arc

caught between two poles

THEOLOGY ON THE MAKE: HOPE AND LIBERATION

A few years back Harvey Cox wrote, "We are living in an age of revolution without a theology of revolution. The development of such a theology should be the first item on the theological agenda today".

Academic theologians—in seminary as well as university—continue their time-honoured task of nit-picking, and shrill voices proclaim the viability of "religious studies" or even "religiology" as respectable intellectual endeavours. But the crucial issues of our time are proving to be different from what Western tradition supposes. The issues are survival, freedom, human dignity. And the theologians who know this are found in the despised countries, still struggling out of colonialism and "underdevelopment". For them, theology concerns hope, liberation, revolution. It is political theology—not "a theology of politics" but a political theology, reasoning out the faith that has to do with creation and incarnation and human society.

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Father Camilo Torres of Colombia (I remember our Church, through its Board of Evangelism and Social Action, making strong statements about the unjust society of Colombia some twenty years ago)—Torres, like so many of his colleagues in mission, was driven away from non-violent protest to violence. Leader of a guerilla band, he was shot to death in a minor engagement.

Perhaps the "minor engagements" of political confrontations are the test of our theology. In this article I propose to sketch some of the background ideas and names of the "theology of hope" and its significance for the modern situation. In the next issue of ARC I will follow this with a statement concerning revolution and violence. Readers' reaction will be welcomed.

What is the meaning of "salvation"? The old, old story again captures attention, and demands commentary. For instance, it seems that Exodus is the biblical pattern for God's way with man: the Exit under Moses, the new Way ahead through Jesus. The Jews on the way from Egypt to Canaan knew what salvation meant for them: freedom from the land of bondage—liberation. (In the sign-language of the deaf, "salvation" is represented by crossed wrists suddenly pulled apart. He that has ears to hear ...).

Western theology, since Augustine in particular, has tended to spiritualize the biblical event of liberation. This was partly because the old dualism continued, the eternal battle between good and evil, in which the powers of darkness were so strong that man's hope lay in the life beyond death. For Augustine, and the Middle Ages after him, this was not so bad since the social order was still thought of as under God. But after the Enlightenment and the age of revolution, the Church tended to let the social order have its autonomy, so that "faith" became something private—"personal ethics" signify one's piety, one's soul-relation with God.

Such privatization of faith will not do: it denies the biblical thrust of creation (mankind destined together for joint fellowship or "common union") and incarnation (God's uttering a Word that joined himself with human being to restore mankind to joint sonship through the Elder brother). Jesus himself, of course, was no mere figurehead or abstract Logos. In his earthly life he confronted the powers—the group powers—which held men in bondage. His disciples included Zealots, his trial was political in which the charge was that he played the role of zealot Messiah (cf Cullmann, The State in the N.T.)—has our traditional theology done justice to this N.T. portrait?

Theologians of the Third World are trying to reflect this portrait. They know that politics has to do with power: narrowly, an elitist struggle for power, i.e. professional politicians over on behalf of their fellows. There is also a broad definition of "politics" however: everybody's business, the business of the polis, of society, of the totality of human life together. Man's consciousness is raised to a responsible level only when he acquires a sense of this business: politicization, "conscientization" in Freire's term. And if the

present society is unjust, then raising consciousness means dissatisfaction, an awareness that radical change is "in order". One of the ablest interpreters of the Third World scene is Gustavo Gutierrez, who indicates that "the political arena is necessarily conflictural" and that "Concretely, in Latin America this conflict revolves around the oppression-liberation axis" (Theol. of Liberation, 48).

