L. Boff, op.cit., ch.10, pp.178ff.

40. ibid., p.63.

41. ibid., p.281.

42. ibid., p.64.

43. Boff, however, does not suggest that Jesus was made the Son of God because the first christians said so.

44. ibid., p.191.

45. ibid., p.192 - the words within brackets are mine.

46. ibid., p.192.

47. ibid., p.193.

48. ibid., p.197.

49. It is not clear if Boff means that Jesus became aware of being the Son or in fact that he became the Son in that the divinity increased.

50. W. Pannenberg, op.cit., pp.354-364.

51. L. Boff, op.cit., p.202.

52. ibid., p.205.

53. J. Sobrino, op.cit., p.105.

54. J.A.T. Robinson, "Need Jesus have been perfect?" in CHRIST FAITH AND HISTORY, Cambridge Studies in Christology, ed. S.W. Sykes and J.P. Clayton, Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp.39-52.

55. S.W. Sykes, "The Theology of the humanity of Christ" in CHRIST FAITH AND HISTORY, op.cit., pp.53-72.

56. Cfr. p. 82 of the thesis.

57. J. Sobrino, p.338.

58. Does this position of Boff not imply the co-existence of two separate metaphysical subjects, and hence Nestorianism? If he does not suggest this by his use of the language of Kenosis of the human person, when does the process of the eternal Person assuming the human person start? Certainly some suggestion of adoptionism can be traced in his position.

59. A RAHNER READER, ed. G.A. McCool, DLT, London, 1975, pp.159-166.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

It was the resurrection event that inspired the first christians to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, and to look upon the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. Any christological discussion should, therefore, take into account the theological significance of the cross and the resurrection without making too sharp a distinction between soteriology and christology, for these two are aspects of a single whole. Moreover the person and the history of Jesus are inseparable from their universal significance. As W. Kasper puts it:

> "The actual meaning of a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and of christological teaching is only apparent if we inquire into the liberating and redemptive meaning of Jesus".[1]

In this chapter our intent is to examine the statements of Sobrino and Boff as regards the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The situation in Latin America for christians is one of involvement in the effort for social change. For them the resurrection, according to the liberation theologians, remains a paradigm of 'liberation'. But, Sobrino asserts, the resurrection without the cross is idealistic and for christian life the utopia of christian resurrection becomes real only in terms of the cross:

> "From their concrete experience in the effort to achieve liberation, people are now beginning to realise that they cannot prescind from the cross of Jesus if their experience is to be truly christian".[2]

In the light of this stress upon the significance of the death and resurrection, we shall divide this chapter into four main parts. In the first we shall briefly summarize the statements Sobrino and Boff make about the death and resurrection of Jesus; in the second we shall see how their position is to be understood within the framework of liberation theology, in particular with reference to Gutierrez; in the third we shall examine some traditional categories of the soteriological motif of the death and resurrection of Jesus; and fourthly we shall try to establish if the traditional understanding of salvation finds expression in liberation theology.

(i)

SOBRINO AND BOFF : A SUMMARY

a) SOBRINO :

In this first part we shall briefly examine the discussion of Sobrino and Boff on the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. According to Sobrino there are at least two levels of theological reflection on the death of Jesus. The first is to do with theology in the strict sense:

> "Theology must consider how the cross of Jesus, as a real happening in history, affects God himself ..... where it could become a theology of the crucified God".[3]

The second level is to do with the consideration of suppositions and implications of this particular concept of God for christian life:

> "To see whether the notion of a 'crucified God' should not have some impact on the way we configure our historical praxis".[4]

If we are to enter these levels of discussion we have to avoid two common dangers; one is the danger of isolating the cross from Jesus' own history and the other is that of isolating it from God. In the following few pages we shall outline the way in which Sobrino considers these two levels: the theology of the crucified God, and the practical implication of this notion of God.

According to Sobrino one thing that differentiates Jesus' death from that of any martyr is that Jesus died

in complete rupture with his own cause. Jesus cried out in abandonment: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46).[5] He felt abandoned by God, the nearness of whose kingdom he had proclaimed. Hence there is the scandal of the cross which is the feature of this abandonment. Sobrino avers:

> "The scandal of this death in theological abandonment is irretrievable even after the resurrection, for the resurrection does not eliminate it".[6]

According to Sobrino this raises a set of new questions about God; the question in the main is: "What kind of a God is he who has abandoned his Son on the cross?". And this question entails a new revelation of God.

Sobrino observes briefly by way of theses that there is a tendency in the post-resurrection faith of the New Testament and in christian tradition either to overlook or explain away the scandal of the cross. His arguments for the theses to explore this tendency in the New Testament may be summarized as follows: While Mark and Matthew preserve the cry of dereliction, a verse used from Psalm 22, Luke and John not only do not have this verse but in the place of the final cry they have: "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46); "Now it is finished" (Jn 19:30). Luke and John have avoided the scandalous element of the abandonment. The next indication of this tendency is the way in which various christologies of the New Testament concentrate on the honorific titles they ascribed to Jesus on account of his resurrection. The point is that this attempt of

christological titles lose sight of the "servant of Yahweh" title which is the most direct pointer to Jesus' cross.

Another way in which the New Testament lost sight of the scandal of the cross, according to Sobrino, is to be seen in that the cross was reduced to a 'noetic mystery'. By 'noetic mystery' he means a cognitive mystery that underlies God's plan of salvation. The cross in the New Testament is viewed in soteriological terms, in terms of its salvific implications for human beings. Attention was focused on the why and wherefore of the cross. And, therefore, the cross was seen as the part of the plan of God: "Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23); it was necessary that Jesus should die on the cross (Lk 24:26); and it was also predicted in the scriptures (Lk 24:25; 1 Cor 15:4). And various models are used to explain that Jesus died for our sins: "to bring repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31); to expiate sin (Mk 10:45); he shed his blood for us (Mk 14:23 ff; Lk 22:20). He dies as an expiatory victim (Rom 3:25). These motifs are basically from a certain conception of cultic worship. This is an attempt to find the internal connection between death on the cross, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. Sobrino admits that there is a positive element about these models, because they stressed that Jesus' death on the cross brought salvation. But, he says, they, however, do not say enough, for they do not bring out the scandal of the cross. The negative thing about them is that they draw our attention away from God himself and his relationship to the cross.

According to Sobrino the whole logical (it is not clear what he means by 'logical' here) scheme of the New Testament in which the first christians frame the question of the cross presupposes from the outset a particular knowledge of God. In their sociocultural milieu the notion of God as such did not pose any problem to them. But such an approach cannot be taken for granted as self-evident in St. Paul's theological situation nor in ours. Sobrino argues in support of this that:

> "We cannot explain the cross logically by appealing to God, who supposedly is known already, because the first thing that the cross does here is raise questions about God himself and the authentic reality of the deity".[7]

This understanding of the New Testament evidence on the whole, however, is not without problems.

Sobrino also observes that there was a similar kind of tendency in the Church's tradition and theology to bypass the scandal of the cross. He outlines four important trends in the tradition to indicate this tendency. First of all, christians of the early centuries found it impossible to understand the abandonment of Jesus by the Father. Therefore some of them considered the use of Psalm 22 in Jesus' cry as metaphorical and said that Jesus spoke on behalf of the sinful humanity. There were other Fathers since, like Tertullian, Ambrose and St. Thomas Aquinas, who admitted that Jesus suffered abandonment, psychologically speaking, and that this caused him great anxiety not despair. Jesus was thought to be complaining that the Logos was

going to abandon his body in the tomb in the short interval between his death and resurrection.

Secondly, the same tendency is also noticeable in Anselm's theory of vicarious satisfaction which has been extremely influential in christian tradition. Sobrino does not come up with a thoroughgoing criticism of Anselm's theory. However he points out that Anselm's explanation assumes that God cannot be affected by evil; and that it also assumes that salvation consists in the pardon of sins overlooking the much broader biblical conception of salvation as the reign of God and integral salvation. Anselm's theory views the death of Jesus in isolation from the rest of his life. This has given rise to a mystique of the suffering of Jesus, for it is ahistorical.

Thirdly, Sobrino makes an observation, which incidentally is currently discussed by ecumenical groups,[8] that there is this misleading tradition of referring to Mass as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The danger however according to Sobrino is that this might reduce the real irrepeatable, historical cross of Jesus to nothing more than a cultic, ritualized cross.

