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# CLIC PAPERS

**LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN CENTRAL AMERICA  
AND  
LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE  
MARXIST SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

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Together, these papers serve to provide a greater understanding of how religion has played a visible role in revolutionary movements. Only through this understanding can we properly integrate its aspects into appropriate foreign policy deliberations and avoid the pitfalls of ignorance.

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by

Melissa K. Barnes

and

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## PREFACE

Separation of church and state has been a founding principle within this country from the time of our forefathers. However this separation does not extend around the globe. In many regions of the LIC environment, the interaction of religion and politics has had explosive consequences. Often when one thinks of the intertwining of religion and politics, the region that comes to mind is the Middle East. However, there is another aspect of this interaction which is also of concern to US interests. This aspect is the doctrine of liberation theology in Latin America and its relationship to the ideology of revolutionary movements.

While liberation theology has received increased interest and visibility in the past few years, some uncertainties surround its origin and its impact on revolutionary movements. To assist in that regard, the Center presents two papers of interest to those concerned with the future of liberation theology in Latin America. The first, from the perspective of an US student of Latin American Studies, succinctly addresses many of the questions the North American public has concerning liberation theology. In the second, Professor Ybarra-Rojas, a co-founder of the University Catholic Action Youth in Nicaragua and consultant on the peace process in Central America, presents a theoretical model of the rise of Christianity elaborated by the classics of Marxism in order to show how liberation theology has been adopted by elements of Marxist Sociology.

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## LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

by

Melissa K. Barnes

History shows the nations of Central America have been in almost constant upheaval for centuries. This turmoil can be attributed at least in part to Spanish colonial rule and its attendant subjugation of the native Indian population, largely characterized by political and economic oppression. Another element of colonial rule causing upheaval was the Roman Catholic Church. Church positions and policies continue to contribute to unrest in Central America today. The current issue is a concept known as "liberation theology."

As opposed to our cherished tradition of separation of church and state, the church in Central America rivals established secular institutions in its political and economic influence (1:76). From the beginning of the colonial era, native Indian religions were combined with traditional Christian teachings, a practice which not only made the colonialists' religion palatable, but also institutionalized the church in government for the Indians' governed with their religion. A good example is the Guatemalan cofradios, a lay organization which began to effectively influence the government in the Indian regions (7:22).

It was not until the early 1960s that the Roman Catholic Church -- the predominant religious affiliation in Central America -- became an important quasi-official social instrument of the peasants in the region. The catalyst was the Vatican Council II of 1962-1965. Vatican Council II, an instrument of major change in Roman Catholic theology, is perhaps best known for its provision permitting Mass to be said in the vernacular, thus "bringing man closer to his God." Just as significant is the direction that saving souls is no longer the only mission of the Church -- human rights and social issues are now "major issues" of Roman Catholic theology (1:23). The Church began to interpret God's work through "human progress" (2:16).

In Medellin, Colombia in 1968 the Second Latin American Bishops Conference was held to discuss VC II doctrines and how the Council decisions were to be implemented (3:79). They produced a report often called "the Magna Carta for liberation theology" (2:22). And perhaps the most important change in this document was an expanded definition of "sin." The bishops decreed that sin could no longer be viewed as simply a personal transgression, but sin could also be a transgression committed by the state (2:23) in the social, economic, and political senses.



They further stated that where these transgressions occur, the church is obligated to "accompany" the people to help resolve the situation (3:79).

From that conceptualization of the church's role emerged a new concept, Liberation Theology. The church began to interpret the Bible's message with reference to the poor in Central America; with that justification of the church's role in all of society, a new age of awareness and activism began to spread. The message was Jesus' teaching was a call to liberation . . . God is a god for the poor (1:23) . . . in both the old and new testaments, oppression and injustice are condemned . . . God is a god of justice . . . the Bible promises a better life on earth, not just in heaven (3:79).

Liberation theology was described as "a new way of understanding Christian beliefs, Christian life:" the church was obligated to look at life from the side of the poor and their demand for justice (1:23). Liberation theology was embraced as the answer to the economic, social, and political problems of the poor.

This new concept presented the Central American priests not only a radical change in their theology but also a formidable challenge. Whereas they had been dealing with poverty's existence, they now had to also deal with its causes and find a cure. Someone or something was causing the inadequate housing, lack of adequate health care, illiteracy, etc. (5:27). What better reason -- or more opportune target -- than the richer countries of the region and the world? Many liberation theologians concluded the cause of Central American poverty was, indeed, the exploitation of the developing countries by the developed countries.