The Third World (defined against both the capitalist West and its communist adversaries) has a special stake in the emerging theology of hope or liberation. It has seized on that biblical theme which Moltmann calls "Christ and his future"—the new creation made possible by the miracle of Resurrection. Rubem Alves, the Brazilian theologian, comments: "Man is made free for life, and therefore remains stubbornly unreconciled with death as the fact-or of history". It is this root freedom purchased by Christ and guaranteed by his resurrection presence, that opens eyes to God's will for the quality of human life here and now. It is not necessary to contrast present and future worlds, so that because eternal life occurs "then", it has nothing to say about temporal life now. That old chestnut should have been roasted long ago. Perhaps it is indeed a new era, when one sees conservative evangelicals renouncing the familiar private definition of ethics and joining the search for social justice. Is the time to hear the O.T. prophets come at last?

Ernst Bloch, the Marxist philosopher whose dialogue with the Bible has proved fruitful for many, sees how human dreams and utopias carry that human hope to which the Gospel is the answer: God's Story. Moreover, he finds in the Bible a "critique of religion" which bids us maintain a self-criticism along the way. If we develop a theology of glory, of human pride or satisfaction with our way of understanding the Gospel (as Luther used to warn) then we are allied with demons and are messengers of doom. Only as we echo the heart of Gospel—News that is Good—will we speak to the poor and oppressed of our day who languish and suffer for want of an authentic word that will prove powerful in raising minds and hearts to a new expectancy, a greater vision and a proper hope.

Bibliography: G. Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Orbis Books 1973) is excellent introduction and survey. Rosemary Ruether's Liberation Theology (Paulist 1972) covers other ground, including issues raised by blacks, women, etc. A recent debate in Christianity and Crisis (Sept 17 and Oct 3, 1973) contrasts the "Christian realism" of Niebuhr with the emerging liberation theology. C. Torres, Revolutionary Writings (1966); R. Alves, A Theology of Human Hope (1970); E. Bloch, Man On His Own, etc.

J.C. McLelland

AN APPEAL FOR JUSTICE

This appeal comes from Prof. Peterli von der Kuche who is a visiting teacher and researcher in the Toronto area.

I appeal to the readers of ARC to help me as I have been the innocent victim of an unjust act perpetrated by persons well known to most who would read this journal.

I have been in charge of a research project in the area of teaching Biblical languages which up to now has been highly secret due to the revolutionary nature of the concepts involved. Last year I received promises of substantial help from NDF, Knox College, and Presbyterian College. Of course, I could not reveal to them anything of the precise nature of my project, but the very thought of a break-through in the technology of teaching Biblical languages encouraged them to advance me a considerable sum and promise much more.

In view of what has happened, I feel compelled to make details of my research project public in order to protect myself not only from false gossip and rumour but also from the possibility that my idea may be stolen by the very people who funded me.

My research project is a daring attempt to harness heretofore unexploited sources of energy in nature using an interdisciplinary team of scientists, linguists, psychologists, and biblical scholars. Such a team has in fact been at work for many months under my leadership. The general idea is to do what computers can do but do it at a fraction of the cost and without any need to depend on a source of power like electricity. Insects and animals abound in our world and most of them can be trained. We had two working groups: a Montreal based group to work with insects and a Toronto based group to work with animals.

The Montreal based group selected fleas. It has long been known from the existence of flea circuses that fleas are highly trainable. The mailing list of the Presbyterian Record was matched with the list of dog owners in Montreal. Several Presbyterians in Montreal were then asked to bring their dogs in to the basement of Presbyterial College where our workers could vacuum them for fleas. In a short time, sufficient fleas were collected and work was ready to begin.

The concept was simple. Groups of fleas were trained to form Hebrew words on a blank sheet of paper. Anyone who has watched the half-time show of an American football game will understand immediately. Soon, we had trained several bottles of fleas each of which could form on a sheet of paper in succession the one hundred most frequent words occurring in Biblical Hebrew. With one bottle of fleas, a student could drill vocabularly for several hours at his convenience in the privacy of his own room, and at minimal cost.

The Toronto group was working with dogs. The idea was basically the same. Naturally, dogs are bigger than fleas, and so this had to be a group teaching experiment. Dogs were obtained from various sources. They were trained to form up in rapid succession the one hundred most common words in Biblical Hebrew. It is clear that this could not be done on a sheet of paper in a student's room. However, using the quadrangle of Knox College, the dogs formed up their words on the ground and the students hung out the windows of the top floor of the residence.