Fourthly, Sobrino criticizes the Greek metaphysical and epistemological framework which was very much absorbed into christian theology. The Greek concept of perfection made christians insist on the impassibility of God. Suffering could not be thought of as a mode of being belonging to God. The Greek epistemology used by traditional christian theology was based on the principle of analogy and insisted that one came to know something through its resemblance to something already known. For

christians it meant that the reality of God is to be recognised through what is positive in the creatures. Hence for them the cross cannot reveal anything about God himself. However, Sobrino asserts that true knowledge would be impossible without some kind of analogy.[9] But this should be complemented by the principle of dialectical knowledge, i.e. knowing something through its contrary. Greek conceptual categories alone would not help christians to arrive at, for instance, a concept of the crucified God.

After showing dissatisfaction thus with the ways the cross and its significance had been hitherto explained, Sobrino moves on to demonstrate that one initial way to recover the original meaning of the cross is to see it as the historical consequence of his life.[10] As opposed to Anselm's ahistorical understanding of God's plan or design, Sobrino suggests that God's plan should be understood in terms of real authentic incarnation of God:

> "If God did become incarnate in history and accepted its mechanisms, ambiguities, and contradictions, then the cross reveals God not just in himself but in conjunction with the historical path that leads Jesus to the cross".[11]

> "The cross is the outcome of an incarnation situated in a world of sin that is revealed to be a power working against the God of Jesus".[11]

Sobrino describes sin in this context not merely as an internal state but also as in socio-political systems that give shape and structure to the overall situation. Sin is against God insofar as it is sin against the reign of God. While Jesus proclaimed the nearness of God's kingdom, he is thrown into a conflict-ridden situation.

It is ultimately this situation that leads him to his death on the cross.

Jesus was condemned to death as a blasphemer by the Jewish authorities. The verdict in Mark 14: 63-64 of 'guilty', claims Sobrino, is important not to see whether the condemnation of Jesus was correct in the light of theology and laws of the day. but because it enables us to see the historical causes that led Jesus' condemnation. Jesus practised his religion as an orthodox Jew but denounced the de facto situation of religion as manipulated by the religious leaders. He challenged their status quo. He questioned the way in which they wielded power in the name of the law, thus manipulating the mystery of God. In the last analysis Jesus is hostile to the religious leaders of his day and is eventually condemned because of his conception of God.

Jesus was also condemned as a political rebel. Sobrino says:

> "The only real point of conflict, and the one that came to the fore in Jesus' case, was the use of power. What kind of power should be used to organise society in accordance with God's wishes?"[12]

Jesus did not espouse nationalism, as zealots did; nor did he favour political theocratism. For him God's coming was an act of God's grace. His basic temptation was, as it was for others, to establish God's kingdom through the use of political power. However his concept of the kingdom also involved some form of social organization that would necessarily take society and politics into account. Jesus was not a zealot, but he does not

basically disagree with the zealots on the idea that there must be some historical and socio-political, mediation of the kingdom of God. Eventually he suffered the punishment imposed on political agitators which was crucifixion as opposed to stoning which was the punishment for blasphemers. Thus his life is a journey that leads to the cross.

> "The cross is not the result of some divine decision independent of history; it is the outcome of the basic option for incarnation in a given situation".[13]

In this phrase, 'the basic option for incarnation in a given situation', Sobrino presupposes a dynamic concept of incarnation. Jesus was not born to die on the cross as such but he came to terms with a given situation and grew up in a situation of conflicts. Eventually it was this situation that led him to the cross.

While the step above was to recover the original sense of the cross as the outcome of Jesus' historical path, the next step is theological consideration in the strict sense. And in this step, as we shall briefly consider below, Sobrino proposes to ponder suffering as the mode of being for God.

Sobrino maintains, as we indicated right at the beginning of the summary of his position, that the distinctive character of Jesus' death lies in the questions about God that arise from the abandonment of Jesus on the cross. According to Sobrino the cross of Jesus first of all radicalizes the transcendence of God. What he means by radicalizing the transcendence of God is as follows. The transcendence of God was already recognised in the Old Testament basically in two ways

both of which were operational and practical rather than metaphysical:

> "First, there is the prohibition against fashioning images of God (Deut 5:8).
> Second, there is the formulated belief that the authentic reality of God will only show up at the end of history, thanks to some definitive action on God's part (Is 65:17)".[14]

The same understanding of transcendence is radicalized on the cross, says Sobrino: firstly, there is no image of God on the cross; secondly, there is no hint of divine power, beauty or perfection. On the cross the relationship between God and power appears in very different terms. God on the cross is seen submerged within the negative.

Sobrino also maintains that the cross calls into question all knowledge of God based on natural theology. While natural theology by way of analogy attempts to gain access to God on the basis of what is positive in existence. Sobrino adds:

> "On the cross, however, we find nothing similar to what is usually regarded as divine. If there is some knowledge of God to be found on the cross, then some other principle of knowledge must be operative because the deity appears totally unlike anything we know".[15]

Therefore the cross forces us to reformulate the whole problem of God. God is to be recognised through what seems to be quite the opposite of divine, i.e. suffering. It is in this content of theodicy that theology is to be formulated says Sobrino.[16] Suffering is exemplified most emphatically on the cross. It is in this mode of suffering that God has to be recognised.

The central thesis in these reflections of Sobrino on the cross is:

> "On the cross of Jesus God himself is crucified. The Father suffers the death of the Son and takes upon himself all the pain and suffering of history. In this ultimate solidarity with humanity he reveals himself as the God of love, who opens up a hope and a future through the most negative side of history. Thus christian existence is nothing else but a process of participating in this same process whereby God loves the world and hence in the very life of God".[17]

Sobrino, therefore, has recourse to the seemingly paradonical notion of the "crucified God".[18] On the cross God may be said to question God. We find a process on the cross within God himself; God takes the form of abandoning the Son surrendering him to the inertia of a world that really ought to be called into question. The transcendent God as the Father enters in direct conflict with the history of the Son.[19]

On the cross, God in abandoning the Son enters into solidarity with the world. This love relationship of God with the world is expressed in historical terms. This historical love presupposes a dialectics of passivity and activity, and a dialectics of presence and absence. God is passive in that he let himself be affected by the death of his Son. In the Son's passion God does not die, but, as a complete expression of love, he himself suffers. Love is made credible on the cross. From this standpoint of the cross the important problems of theology can be reformulated, says Sobrino. We come to know who God is,

and who we are; and the meaning of history and salvation.

From the standpoint of the cross he argues in the same line as J. Moltmann[20] for christian belief in the Trinity in a dynamic way. The eternal love between the Father and the Son is historically mediated and reaches its paradoxical form of abandonment on the cross. In God himself the Spirit is the fruit of the love between Father and Son, the Spirit in history becomes the Spirit of love designed to effect liberation in history. Thus the Trinity is seen in historical terms:

> "God is a trinitarian 'process' on the way towards its ultimate fulfilment (1 Cor 15:28), but it takes all history into itself".[21]

By the work of the Spirit we come to know what we are, for the spirit incorporates the human individual and all people into the very process of God himself. The Spirit makes us the children of God by making us participate in the very process of God. Then christian existence would mean the following of Jesus not simply in ethical terms but by participating in the love that God manifested on the cross and making it real in history.

The next question is, 'What does it mean, therefore, to insist that we have been saved by the cross?' Sobrino gives this answer:

> "In my opinion, however, we are saying two things when we say that the cross brings salvation: first, we are saying that in it is revealed God's unconditional love. Salvation is both gratuitous and possible in historical existence. If God has loved us first (1 Jn 4:10, Rom 5:8), then there is some ultimate meaning in history. Second, we are

> saying that the culmination of our being loved by God is his work of preparing us to be introduced into his own historical process, to move from passive love to active love".[22]

Sobrino continues the argument as follows:

> "The cross, in other words, does not offer us any explanatory model that would make us understand what salvation is and how it itself might be salvation. Instead it invites us to participate in a process within which we can actually experience history as salvation".[22]

This foregoing quotation, shocking as it may be, is not seemingly in line with the way the catholic tradition has always understood the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. The cross has been regarded as the instrument of salvation by which God reconciled the world to himself. Sobrino, and as we would see liberation theology in general, has apparently reduced the cross merely to a paradigm of salvation. For the moment we will refrain from any further discussion of this issue, as in the final section of this chapter we shall compare the position of liberation theology with the traditional position.