Since most of the developed countries are capitalistic, then it follows, to many liberation theologians, that capitalism is to blame. The liberation theologian believes the developed countries -- the capitalists -- will dominate and control international economics and thus exploit lesser developed nations for cheap labor and raw materials. To maintain this status, the rich countries will manipulate the political processes of the developing nations, even intervening militarily if it supports their self interests. Some liberation theologians say this evil process is aided by the small upper class in the victim states, thus continuing a form of colonialism. This theory means that the exploitation is "an evil only of capitalism" (5:28-29).

Since Marxism is the "antithesis" of capitalism, is the answer to Central American poverty Communism? It seems clear those who embrace liberation theology think so. They dismiss development as the solution for the underdeveloped countries: they argue development will only widen the gap between the upper

and lower classes (5:29). Gustavo Gutierrez says change must come quickly, and the necessary change can only be achieved through revolution. That radical changes within the social and economic structure of the states must take place if the oppressed are to be freed (5:30).

This is pure Marxism, and therein is a major criticism of liberation theology. With this Marxist-led revolution and the establishment of a Marxist government. This then will open the gates for the spread of Communism by the Soviets and their surrogates in these newly developing nations. This facet of liberation theology is used as justification of Reagan's Central American policy. In 1980, a paper written by the Committee of Santa Fe said "the United States policy must begin to counter liberation theology" (2:3). The Committee further said that liberation theologians use the church as a political weapon against the private property and the development of Capitalism "by infiltrating the religious community" with ideas which are more Communist than Christian (2:4).

In answer to this criticism, moderate liberation theologians do not promote total Marxism, but they only see a socialist society as being able to answer the ills present in Central America. Phillip Berryman says this socialist society should have three characteristics: 1) meet people's basic needs: 2) give ordinary people opportunity to participate in the development of a new society: and, 3) what is developed should not be a copy of any existing socialist governments but one which is uniquely Central American. As in the Medillin documents the people should be "subjects of their own development" (2:92).

Out of all this emerging thought arose a new institution. The grass roots movement of organizing (Cumunidades Eclesiales de Base, or Christian base communities. These were small groups of people who met with appointed lay leaders for Bible study and worship. The importance of the priest as the leader of the community diminished as a result. The pastoral work which had been concentrated at the church began to shift to these communities (1:22). For example, in 1969 in El Salvador, these communities became the predominant output of the church work. It is interesting to note that Christian base communities were present in areas where fighting had been such as Suchitoto, Aguilares, San Martin, Guapa, Arcatoe, and Zucatecolua (1:23).

At these community meetings, the people began to interpret the Bible messages with reference to their own lives. This interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of the poor pointed out the inadequacies of the status quo and gave the peasants a reason to come together (1:23). Also, the peasants began to discuss more openly the inadequacies of the governments. Grass roots movements began to appear all over Central America in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Their impact on society

became evident as their numbers increased. Popular organizations grew as people realized that the Christian base communities could be used as an instrument through which they could apply pressure on existing power structures. In the 1970s, the Federation of Christian Peasants of El Salvador (FECCAS) became stronger and spread. Although FECCAS had existed since the 1960s, its organization began to use peasants to push for pressure to order reforms (1:23-24).

Thus emerged the politicization of the church in Central America. The distinction between church and state diminished. Because of the church's stance on human rights violations and subsequent position of the priests as the protectors of the poor, often the church was put between the government and the peasants. This issue, along with the escalating violence in Central America, brought the promoters of liberation theology under fire.

In El Salvador, the Christian base communities and the Catholic clergy started speaking out against the human rights violations present (7:252). In November 1974 in San Vicente Province, a Christian base community was occupying a piece of land trying to get the owner to let them rent it. But the government moved in, killing six, and arresting many more. The peasants then grouped to form the Union of Rural Workers (UTC). Also, at this time peasants, lay leaders, church people, and other labor leaders formed the United Popular Action Front (FAPU) (1:24). Notably, Archbishop Oscar Romero, who vehemently denounced the atrocities committed by the Salvadoran troops, called for immediate reforms. He was murdered in March of 1980 (1:114).

As a result of these emerging popular organizations, the El Salvadoran government responded with force to demonstrations and political pressure. The government perceived these organizations as the impetus behind increasing peasant uprisings. The connection between the popular organizations and existing guerrilla factions such as the National Resistance came under scrutiny. Some of the popular leaders became involved with guerrilla movements, and the grass roots movements all over Central America became political tools for the insurgent forces (1:24-25).

The governments' perception of the connection between the groups can be illustrated by different event in separate countries. In San Salvador, a priest was killed in response to the kidnaping and murder of the foreign minister by Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) guerrillas (1:26). In Honduras, the gap between the church and state was growing because of increasing turmoil. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, the Army Chief of Staff, in 1983 took a pro-American stance and supported Reagan's opposition to liberation theology (7:258). In Nicaragua on October 2, 1977, a small group of so-called Christian men and women attacked a

nation guard barracks in San Carlos. A great deal of their incentive came from the discussions which had taken place in their Christian base community meetings. All over Nicaragua these communities have contributed to insurrections which escalated in the late 1970s (4:404).