The work of both teams progressed very well and everything was kept totally secret. All work was done at odd hours when others were not around. Eventually, we were ready to unveil our project to the two colleges and the NDF to show them how their money had been spent and to ask for further funds to carry on the important work.

The unveiling of our project was to be a great occasion. Both the flea group and the dog group were to give a demonstration in the quadrangle of Knox College during the Christmas holidays. A special ceremony was arranged. There was to be an academic procession of members of both Colleges as well as the presence of dozens of dignitaries from Wynford Drive.

Unfortunately, during the last minute preparations, in the quadrangle, the worker carrying the bottles of fleas slipped on some ice and the bottles broke. The fleas leapt for the dogs. Driven to a frenzy the dogs sought escape. The first exit these poor creatures spied was an open window. The resultant uproar could not be brought under control for a full hour. Let me emphasize. No one was seriously injured. If anything, the dogs fared worse than the humans. It is true that gowns and academic hoods suffered damage.

But all this was an accident and no just cause for the abuse to which I was subjected. The Colleges and the NDF not only refused further funds for my project but demanded their first subsidy back. What is more, they wanted me to pay for the gowns and hoods which had been damaged in the melee. They called me a madman. They said my scheme was insane. But I am not fooled. I am convinced that they want me out of the way so that they can steal my idea. Thus, I cry for justice and help. Bring pressure to bear. Write letters. Send in petitions. Above all, under no circumstances donate fleas or dogs if the College request them. This will be certain evidence that they have stolen my idea.

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STRUCTURES

Structures are in the air (so to speak) so much so that even ARC is concerned with them. We are so worried about structures that we can't even reorganize, we have to be restructured. The trouble with the discussion is that it starts from the wrong place, from the assumptions of sixteenth century Scotland, and

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consequently ends at the wrong place, with a church that contemplates its own navel. In point of fact, if we knew what has happened to our church since the death of Andrew Melville, we would realize that we have invented structures with gay abandon, but since most of them were invented by overseas missionaries, nobody in Canada has ever heard of them.

Let us start with India, the least successful of our fields. Because the Indians did not take to the gospel with much enthusiasm, church growth, as measured in the usual categories of members and congregations, was slow. On the other hand the ground rules of Indian missions called for the early establishment of medical and educational facilities, and these flourished like the green bay tree. Further, not only did the Indians tend to resist the gospel, they also tended to drive the people who did become Christians into the shadow of the mission, and after forty years of work a remarkable number of Christians were working for the mission. In 1924 there were just under 1800 Christians, and the mission cost us about $180,000 a year, or roughly a hundred dollars a head. The church in India was not far from being a network of social services run by the Christians.

This is clearly not our problem; we have Christians and we don't have to worry any more about education and medicine. I mention this case simply to illustrate the way we have varied our church structures in the past. Of more immediate relevence are the other fields, of which the simplest example is the New Hebrides.

The New Hebrides was a successful mission. After, say, 1870 the islanders began to take the missionaries seriously, and bit by bit they became Christian. To handle the demand, the missionaries began appointing teachers to the various villages, charged with managing the daily literacy classes and the Sunday services, under the overall direction of one or perhaps two missionaries per island. In other words, they invented a series of small dioceses. Because the missionaries had in some cases grown up with the teachers, and in other places baptized them, there was a close human relationship among them that prevented the missionaries from becoming the prince bishops of the middle ages that gave the Reformers such heebeejeebies. Further, the missionaries had to take the chiefs into account. Chiefly authority may not have amounted to much in the islands, but it was the only government in sight, and as such, had to be taken seriously. The missionaries knew from long experience that they could not do without the chiefs, for not until the chiefs, or some at least, were won could the village be won. These considerations, plus the fact that the islands were small communities where everybody knew everybody resulted in a very human, if at times paternalistic, kind of church. These Presbyterian missionaries created a church structure after the pattern, not of the sixteenth, but out of the second century, and to round it all off neatly, they used to meet together in Synod.