Now we come to what Sobrino calls, the second level of theological discussion of the cross, i.e., to see the implications which he elaborates from the considerations above for christian living. These implications may be outlined as follows. First of all, as the cross makes one to reformulate the transcendence of God, this transcendence of God must be grasped not as an explanation but rather as an appeal to human conscience to overcome the sinfulness and injustice in the world. So long as evil exists in the world, faith cannot but be attacked by unbelief. As this

is the abandonment of Jesus on the cross, so abandonment is experienced in injustice and oppression. It is in this context that christian faith is a process that has to take shape. As Sobrino argues secondly:

> "Christian hope is not a hopeful optimism which looks beyond injustice, oppression and death; it is a hope against injustice, oppression, and death".[23]

Christian hope is thus set against any situation in which injustice seems to triumph over goodness. Hope derives its nourishment from the cross and from the service rendered to those who are suffering in our own day.

Thirdly, Sobrino argues that christian love shows its life from the dialectical interplay between love and alienation. It must positively fashion a new person and a new society, hence it is not only personal but also structural. It is not idealistic, neither is it pragmatic because, as the cross shows, death accepted out of love is the ultimate that humanity can speak of, or even better, do. These are the implications that Sobrino draws from his historical and theological understanding of the significance of the cross. Thus faith, hope and love, when viewed from the vantage point of the cross, have very practical implications for christian living.

Having outlined the main aspects of Sobrino's understanding of the death of Jesus on the cross, we now turn to his conception of the resurrection, the culminating point of any historical christology. Sobrino defines the resurrection of Jesus as follows:

> "It is an eschatological event in which the final reality of history makes its appearance in the

midst of history - whatever that final reality may be understood to be".[24]

Being an eschatological event, the resurrection has a distinctive relationship of its own with what is historical. Sobrino considers the resurrection under its three aspects: the historical, the hermeneutical and the theological. Sobrino argues that examination of the historical aspect of the resurrection reveals two types of tradition in the gospel narratives that deal with the resurrection of Jesus, one dealing with the empty tomb and the other with appearances of the risen Christ. Any question of the historicity of the resurrection has to come to terms with these two traditions.

Sobrino suggests that the historicity of the 'empty tomb' tradition is a moot question. This has been disputed and scholars have argued both for or against the historicity of this tradition.[25] I do not agree with Sobrino when he points out that in the oldest narratives about the resurrection this 'empty tomb' tradition does not appear and therefore it might have been added later for an apologetic purpose. On the contrary, I concur with C.H. Dodd, who in his book, The Founder of Christianity , argues that the evangelists had in their hands a solid piece of a very early tradition.[26] Several hypotheses have been proffered, all of which could not be examined either by Sobrino, or by us within the scope of this thesis. All that a theologian need assert is that when the resurrection narrative states 'he was raised from the dead', all it may initially mean is that Jesus underwent a transition, or a transformation of a personal nature of which no one has

direct experience in this life. Sobrino asserts that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead must not therefore be understood literally in terms of a physical resuscitation or merely as a restoration to a normal state of life.[27] Consequently the two basic points that Sobrino makes are based on the understanding that 'something' happened to Jesus to suggest this transformation. This 'something' is all that is needed by way of a minimum for a historical understanding of the resurrection narratives which have been written from a selfconsciously theological standpoint. And those two important points are:

(a) "In the New Testament itself faith in the risen Jesus does not depend on the existence (or non-existence) of the empty tomb, but on the concrete experience of Jesus' apparitions".

(b) "Centering the whole discussion around the empty tomb may prejudice one's conception of Jesus' resurrection, leading one incorrectly to envision it as the revivification of a corpse. This view is certainly not shared by the New Testament".[28]

As regards the appearances of the risen Jesus, Sobrino affirms that they are more decisive, and are more important. The oldest of the traditions, according to him, as according to most scholars, is the one found in 1 Cor 15:3-5,7. In spite of the discrepancies which are inevitable due to the lateness of the reports and the nature of the communities to which they were intended, there can be no doubt that the disciples (both women and others) had some sort of privileged experience which transformed their whole lives. Sobrino also argues that these apparitions could hardly be called subjective hallucinations, as the atmosphere after

the shattering experience of Jesus' death on the cross could scarcely have been conducive to such an experience. Sobrino concludes that the resurrection is either a 'trans-historical' event (i.e. in his terms it indwells and in some sense transcends history) or an eschatological event (i.e. it expresses a final reality within history). In either of these ways the other-worldly new reality of Jesus is sustained.

This brings us to a consideration of the hermeneutical aspect which should provide us with the correct horizon for understanding the resurrection of Jesus, which as an eschatological event is not as such readily and immediately comprehensible.

Sobrino insists that an adequate hermeneutic should do justice to the New Testament evidence and at the same time sustain the need to make the resurrection comprehensible for us today. The possible hermeneutic that Sobrino suggests has three characteristics consisting of hope, promise and mission.

For all christians, argues Sobrino, christian faith in the resurrection of its very essence cannot be separated from a hope in the future of history.[29] The expression 'resurrection from the dead' is based on the apocalypse expectation of the Old Testament and later Judaism rather than the Greek formulation of the immortality of the soul. It was the same apocalyptic expectation that provided the disciples with a horizon for understanding what happened to Jesus at the resurrection. Therefore it is hoped that that is the

first condition for understanding the resurrection of Jesus. It is not, however, just a merely human hope but one that looks forward to the vindication of God's justice. Christian hope is a qualified hope because of the fact that the one who rose from the dead is none other than the one who was crucified. It is a hope against death and injustice.

Sobrino then presents history as a promise to understand the resurrection as a historical event.[30] He criticizes historical positivism which demands that historical facts present an objective history. According to this conception it is impossible to present the resurrection as a historical event. Notwithstanding, however, he conversely criticizes Bultmann's existentialist conception of history. For Bultmann would say that the meaning of history always lies embedded in the present. This view of Bultmann makes it impossible to understand the resurrection as the past historical action of God and as an event pointing towards the temporal future. Sobrino also criticizes Pannenberg, whose historical methodology rejects anthropological prejudices and the supremacy of analogy, maintaining that the appearances of the risen Christ are explicable only insofar as they can be deduced from the reality of Jesus' resurrection itself. Sobrino, borrowing from J. Moltmann, cites the following crucial passage proposing to view history as a promise:

> "When the word is a word of promise, it means that it has not yet found its guarantee in reality. On the contrary, it stands in contradiction to the

> reality that can be experienced now or that could be experienced in the past".[31]

Therefore this understanding of history as promise allows Sobrino to assert that the revelation of God effected in Christ's resurrection is a promise.

The resurrection appearances confronted the disciples with a call to mission. They were initiated in a service not only of proclaiming the risen Jesus but also of transforming the world. Sobrino maintains, therefore, that for us today the resurrection of Jesus is an event that establishes a new history. In the brief statement below, he asserts that for us today it implies the praxis of establishing a new history.

> "Jesus' resurrection cannot be grasped unless one engages in active service for the transformation of an unredeemed world".[32]

From those considerations of the hermeneutical aspect, Sobrino then moves to theology in the strict sense and considers the theological aspect of the problem of the resurrection. Sobrino sees that in a similar way to the narratives of the Old Testament the resurrection expresses something about God himself in historical terms. God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. God is defined as a liberative power. God's action can also be seen as a salvific action of pardon and revitalization. Jesus is raised from the dead by God and thus becomes the firstborn of many brothers. Furthermore the resurrection says something about Jesus himself. By raising him from the dead, God has confirmed his person and approved his actions.