There is a great deal of controversy concerning the training of lay people by the church and their involvement in the political scene. So most of the grass roots communities pulled away from church participation and began to concentrate on the political work. However, Christian base communities are still able to move more freely in the society than the labor organizations. In 1987, Ortega met with leaders of Christian communities in Nicaragua and out of this meeting came critical support for the government's policies and programs. This comes from the blending of the Christian ideals with the Sandinista revolutionary goals. In Nicaragua it is hoped that these grass roots organizations may help to develop a democratic society. (4.404-407).

The Catholic Church is not the only religious organization trying for Central America. The Protestant missionary organizations are fast becoming strong with the Central American peasants. In Guatemala, 30% of the population belongs to a Protestant community, and their leaders denounce Catholic liberation theology as Marxist. In turn the Catholics counter with the argument that the Protestants are trying to further United States geopolitical strategies. So, in Guatemala the turmoil between these two factions is another cause for alarm beside the insurgency. Most rural areas are still solidly Catholic, but the instability in Central America, among peasants, makes the Protestants' conservative preaching very appealing. They do not shout for radical change, but take a more moderate stand and preach of the life in the hereafter (6:63).

Thus far I have traced the beginnings of liberation theology and its present position in Central America. It has been shown that liberation theology contains a great deal of Marxist thought and it is this concept which has brought liberation theology under criticism by the United States and religious leaders. Liberation theology is a major instrument of change in Central America. Its implications and practices must be monitored.

Basically, the greatest objection to liberation theology is the Marxist message within its doctrine and the escalation of violence which it promotes. Pure Marxist may in itself be good theory; however, there is no true Marxist government in the world. They are Marxist-Leninist. It may be possible that the best answer to the social, economic, and political problems in Central America is a socialist government. However, "socialist" (Marxist) preachings in liberation theology will make a government more susceptible to Soviet influence. This is true

because, without outside economic help, I do not believe there is a country in Central America which can stand on its own feet even if insurgences are eliminated. It is imperative that liberation theology be stopped. The theologian is often the only contact the peasant has with the rest of his country. Their political ideas will be shaped by Marxist preachers, and, therefore, the peasants will never know the options of more democratic ideals.

Also, wherever liberation theology is present in Central America, there has been violence. All because a priest told the peasants that the government was sinning against them and the only way to reform was through revolution.

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# LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE MARXIST SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

by

Antonio Ybarra-Rojas

## Introduction

A real dialogue with the theologies of liberation that propose "a novel interpretation of both the content of faith and of Christian existence"<sup>1</sup> borrowed from Marxist ideology requires an understanding of the pastoral implication of the Marxist's Sociology of Religion. As Leonardo and Clodovis Boff state, ". . . the theology of liberation is more than just a theology. It represents the church of a whole continent -- a church caught up in the historical process of a people on the move. There are people behind liberation theology, there is struggle, there is life . . . ." <sup>2</sup> So in order to clarify the nature of the relationship between Marxist ideology and liberation theology one must go beyond the limits posed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's document<sup>3</sup> which defines the issue as one of using Marxist's ideas or Marxist analytical categories in theological reflection. Instead, it is necessary to understand why theologians lead by a pastoral concern have adopted a new hermetism based on the Marxist interpretation of Christianity. The presentation of the Marxists sociology of religious interpretation of the roots of Christianity as a social movement will contribute to the comprehension of it's adoption by those theologies of liberation. However, the Marxist theory of religion has generally been presented in such simplistic and reductionist terms that the relationship with liberation theology has been obscured. It is my intention to reconstruct the sociological approach to religion developed by the classics of Marxism in order to clarify this question.

The most wide-spread analysis of the founders of Marxism on religion refers to their ideological critique based on a philosophical perspective, a perspective characteristic of their writings of youth but not of their conceptions of maturity. As indicated by Roger Garaudy, the statement that "religion is the opium of the people" is taken from a text of Marx's of 1843, a period when Marx was not yet a Marxist but a left wing disciple of Fuerbach.<sup>4</sup>

Engels confirms to us the tendencies of Marx and himself at that early period, writing, "the enthusiasm was generalized, we were all at that time Fuerbaquians."<sup>5</sup> Besides the influence of Fuerbach, seventeenth and eighteenth century French materialism was heavily present in their writings. The transition can be identified with their efforts to try to explain religious phenomena from a perspective that could be qualified as

sociological. Engels confirms his rupture from that early period, writing, ". . . the step that Fuerbach did not take had to be taken: the cult of abstract man that constituted the center of the new Fuerbaquian religion had to necessarily be replaced by the science of real men and their historical development."<sup>6</sup>