The other fields fell somewhere in between these two extremes. Honan, in China, had an elaborate network of social services, but not as elaborate as India, and they had more Christians. In Korea the 'mission' structure, compared to the church, was comparatively small. The Korean Church grew by the multiplication of Bible classes, supervised by a roving Korean staff, who in turn were supervised by the district missionaries. In Trinidad a similar diocesan structure appeared, but in this case the basic unit was the village church/school, run by the Trinidadian teacher/preacher, who provided education for the young and preaching for the adults.

But however they may have varied, these patterns had two things in common. They were invented in response to a specific missionary situation, and they were all regarded as temporary. Nobody thought of them as being a permanent way of organizing a church, and they all looked forward to the day, however far off when the missionary pattern would be replaced by regular Presbyterian structures. As Harvey Norton, a Trinidad missionary, put it, we want natives in their places, not in ours. In other words the function of the missionary is to start things going and then pull out, leaving behind a regularly constituted Presbyterian church. The trouble is that the regularly constituted Presbyterian church was invented for the Scottish lowlands in the sixteenth century, not the sugar plains of Trinidad in the twentieth. The one society was, and still is, largely Hindu or Muslim; the other had been deeply influenced by Christianity since at least the days of Columba. The diocesan structure of the Trinidad church grew out of the need to preach the gospel to the Hindus, while Andrew Melville could assume that everyone in sight was at least nominally Christian. It would not take much work to show that we are closer to Harvey Nortin's problem than Andrew Melville's.

We are in a missionary situation; we all know this, but we never draw the appropriate conclusions. All over the world we have used the district missionary as the key figure in missionary situations: why not try it here? Grant that the district missionaries have been phased out, partly because they were foreigners, and partly because the office was believed to be temporary. The first argument is valid, the second is not. The district missionary was the idea man, the guide, the counsellor of his staff, and if any good, he was the man with the vision of the church as a whole. These functions never become obsolete. Organization and Planning have hinted at such a man in their Synod Executive Officer, but they do not argue the case with sufficient rigour. Unless this job begins and ends with the need to help the church to be the incarnation of the gospel, we might as well forget it. Perhaps we should forget it anyway, but what we can't forget is that we need men who are free to lead. The Presbyterian system only works well if men are prepared to take initiative, in Presbytery and in Synod, and there are very few of us who can do that and manage a parish at the same time.

Geoffrey Johnston

Mr. Johnston has ministered in Canada and Nigeria, and has taught in Nigeria and at the University of West Indies (Jamaica). He is presently in the Missionary Education office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the last few months I have been reflecting on the difficulty many Christians (including some ministers) have in understanding and living out of the Old Testament. At our synod meeting last Fall we tried to study a passage from II Kings. Some did famously; quite a few found it disastrous! From my recent involvement with the professional year at Montreal, theology students also seemed diffident about preaching from the Old Testament, especially preaching a Christian sermon from an Old Testament text.

What is the relevence of that ancient collection of books that comprise the larger part of our canon? How are its incidents, people and writings related to Christ? What hermeneutic does justice to what is said? How can we rediscover the Old Testament as the Word of God for us?

The Example of Abraham

Let's illustrate some answers and develop some methodology by reflecting on the story of Abraham and the references to him in the rest of Scripture. This latter aspect can be easily seen with the help of a concordance, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, or A Companion to the Bible (ed. J.J. Van Allmen).

A quick survey of Genesis 12 to 25 impresses upon us the figure of a man who was a leader of a large family, a traveller, around whom various ancient peoples and divers individuals clustered. He is both a man of faith and a man struggling to believe. Very human, yet also extraordinary. The more you live with him (through reading and rereading his life story) the more you identify with him. If you find trusting God a problem, so did Abraham. If you have known the triumphs of risking faith, so did Abraham. Being a believer is quite a trip!