Besides on this understanding the New Testament affirms Jesus' oneness with God, not in terms of absolute divinity, but rather by a category of relationship. Sobrino adds that this relational category is expressed in various ways:

> "In personal terms, Jesus is the Son. In functional terms, Jesus is the one who holds lordship. In temporal terms, Jesus will hand the kingdom over to the Father at the end of time".[33]

Sobrino's reflections on the resurrection may be summed up as follows. Even after the resurrection, Jesus is to be seen in relationship to the Father (1 Cor.15: 24-98; Rom 6:10) without reducing the resurrection to its christological aspect alone. Beyond this the resurrection is understood as an eschatological event pointing towards the future of humanity. It is a word of promise to which christians hold on by hoping against hope.

b) BOFF:

Having examined above the views of Sobrino on the death and resurrection of Jesus, we shall now briefly summarize the way in which Leonardo Boff understands the significance of the death and resurrection. In essence Boff's views are very similar to that of Sobrino. Boff argues that:

> "When Jesus embraces death of his own free will, he reveals the total freedom of himself and his projects. He points up one concrete way of fleshing out the reality of God's kingdom when he accepts

> death out of love, maintains his fellowship with the downtrodden of history, pardons those who have afflicted him, and puts himself into God's hands in the face of historical failure".[34]

Boff emphasizes, as does Sobrino, the need to look at Jesus' death as a consequence of his life. Jesus' death, says Boff, was intimately bound up with his life, proclamation and his practical activities. He preached the nearness of God's kingdom; he showed awareness of his mission to liberate people from all social and political alienations. His call was a call to conversion. His image of God was ultimately different from those who were holding political, economic and religious power. He denounced their way of looking at traditional laws. His authority, however, goes beyond this prophetic denunciation, he assumed attitudes that pertained to God alone. All these bring him in direct conflict with those in authority both religious and political; and this conflict resulted in his violent death.

The motive behind the assassination of Jesus is two-fold.[35] First of all, Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer. He presents a God who is different from the God of the status quo. Secondly, Boff maintains that Jesus was condemned as a guerilla fighter. His preaching was seen as that of the liberation project of the zealots. However it has to be emphasized despite this that he renounced religious messianism of a political cast.[36]

> "Messianism grounded on the use of force and power would not succeed in concretizing the kingdom, he

> felt. The kingdom entails a more radical liberation, one that gets beyond the breakdown of brotherhood and calls for the creation of new human beings".[37]

Boff argues that, although Jesus' death was surrounded by political conflict, nonetheless it should be affirmed that Jesus died abandoned by God. Boff adds that this abandonment was meaningless from human point of view. It seemed a total failure of Jesus' mission. Jesus lived in communion with God, and as a being-for-others to the end. But on the cross he experienced the depths of despair of the death (absence) of God on the cross. In spite of the total disaster and debacle he did not despair. There is a theological relevance of his death, according to Boff:

> "The universal meaning of the life and death of Christ, therefore, is that he sustained the fundamental conflict of human existence to the end.... For Jesus, evil does not exist in order to be comprehended, but to be taken over and conquered by love".[38]

This comportment of Jesus means that christians should live in faith, an existence of faith with absolute meaning even when faced with absurdity of suffering and death. This faith is understood by Boff as participation in the weakness of God in the world in an image drawn from Bonhoeffer. The significance of the death of Jesus is, therefore, summed up by Boff thus:

> "The cross demonstrates the conflict-ridden nature of every process of liberation undertaken when the structure of injustice has gained the upper hand. Under such conditions liberation can come about only through martyrdom and sacrifice on behalf of others and God's cause in the world. That is the route which Jesus consciously chose and accepted".[40]

Thus Sobrino and Boff do not seem to differ in their understanding of the significance of the death of Jesus on the cross.

As far as the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, Boff views it in terms of the proclamation of the kingdom. Jesus' death gains meaning only in the light of the resurrection. Jesus by his resurrection makes his mission of the kingdom a utopia realized. According to Boff:

> "Kingdom of God signifies the realization of a utopia cherished in human hearts, total human and cosmic liberation".[41]

> "The resurrection is the realization of his (Jesus') announcement of total liberation, especially from the reign of death. The resurrection signifies a concretization of the kingdom of God in the life of Jesus".[42]

Boff also discusses the two decisive facts in the resurrection narratives: the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Christ.[43] He is in agreement with most scholars in asserting that the empty sepulchre was not adduced as proof of the resurrection nor did it provoke faith in the resurrection. Taken by itself, he argues, the empty tomb is an ambiguous sign, subject to various interpretations. Boff also affirms what most scholars have agreed, that those appearances of the risen Jesus were not subjective visions, products of faith of the community, but on the contrary, faith in the resurrection was the fruit of the impact on the apostles of the apparitions of the living Lord. Without such an impact the apostles would not have preached the crucified

Jesus, who, for all apparent reasons, was a failure. They began to proclaim the same crucified one as their Lord. They deciphered the mystery of Jesus as God's Son. They believed that with the resurrection, a new heaven and a new earth had already begun, and that the resurrection of the human race was imminent (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 5:10) and Christ was the first born. The resurrection also revealed to them that Jesus had died for their sins. It is the faith in the resurrection, which was due to the impact of the appearances, that gives origin to the community of believers who are entrusted with a mission of proclaiming the kingdom.

Christians have drawn a meaning for human existence from the resurrection of Jesus. Does christianity offer an answer to the basic anthropological question: 'What is to become of mankind?' Boff says yes, and considers the anthropological relevance of the resurrection of Jesus:

> "The human person is essentially a being on the road to itself. People seek to realize themselves on all levels: in body, soul and spirit; in biological, spiritual and cultural life. But this desire is continuously obstructed by frustration, suffering, the absence of love, and the lack of unity with self and others. The hope-principle that is part of human nature leads people continuously to elaborate utopias".[44]

For us christians the resurrection of Jesus seeks to be this utopia realized in this world, and, therefore, there is no more 'u-topia' (that which does not exist anywhere) but only topia (that which exists somewhere).

Human hope was realized in Jesus' resurrection and is realized in each person. Hence to the question raised above the christian answer is resurrection, as total transfiguration of the human reality, both corporal and spiritual. Although Boff does not say as explicitly as Sobrino does, it is, however, not to be understood that Boff gives just an anthropological answer but that something of the christian apocalyptic expectation lies beneath his answer. Besides Boff's understanding of the resurrection in terms of Jesus' struggle to establish his kingdom is summed up in his own words as follows:

> "Thanks to his resurrection, Jesus continues to exist among human beings, giving impetus to their struggle for liberation. All authentically human growth, all authentic justice in social relationships, and all real increase and growth in life represent a way in which the resurrection is actualized here and now while its future fulfilment is being prepared".[45]

The practical implication of this way of understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection is that it is in following of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ that the realization of the kingdom comes true in real life here and now; although it is to be emphasized that the coming of the kingdom in its full completion is left to a future in hope. First of all, following Jesus in his death and resurrection entails the proclamation of the kingdom as absolute meaning of the world that is offered to all by God. Secondly, this utopia of the kingdom has to be translated into practice. This utopia is not a mere ideology but nonetheless gives rise to functional

ideologies. Thirdly, Jesus' own journey throws light on the situations of conflict and struggle that are entailed when God's liberation translates into a process. As we have examined above, Sobrino and Boff are very similar in their treatment of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hence we shall treat them together in the remaining sections where we shall compare them with the traditional catholic teaching. Below this, however, we shall set their work in the wider context of liberation theology.

(ii)

LIBERATION AND SALVATION

In this second part of the chapter it is our purpose to relate the statements of Sobrino and Boff, as outlined above, to the language of liberation and salvation in the theology of liberation with reference, in particular, to Gutierrez.

Gutierrez rightly observes that one of the great deficiencies of contemporary theology is the absence of a profound and lucid reflection on the theme of salvation. He joins with Yves Congar and others in saying that the question "In what does salvation consist?", important though as it is, still remains a vaguely answered question, and that there is an urgent need for adequate elaboration. Universality of salvation, as understood by most scholars now, is opposed to the quantitative view of salvation. It has a qualitative

character about it which means more than the possibility of salvation outside the church. This qualitative intensive approach, as opposed to quantitative and extensive approach, emphasizes openness of man's being to God's gratuitous gift through grace which is God's initiative to communion. Therefore, emphasizing this aspect of man's openness to communion with God and men, Gutierrez views salvation as something that is not other worldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. His view of salvation is that it is something which embraces all human reality, transforming it, and leading it to its fullness in Christ:

> "Thus the centre of God's salvific design is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection transforms the universe and makes it possible for men to reach fulfilment as a human being. The fulfilment embraces every aspect of humanity: body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity. Christ, the image of the Father and the perfect God-Man, takes on all the dimensions of human existence.[46]

The salvific action of God, which is actualized or rather concretized in the redemptive work of Christ, embraces all dimensions of human existence. Liberation theologians, including Sobrino and Boff, would emphasize that the work of redemption achieved by Christ is not to be narrowly understood as a rescue from sin. This narrow understanding which was due to Gnostic anthropologies emptied concepts of redemption and salvation of a good deal of their content. This narrow view pays no attention to the proclamation of salvation of human kind

within history. It could be thought (as by some critics of the theology of liberation) that this new emphasis upon 'liberation' and its breadth might in fact eclipse the traditional concept of 'sin'. Whether in fact the collective and individual dimensions are held together is a matter of dispute.

This leads Gutierrez to consider a socio-political perspective of salvation. As it is typical of all liberation theologians the Exodus remains a great paradigm for liberation. For Gutierrez, however, it is even more important to look at the death of Jesus as a consequence of his life and mission. He would argue that there are three indisputably factual aspects of Jesus' life which indicate his inevitable involvement in socio-political reality of his time. They are the same three aspects that Sobrino and Boff have considered as those that surround the death of Jesus. These facts are as we have seen the complex relationship between Jesus and the zealots, his attitude towards the Jewish leaders, and his death at the hand of political authorities. Most liberation theologians underline these facts when they consider Jesus' death as the result of his attitude which was not apolitical but had considerable political significance. Gutierrez would say that these features of his attitude and ministry ratify the universality and totality of his work:

> "This universality and totality touch the very heart of political behaviour, giving it its true dimension and depth. Misery and social injustice reveal 'a sinful situation', a disintegration of brotherhood and communion; by freeing it from sin, Jesus attacks the roots of an unjust order".[47]

Gutierrez speaks of liberation at three levels: first at the economic, social and political level, second at the level of man's acquiring his full human dignity and becoming a new man through the historical evolution of society, third at the level of faith where liberation from sin occurs as entrance into communion with God and with all mankind.[48] Gutierrez would like to add that:

> "These three levels mutually effect each other, but they are distinct: they are all part of a single, all-encompassing salvific process, but they are to be found at different levels."[49]

Such a distinction of the levels of liberation is not elaborated by other liberation theologians although some have cited Gutierrez in their discussion. But one thing that is common throughout is the consideration of sin in its socio-political structural nature.

> "In the liberation approach sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality - ..... Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood and love in relationships among men, the breach of friendship with God and with other men, and, therefore, an interior, personal fracture. When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered."[50]

Sobrino, for instance, would assert the social or collective nature of sin in reference to Jesus' own proclamation of the kingdom:

> "For Jesus, sin is the rejection of God's kingdom which is drawing near in grace: and the anthropological essence of sin in people's self-

> affirmation which leads them to assert their own power in two negative ways. On the one hand they use it to secure themselves against God; on the other hand they use it to oppress others".[51]

The same point again is stated by Gutierrez in the following words:

> "Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation. It cannot be encountered in itself, but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations. It is impossible to understand the concrete manifestations without underlying basis and vice versa".[52]

It would appear from these representative remarks that sin underlies all socio-political structures in the form of alienation. One may recognise in this understanding of sin some similarities with Marxist view of alienation. But I do not think the liberation theologians depend on Marxist concept of alienation as such. It is worth looking briefly at the concept of alienation in Marx for the purpose of our argument.

The concept of alienation is that which remains central to Karl Marx's writings. This concept is not, however, entirely Marx's own innovation. Although one could argue that Marx's understanding of this notion came most directly from Hegel, it can be safely said that there is no single source for Marx's concept of alienation.[53] Marx affirmed that for man, the root of his reality is man himself - a basic reality self-derived and self-

justified. Rejecting Hegel's idealism, and accepting Feuerbach's naturalism, Marx's concept of man becomes naturalism in which mind is conceived as part of nature.[54] Although this notion of man seems philosophical in origin, it is also sociological and empirical because for Marx man was ultimately a social being. Man is the ensemble of social relations. There is no such thing as a fixed human nature, says Marx. The human essence of nature first exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist for him as a bond with man. According to Marx:

> "Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity. It is just because of this he is a conscious species-being. Or it is only because he is a species being that he is a conscious, i.e. that his own life is an object for him"
>
> and
>
> "while society is produced by man, society itself produces man as man".[55]

The term "species-being" (Gattungswesen) is derived from Feuerbach. By this term Marx means a being who treats himself as the present, living species. He argues that since this species-being defines the nature of man, man is only living and acting authentically, i.e. in accordance with his nature, when he lives and acts deliberately as a species-being, that is, as a social being.

Marx had initially been attracted by Feuerbachian anthropological understanding of alienation, which affirmed that God was the projected concentration of

human values, and it is consciousness itself which creates this concentration that is at the root of alienation. For Marx the criticism of religion, therefore, was the foundation of all criticism. Marx himself is reported to have said: 'die Kritik der Religion ist die Voraussetzung aller Kritik', the precise meaning of which is disputed among scholars. However, it is quite obvious that Marx, realizing that religious alienation as only one form of alienation, moved in his thought to a more concrete understanding. His intention of moving from the criticism of religion to political economy, as it seems to me, was in order to be able to criticize every sphere of alienated human existence, for he saw man and his society very much conditioned by their economic conditions.

Marx indicates alienated labour as the essential connection between the whole estrangement and money-system. According to the Paris Manuscripts (1844) the process that engenders all other forms of alienation is that of alienated labour. Man produces something by his labour and that product becomes an externalized object. And the worker relates to the product of his labour as to an alien object. The more the product the more the alienation that the labourer faces. Marx argues in this line:

> "The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. That means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien".[56]

The argument is that man in his labour cannot be unalienated if the product of his activity is alienated for the product is nothing but the sum of activity, of production. Private property is only secondary as it is the necessary consequence of alienated labour, and in its turn, of course, it profoundly affects human aspirations. And man alienates himself from himself in the very act of production. Marx, however, inquires into what gives rise to alienated labour itself; all he does is to affirm it as a reality, as it is for him merely a fact of political economy. Alienation affects not only the worker, as it estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his human aspect,[57] but also everyone who stands in relation with him.

> "The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man (stands) to himself, is realized and expressed only in relationship in which a man stands to other men".[57]

The transcendence of alienation is for Marx another name for communism. By communism is meant a total transformation of human existence, the recovery by man of his species-being. Communion would be a negation of private property and it would destroy the power of the objectified relations over human beings, give man control over his own works, and it would also restore the social operation of his mind and senses, and bridge the gulf between humanity and nature.

There is, as one can observe from the above outline of Marx's concept of alienation, the Promethean idea of man's absolute self-sufficiency which constantly recurs

in his writings. Marx's Prometheanism, above all, relates to species and not the individual. Person becomes of interest only when involved at the level of the species, as man is defined in purely social terms. A typical feature of Marx's Prometheanism is his lack of interest in the natural (as opposed to economic) conditions of human existence. Marx did not give a great deal of attention in the essential finitude and limitations of man, or the obstacles to his creativity.

Whereas in the liberation theologians' understanding of 'sinful situation', and of human effort towards liberation from all oppression, exploitation and injustice that is entailed in this 'sinful situation', there is no Prometheanism of Marxian kind, or of any other for that matter, involved. They may have used certain Marxian categories to expound this sinful situation, but this 'sinful situation' is understood primarily in reference to the rich christian concept of the kingdom of God in which there is no place for injustice and oppression. Transcendence of 'alienation' that underlies the situation of oppression which is the breakdown of brotherly communion is purely a gift of salvation in true christian sense of the term. The human effort of transforming such a society, as these theologians argue, is related to the growth of the kingdom. As Gutierrez puts it, (we cite the passage once again):

> "Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event is the growth of the kingdom and is a salvific event; but it is not the coming of the kingdom, not all of salvation".[58]

For Marx, salvation is man's salvation of himself; not the work of God, but that of a collective Prometheus who in principle is capable of achieving absolute command over the world he lives. In this sense man's freedom is his creativity, where he overcomes nature and himself. It is not in this sense that liberation theologians speak of man's participation in the historical process of liberation. For them the liberation process in specific terms, means transforming society that is characterized by a 'sinful situation', which is not to be identified with the coming of the kingdom as such. For the kingdom is a gift of God by which in Christ the all-comprehensiveness of the liberating process reaches its fullness. In him and through him salvation is present at the heart of man's history, says Gutierrez. Does, then, the traditional understanding of the redemptive work of Christ find expression in liberation theology, in particular in Sobrino and Boff, whose views we summarized in the first part and compared with Gutierrez in the second part? In the remaining two sections of the chapter we shall briefly summarize the traditional understanding and compare Sobrino's and Boff's understanding of the redemptive significance of Jesus' death and resurrection with the traditional understanding.