But Abraham's story is not just psychologically intriguing and his importance for the church does not simply lie in the realism of our written accounts about him. He is more than an example. Abraham is related to the history of Israel as a nation.

Abraham and Is-rael

The Apostles' Creed of the Old Testament, (which is found in Deuteronomy 26) begins with "a wandering Aramean" who is the "father" of Israel (cf. Ps. 105:6 and Isa. 41:8). Abraham has a most significant place in the history of Israel, viewed as a history of salvation. He is one with whom God made a covenant—a covenant initiated by God and based on promise without conditions. This covenant, and the Davidic covenant (I Samuel 7), stood in contrast to the Sinaitic covenant with its stipulations and laws. Thus Abraham, like David, became a figure of hope when the Sinaitic covenant was broken and the people were exiled

(cf. I Chronicles 16:16; 29:18; Nehemiah 9:7f.). Here is the historical rootedness of Israel's hope — in the God of Abraham, a God of promise. We are not pointed to faith in Abraham but in the God in whom Abraham trusted.

Israel also saw in the Abrahamic covenant the basis for pleading for undeserved mercy (cf. Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:26,27; II Kings 13:22,23; Micah 7:20; cf. also Luke 16:19-31).

Abraham and Christ

The Christian ought, however, to go beyond even Israel's theology to Christ. If their faith was in the God of Abraham, so is ours. But that God has clarified his person and further acted in Jesus, the Christ. We need to follow the story of Abraham beyond its implications for Israel to Jesus of Nazareth who was born a descendant of Abraham (Matthew 1). In the New Testament references we see the full significance of Abraham for the Christian Church.

The Abrahamic covenant with its promise of a great nation through which all nations would be blessed was prophetic of Christ and fulfilled supremely in him (Luke 1:73; John 8:56; Galatians 3:16). And through faith in Christ we non-Jews become the recipients of that covenant (Romans 4:16-19; Galatians 3:6-9; 4:28-31). The centre of our theology is Christ.

In pondering the faith of Abraham, we are not called to emulate him by our trying to believe, but to look to the object of his faith, *viz.*, Christ. Then we can see both the object and the source of our own faith in the same Christ. This is the whole thrust of Stephen's sermon (Acts 7) and the panegyric on faith in Hebrews 11 which ends with our focus on Christ (12:1-3).

Concluding Observations

This is just a sketch from one small part of the Old Testament replete with relevant challenge for the Christian Church today. In the full purview of Scripture it is related to that history of salvation that is centred and culminated in Christ. This is a Christological interpretation of Abraham without apology. As such it avoids the moralizing which arises from a mere character study and points the Christian community to the true dynamic source of its life.

Now, why not go back and reexamine the Genesis chapters in the light of the rest of the Scriptures? After that you could go on to study the other Patriarchs, or Moses or David!

The method is straight forward. Relate the person to his place in history from the perspective of Israel's faith and journey throughout that history. Connect this development with the person and ministry of Christ and then tie in the church's links through Christ. With this wider perspective, the chapters in Genesis can be reread afresh. It is at this point they challenge our living and believing with their concreteness and their vividness.

Arthur Van Seters

EFFECTIVE PREACHING

"The parson (collectively understood) does indeed preach about those glorious ones who sacrificed their lives for the truth. As a rule the parson is justified in assuming that there is no one present in the church who would entertain the notion of venturing upon such a thing. When he is sufficiently assured of this by reason of the private knowledge he has of the congregation as its pastor he preaches glibly, declaims vigorously, and wipes away the sweat. If on the following day one of those strong and silent men, a quiet, modest, perhaps even insignificant-looking man, were to visit the parson at his house announcing himself as one whom the parson had carried away by his eloquence, so that he had now resolved to sacrifice his life for the truth—what would the parson say? He would address him thus: 'Why, merciful Father in heaven! How did such an idea ever occur to you? Travel, divert yourself, take a laxative!"

(Kierkegaard,

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