(iii)

THE CATEGORIES OF TRADITION

In this section we shall briefly outline some of the traditional categories that were used as images to speak about the redemptive significance of Jesus' death on the cross. It is necessary to come to grips with the under-

lying significance to see if that significance also finds expression in liberation theology. The underlying significance of the traditional notion is that we have been saved by the cross. On the whole, the Church's official pronouncements simply repeat the doctrine of scripture. The basic christian belief is that God has reconciled man with himself. The word 'atonement', which is of Anglo-Saxon origin, signifies this theological doctrine, which basically means the getting 'at one' of two parties that were estranged.[59] This basic understanding has been portrayed by several models some of which are more prominent than others. We shall consider those prominent ones from the history of the Church's tradition.

For the Fathers of the early church it was central to their belief that the death of Christ effected an atonement, but they never felt the need to theorize, but they used some models to express their belief.

One such model was the model of victory over the devil, which had also an image of ransom related to it. St. Irenaeus who together with his theme of 'recapitulation' (which we shall consider below) uses the image of ransom when he says that justice of God required that man should be bought back. In origin also we find the idea that man needs to be rescued from the power of evil and the penalty of sin. Gregory of Nyssa goes so far as describing this victory and ransom in terms of deceit: God offers the bait of Christ to the devil by which he deceived the devil. It was a fair deal according to Gregory of Nyssa, but such an idea was indignantly repudiated by Gregory Nazianzen, according to whom the

the whole concept of ransom was repugnant. He argues that such a ransom was due neither to the devil nor to the Father. However the whole model of victory over the devil or ransom to him is no longer acceptable as theological explanation of redemption. Such images focus on the role of Satan as if he were central to the notion of redemption. This strong mythological element in the image of ransom is not acceptable to modern thinking.

Christological controversies made the Fathers look at the incarnation in the light of salvific role. St. Irenaeus on the basis of Eph 1:10 says against the Gnostics:

> "When he was incarnate and made man, he summed up (or recapitulated) in himself the long roll of the human race, securing for us all a summary salvation, so that we should regain in Christ Jesus what he had lost in Adam, namely, the being in the image and likeness of God".[60]

This mystical-incarnational theory of redemption has been adapted by Teilhard de Chardin in the modern times. This incarnational view of redemption was formulated in various ways, by the Fathers of the East. It was most emphatically put by St. Athanasius as follows:

> "He became man, in order that we might become divine".[61]

This became a maxim expressed by most of the Greek Fathers. This theory conveys only half the truth as incarnation itself seen as effecting the redemption, the cross role is not emphasized.

Another theory was put forward by St. Anselm of Canterbury in his Cur Deus Homo and has been extremely influential in tradition. It is the theory of satisfaction. Tertullian was the first to use the term

satisfaction. But he used it, not in the sense of vicarious satisfaction but in reference to the doctrine and practice of the sacrament of penance. Even at the present time the Church's pronouncements use this term 'satisfaction', although without precise explanation of the term. Theologians are divided as to how precisely to interpret it in relation to Jesus' death on the cross.

St. Anselm's concept of sin was that it was sin when one withdrew one's will from God by which one inflicts dishonour to God. His concept of God as he expressed in his Proslogium and Monologium is presupposed in his arguments in Cur Deus Homo. Basing on these presuppositions Anselm points out his idea of satisfaction:

> "And so everyone who sins ought to pay back the honour of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God".[62]

Anselm's argument may be summed up as follows:

a) None but God can make the satisfaction, because of the infinity of the offence involved;

b) None but man ought to make satisfaction, because he is the offender;

c) It is necessary that the God-Man makes it.

One could turn this argument around and arrive at a different conclusion altogether: God-Man as man could not make the satisfaction; and as God needed not; and therefore satisfaction is impossible. The terms Anselm necessitas, debet, decet have German legal connotations and do not translate well in other situations. This legal terminology is not adequate enough to explain the relation between God and man. Even when Anselm speaks

of God's mercy he speaks of it in abstract terms. The major difficulty, however, according to me, is that, he views salvation as merely as a consequence of sin,[63] 'necessity', he stresses, suggests some failure in God's original plan, and this 'necessity' also imperils the gratuitous nature of God's gift of salvation. Anselm's theory, however, gained currency in the middle ages. It has been maintained over the centuries. It is summed up as follows by K. Rahner:

> "Redemption primarily concerns guilt, which involves an infinite offence against God, because it is measured by the dignity of the person offended. It is to be made good (and not just forgiven by a free act of God's grace, the possibility of which in principle on God's part is not contested), then this fully adequate (condigna) reparation (satisfactio = iniuriae alteri illatae compensatio : Catechismus Romanus, II, 5,59) can only be effected by a divine person. For the worth of the satisfactio is measured by the dignity of the offerer, not by that of the person to whom it is addressed. Such reparation can be made by some person other than the offender on condition that the person offended is willing freely to accept a vicarious satisfaction (vicaria satisfactio). In this sense Christ by his obedience even unto death on the cross presented a fully adequate (condigna), infinite (infinita) vicarious (vicaria) reparation (satisfactio) for the infinite offence offered by sin to the holiness and justice of God. And in view of this, God is prepared to forgive man's sin".[64]

In spite of its many defects, this theory has become the most profoundly influential theory. It is true that it does not explain everything about the redemptive work of Christ. It does not say how salvation and participation

in divine life is communicated to men. No single doctrine can be simply identified with the unique redemptive work of Christ on the cross, and it is also the case with this doctrine of satisfaction. However, the valuable point that this theory aims at imparting to us is that our personal reparation in our need for salvation from God is, hence our personal relationship, expressed in terms of Jesus' personal relationship with his Father, as he died in our stead.

This theory of satisfaction can be better understood in relation to another powerful image, the doctrine of sacrifice. The Early Fathers use this rich image as spoken in the Scriptures, and as found in Judaism. Considering Christ's attitude of obedience unto the cross they have also viewed the whole christian life as a sacrifice.[65] There are a few points that one can emphasize by looking at the notion of sacrifice as applied to Christ's death on the cross. It may be of cultic origin, but this image of sacrifice when it is used to portray Christ's death on the cross does not simply reduce it to a cultic event, as Sobrino seems to fear it does, but serves as a powerful model to bring out the redemptive significance.

As the author of the epistle to the Hebrew portrays, Jesus is a high priest, but a unique high priest who is beyond all priesthood of the frontiers of Judaism (as this is suggested by the figure of Melchizedek applied to him - Heb 7:15-17). The epistle also suggests that his priesthood is one of mediatorship, (and not in a narrow sense of suffering sacrifice). His mediatorship (Heb 3:15, 8:6) implies his sharing our humanity (Heb 4:15). And the

sacrifice he offers is no longer in the order of profigurations. Christ has entered the real sanctuary (Heb 9:24) and his sacrifice is unique (Heb 9:24) and it is offered once and for all (Heb 7:27). Although the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) provides some context, all the anterior sacrifices are seen by the author of this epistle as having no value in themselves. They did not attain the goal for which they were intended. This goal is attained only by the one sacrifice of Christ. One may recognise some essential elements of sacrificial rites of Judaism and other religious, as Martin Hengel shows in his study of the origins of the doctrine of the atonement in the New Testament.[66] But what christian theology should emphasize is that any meaning of sacrifice is to be looked for first of all in Christ, as his sacrifice supersedes every other notion of sacrifice.

Taking the sacrificial expiatory action of the high priest on the day of the Atonement - Yom Kippur (Lev 16: 1-34; 23:26-32; Nm 29:7:11) one can, as the epistle to the Hebrews shows, arrive at a broad notion of expiatiatory sacrifice of Christ's Sacrifice. But the same letter emphasizes that the purpose of Christ's sacrifice is not just remission of sins but to effect sanctification of men, total sanctification (Heb 10:14). Christ's obedience unto death on the cross adds a very personal significance to this notion of sacrifice. That in Christ's sacrifice on the cross the human nature is made perfect by God's communication of this perfection is a highly significant conclusion for christian belief.

In the middle ages another doctrine was developed, although it can be traced back to the Patristic age. It is the doctrine of merit. By merit is understood a work completed for the benefit of another on whom it establishes a claim for reward. The Thomists emphasized condign (de condigno) merit, which implied a proportionality between the work accomplished and the result obtained. The Scotists emphasized merit of fittingness (de congruo). The Council of Trent teaches that the origin of the merit of Jesus Christ's justification is that he, through his holy passion on the cross, has merited justification for us. This doctrine has been challenged very much. Its extremely juridical understanding is not satisfactory.

From the considerations above one arrives at the conclusion that in christian tradition various images were necessary to say that Christ died for us, that there is a necessity in affirming that Christ died in our stead, and there is meaning in speaking of the substitution (not in the sense of penal substitution) implied in the representative value of Christ's death on the cross. This representative is not a scapegoat figure, for the scapegoat according to Leviticus 16:10 was not immolated, besides Christ was not with blemish as the goat was defiled. Nonetheless some notion of substitution is necessary. And Christ's redemptive work on the cross is a once and for all event.

(IV)

SOBRINO AND BOFF IN THE LIGHT OF TRADITION

In the final part of the chapter we shall compare Sobrino and Boff with the tradition we have discussed above. Sobrino says he appreciates the deeper underlying significance of a traditional notion; namely, that we have been saved by the cross. But he opposes traditional ways of presenting this significance, because they, he says, assume we know who God is and what salvation is. It is the cross which reveals the notion of God: God who has entered into a process of suffering because of his solidarity with man and revealed himself as the crucified God. According to Sobrino there are two things implied when one says that cross brings salvation: first, on the cross God's unconditional love is revealed as a gratuitous gift of salvation; second, by this unconditional love one is initiated into a process of participation in this love and move from passive love to active love (commitment to liberation).[67]

As for the first aspect of Sobrino's interpretation of the saving significance of the cross, i.e., God's unconditional love being revealed on the cross, it seems to me that this notion of God's unconditional love does not include specifically the redemptive significance of Jesus on the cross. It is taken to be a love par excellence that moves one to participate in the same suffering process of the crucified God. Jesus' death on the cross is reconciliation of man with God. Sobrino asserts that the New Testament makes it clear that reconciliation with God must be understood in an entirely

new way on the basis of the cross.[68] He adds that this is a not a magical conception, but down-to-earth one. There was reconciliation because there was love, and there was love because there was suffering and death. This rhetorical emphasis of Sobrino on reconciliation in terms of love does not seem to include the specific nature of such love in the particular event of death on the cross. The definite saving nature of the cross is reduced to a paradigm of love which enables one to participate in the process of liberation. This is evinced by Sobrino's statement:

> "The cross, in other words, does not offer us any explanatory model that would make us understand what salvation is and how it itself might be salvation. Instead it invites us to participate in a process within which we can actually experience history of salvation".[69]

We move on to consider the second aspect which Sobrino observes as implied in the saving significance of the cross. My intention is not to suggest that talking in terms of participation in the process of salvation is wrong. My argument is that this participation should not reduce Jesus' death to a model, for it is more than a model. It could, however, be said to be a model if, and only if the redemptive significance of the event of the cross is understood properly, and only if this unconditional love is understood to include the essence of the notion of vicarious role of Jesus on the cross. Sobrino agrees with tradition that the redemptive work of Jesus is gratuitous. Sobrino does not define this gift, but understands it broadly in terms of communication of love.

These two aspects of the saving significance of Jesus' death are not spoken of explicitly by Boff. But it is the basic understanding that is implied in his statements. According to him it is the resurrection that gives meaning to the meaningless death on the cross. And this meaning is to be realized in terms of the kingdom, which entails radical liberation that gets beyond the breakdown of brotherhood and calls for the creation of new human beings. The cross becomes a paradigm of salvation.

This position of Sobrino and Boff would appear to come dangerously close to the liberal protestantism advocated by Schliermacher and Ritschl amongst others. According to Schliermacher, the death of Christ produces no objective result and does not liberate mankind. If Christ is considered as redeemer, it is, he says, in the sense that his action consists in evoking a divine consciousness similar to the one he himself had. Those who contemplate on Jesus' image, through this divine consciousness, wipe out their sin and their illusory notion of being under a divine curse. Thus it can be said that Christ is the source of eternal life. According to Ritschl, Christ saves means that in revealing divine love, he inspires us to trust, love and generosity. Jesus reconciled us with God, by showing that God loves us and forgives our sins, and that he had no need of being reconciled with us. The death of Jesus had value as an example of union with God amid trials. There are others who assert moreover that Jesus' influence was purely moral as he assisted man to repentance.

We might add, however, that Sobrino asserts elsewhere that christian existence would mean following Jesus not simply in ethical terms but by participating in the love God manifested on the cross and making it real in history. Nonetheless he does not make it clear in what this God's unconditional love does consist of in the particular context of Jesus' death on the cross.

One positive thing about Sobrino, Boff and the liberal protestants with whom we have just compared them is their basic concern to show redemption as the most astounding manifestation of God's love. Of course redemption is essentially the expression of God's love for men, and whole economy of salvation is to be understood on the basis of this principle. It is also true that contemplation of such love moves one to progress, in the liberation theologians' terms, to participation in the process of liberation. Any over-emphasis upon such an idea of participation, which implies some sort of psychological conversion, would tend to reduce the objective character of the redemptive work of Jesus as the cause of our salvation. Hence my point is that it is simply not enough to regard the cross as the attestation of God's forgiving love which moves one to believe in and act according to this love. The texts of Scripture and the traditional testimony both emphatically bring out the idea that Christ suffered and died for us, and did not merely suffer and die with us. Hence the idea of solidarity that is implied by Sobrino and Boff must be further qualified. If their notion of solidarity just means the Christ suffered with us, and if it does not include the notion of substitution

(understood non-mythologically) then it remains far removed from the traditional position. For the tradition emphasizes solidarity that went to the point of substitution, to bring out the objective significance of the death of Jesus. I am not suggesting that any notion of substitution is acceptable without limits and according to certain modes. And this substitution is also not to be understood as dispensing one from taking part in the work of redemption. My point against the liberation theologians Sobrino and Boff is as follows: whereas substitution as seen by tradition (with objective significance - fides quae) does not exclude the necessity of man's participating with total freedom (subjective significance - fides qua), these theologians speaking of participation do not seem to include the notion of substitution which brings out clearly the objective significance that Christ saved us. It should be pointed out, however, that these theologians speak of participation, not in the sense of Marxian self-deliverance of man, and hence no dilemma of 'self-deliverance' and 'rescue', but only a broad use of the term God's unconditional love. Any christian theology which speaks of the saving significance of Jesus' death, while emphasizing the unconditional love that God revealed on the cross, in the process should not reduce the cross to a mere paradigm of salvation. The death of Jesus on the cross is more than a paradigm, for it brings salvation; it is itself, in a sense, salvation.

CHAPTER 4 : NOTES

1. Walter Kasper, JESUS THE CHRIST, Burns & Oates, London, 1976, p.22.
2. Jon Sobrino, S.J. CHRISTOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS, SCM, London, 1978, p.180.
3. Ibid., p.181.
4. Ibid., p.181.
5. Sobrino argues for the historicity as follows: the fact that the scandal of the cross is preserved by this verse in itself speaks for the historicity of this verse; christians otherwise could hardly have invented it. What he means by 'rupture' is, I should imagine, the apparent failure of Jesus' mission.
6. Sobrino, op. cit., p.219.
7. Ibid., p.188.
8. A.R.C.I.C. THE FINAL REPORT, CTS/SPCK, 1982, p.13.
9. Sobrino, op. cit., pp.198-199.
10. Ibid., pp.201-217.
11. Ibid., p.202.
12. Ibid., p.210.
13. Ibid., p.214.
14. Ibid., p.219.
15. Ibid., p.221.
16. Ibid., p.224. However, it is not clear if Sobrino's theodicy takes into account all types of suffering including natural disaster.
17. Ibid., p.224.
18. Sobrino is heavily dependent on J. Moltmann for this notion of the crucified God. Cf. J. Moltmann, THE CRUCIFIED GOD, especially "Trinitarian Theology of the Cross", p.235 ff.
19. Ibid., p.225.
20. J. Moltmann, op. cit.
21. Sobrino, op. cit., p.226.
22. Ibid., p.227.

23. Ibid., p.232.

24. Ibid., p.236.

25. J.A.T. Robinson, in his book "The Human Face of God", has arguments that are quite interestingly outlined. Cf. THE HUMAN FACE OF GOD, SCM, London, 1972, p.131 ff.

26. Ibid., p.133.

27. It is impossible to outline all the arguments for or against the physical resurrection as resucitation of a corpse. Nonetheless it must be pointed out that many theologians who argue for the physical resurrection interpret it in the sense of some transformation rather than bringing someone back to life as Lazarus was brought back.

28. Sobrino, op. cit., p.375.

29. Ibid., p.242.

30. Ibid., pp.251-252.

31. Ibid., p.252. Sobrino cites from a Spanish translation. For the direct English translation cf. J. Moltmann, THEOLOGY OF HOPE, SCM, London, 1967, p.103.

32. Ibid., p.380.

33. Ibid., p.379.

34. Leonardo Boff, JESUS CHRIST LIBERATOR, SPCK, London, 1980, p.289.

35. Ibid., p.289 - this term 'guerilla fighter' is objectionably too strong a word to indicate Jesus' association with any political situation.

36. Ibid., pp.105-111, 289-90.

37. Ibid., p.230.

38. Ibid., p.119.

39. Sobrino, op. cit. p.119. Boff borrows this image from D.Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison

40. Boff, op. cit., p.290.

41. Ibid., p.63.

42. Ibid., p.122.

43. Ibid., p.124-129.

44. Ibid., p.134. This is perhaps surprisingly the view of the nature of man's fulfilment as a christian view.

45. Ibid., p.291.

46. Gustavo Gutierrez, A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION, SCM, London, 1974, p.151.

47. Ibid., p.231.

48. Ibid., pp.36-37, 45, 176-178, 235-236.

49. Ibid., p.176.

50. Ibid., p.175.

51. Sobrino, op.cit., p.51.

52. Gutierrez, op. cit., p.175.

53. The concept of alienation was given full philosophical treatment by Hegel in his "Phenomenology of Mind" as also in his "Philosophy of History". The basic idea in Hegel is that whatever is, is in the last analysis Absolute Idea (Geist = Absolute Spirit), and the world is the creation of the Spirit. In the productive activity of creation the Spirit becomes conscious that in this activity it was externalizing or alienating itself. Man is the origin through whose process of knowledge the spirit returns to itself. Man as a conscious subject has consciousness of self through his active, productive relations to this world.

54. This was given great emphasis by Engels, Lenin and Stalin in the development of dialectical materialism.

55. K. Marx. ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p.68.

56. Ibid., pp.63-64.

57. K. Marx, op. cit., p.69.

58. Gutierrez, op. cit., p.177.

59. NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA 1, McGraw-Hill, p.1024.

60. St. Irenaeus, Adv.Haer. iii 19.1 as cited in B. Baker's EARLY HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, Methuen, London, 1958, p.334.

61. St. Athanasius, De Incarn. Ch. 1 iv, as cited in B. Baker, op. cit., p.349.

62. St. Anselm, CUR DEUS HOMO in ST. ANSELM BASIC WRITINGS, Open Court Classics, La Salle 1962, p.217.

63. Salvation is overcoming of sin and not merely the consequence of sin.

64. K. Rahner, "Salvation" in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THEOLOGY, ed. K. Rahner, Burns & Oates, London, 1975, p.1523.

65. This point of Jesus' attitude of obedience in relation to the sacrifice of the cross is emphasized very much by Robert J. Daly, S.J., in his book THE ORIGINS OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978.

66. M. Hengel, THE ATONEMENT . The origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament, SCM, London, 1981.

67.

68. Sobrino, op. cit., p.262.

69. Ibid., p.227.

CONCLUSION

(i)

RECAPITULATION

By way of conclusion we shall briefly summarize the main points of the thesis and then offer an assessment of the methodology of liberation theology. The liberation theology of Latin America has three main characteristics. First, it claims to be a theology based on commitment to the struggle of the oppressed for freedom and justice; here, so its proponents claim, speaks the voice of the poor, a voice which has not been heard before. This involves class struggle, but, according to the theologians whose work we have examined, it does not deny the meaning of universal love and peace. Secondly, it maintains that history is one, and that salvation history embraces all dimensions of human existence, including the political action of man to create a better society. Commitment to the praxis of the liberative process is true participation in the growth of the kingdom, which is a gift. It is a participation in the work of creation and redemption in Christ. The third characteristic is the primacy given to praxis, which means that it employs certain tools of social analysis, especially Marxist analysis, with a view to transform this society.

From a methodological point of view it is claimed that liberation theology is a distinctly new way of doing theology. Commitment to praxis comes first, and theology as a theory is the second step. In this process the concrete historical situation of the

theologian plays an essential, hermeneutical role. This implies that it is the commitment to praxis of brotherly love and service that helps us to arrive at an image of God. However, the hermeneutics has not yet been clearly spelt out by the theology of liberation.

With regard to 'Liberation Christology', there seems to be some divergence of paths as regards the starting-point. Sobrino and Boff start with the historical Jesus. Even when other liberation theologians claim that they insist on the historical Jesus as the starting point of Latin American christology, the motivation behind such insistence is, not any theological reason as such, but the practical reason that there are similarities between the situation of conflict in which Jesus lived and the present Latin American situation of struggle. Sobrino and Boff claim to have proferred Christologies within the general framework of liberation theology. However, basically they are not saying anything new, nor have they succeeded fully in presenting a theology arising from a purely Latin American context. The dimensions of christology they explore are basically orthodox, and the truths they want to expound are basically truths contained in tradition. But when they go on to re-express the same truths, their language comes dangerously close to adoptionism.

(ii)

AN ASSESSMENT

The Liberation theologians have accepted Karl Marx's understanding of the dialectical relation between theory and practice. However, whereas Marx would not start any project of revolutionary praxis without an underlying theory, the protagonists of liberation theology would seem to be suggesting that praxis can be untheoretical, unreflected. A closer look shows that they do not actually mean that in their commitment to praxis there is no theory involved. For example, Gutierrez would say that commitment to praxis is from the stand point of the word of God received in faith. Even the most radical liberation theologian, H. Assmann, would say that praxis has a reference to the faith of the Christian Community. By the very fact that commitment to praxis presupposes faith inspired by the word of God, theory is involved. This theory is implicit and is the underlying justification of praxis as christian action.

However, if this christian experience of commitment to action is coupled with social analysis, especially with that of a Marxist kind, and when experience becomes the key to the interpretation of the faith, then there is a risk of relativism and reductionism. However, the liberation theologians' use of Marxist analysis as an instrument (which is strongly objected to by the recent instruction from Rome) is problematic. Whether Marxist categories can be separated from the ideological stand point of Marxism remains an open question. It is beyond the scope of our thesis to discuss it.

The basic question whether the main interest of liberation theology is Christ or liberation has not been satisfactorily posed by christological statements that are available in the theology of Latin American tradition. However it must be asserted that liberation theology endeavours to be a theology which is profoundly Christological. It does so in the sense that Christ is seen as the liberator of all dimensions of reality by his proclamation of the kingdom that is distinctly related to his own person. Jesus himself is seen as the way to liberation. The kingdom is his gift and anyone who follows his path has to work in support of this kingdom by establishing peace and justice among men. Liberation christology however does not try to deduce everything from christology. Within christology itself emphasis is placed on the cross and resurrection as the paradigm of liberation. The cross offers a path of following Jesus and the resurrection offers hope, and expresses man's utopian longing for liberation from anything that alienates him.

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