#### Engels Debate With Bruno Over Primitive Christianity

Engels for the first time presented his new perspective on religion in his debate with Bruno Bauer in an article<sup>7</sup> published on May 11, 1882. In regards to the nature of the origins of Christianity, Engels departs from the explanation given by Bauer and introduces his thesis on the foundation of religions. For Engels, "religions are founded by people that experience for themselves a religious need, and that have the sense of the religious needs of the masses, and in general that is not the case of traditional philosophers . . . ."<sup>8</sup> Engels criticizes the current of thought in which Bauer is situated: the free thinkers of the middle ages through the philosophers of the enlightenment considered that religions were the creation of impostors and frauds. However, Engels after Hegel's contribution will focus on the perspective that history follows a rational evolution and obeys objective laws.

Bruno Bauer contends that the new testament was historically unverifiable and that even the historic existence of Jesus Christ was doubtful. He concluded that the true founders of Christianity were the Jews from Alexandria, Philon, and the Roman stoic philosopher Seneca. He deduced that because Philon had made the fusion between the Hebrew tradition and the rationalist Greek philosophy together with Roman stoicism of his time, he had laid the foundations of Christianity. However, Engels would rebut these arguments replying, "we do not finish with a religion that has submitted the Roman world and has dominated for 1800 years the greater part, by far, of civilized humanity, declaring it to be formed by a tissue of absurdities fabricated by a frauder."<sup>9</sup>

Engels points out that even if the system of thought of Christianity was marked by the influences of the philosophers of that period, which could have facilitated the adoptions of that ideology by the masses of Rome and Greece, the important feature of that phenomena was not addressed. Because, the essential aspect of the foundation of Christianity is not in the system of ideas that characterize the religion, but in the fact that those ideas took possession and were adopted by the oppressed masses of the Roman Empire.

According to Engels the true actors that make history are not ideas or the philosophers that produce ideas, but the masses. The masses appropriate systems of thought in the form of

ideology, specifically in the form of religious ideology. It is this form of ideology that the people can express their protestation against their life situation and at the same time justify their continual existence under those conditions of domination in a class society. Engels develops this point writing, "we can have an idea of what Christianity was in its primitive form reading the apocalypse of Saint John."<sup>10</sup>

The author rejects Bauer's explanation as insufficient when he highlights the essential features of this new religious movement by indicating that its class composition is characteristic of the oppressed masses of the time. Engels wrote, ". . . in the end the essential characteristics are: the new religious philosophy overthrew the old order of the world, finding its disciples among the poor, the miserable, the slaves, the pariahs, and rejecting the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and raising the rule of rejection of all earthly and temporary pleasure, and the mortification of the flesh."<sup>11</sup>

For Engels, the idealist and capricious explanations of his predecessors fail in that they look for ideas to understand the causes of this movement that has revolutionized the world, but did not research for the causes that have produced these ideas within the historical movement. For the co-founder of Marxism, the explanation from his social perspective has to be centered in the historic and class conditions that made those ideas become adopted by the masses of the Roman Empire. He wrote, ". . . we do not come to an end if we can not explain its origin and its development (Christianism). From the historical conditions that existed at that moment, when it was born and when it became the dominant ideology."<sup>12</sup>

#### Engels Identification of the Historical Conditions That Explain the Rise of Christianity

According to Engels the following were the conditions that characterize the conjuncture that permitted the spread of the religious ideology of Christianity:

1. The subordinate role of the ideological structure within the slave mode production granted an increase relative autonomy to ideological forms, especially religious forms.

2. The deterioration of the judicial and political order of the ancient world under the expansion of the Roman Empire. Its economic implications and its effects on the structure of social relations contributed to undermine the traditional loyalties to national religions and authority.

3. The loss of confidence of the ruling classes and their weakened capacity to govern, together with the upsurge of a coalition of the subordinate social classes, centered upon the historical revindications of the universal class of slaves.



4. The capacity of the new ideological system to satisfy the demands of the oppressed masses of the Roman Empire explaining their adoption of the Christian message and church organization. The religious ideology of Christianity functioning as an ideological operator translated and reflected the ideological demands for liberation of the oppressed classes of the time.

5. The consolidation of the new ideological hegemony was assured by the control over the state apparatus at the time of formation of the feudal mode of production. The ideological structure became the dominant instance of that mode of production, as necessary mediator of the reproduction of relations of production between serf and feudal lords, with the church backing their divine right to govern and extract economic surplus.

For Engels, the identification of the specific historic conditions of formation and development of a religious ideology are essential in the explanation of the most pertinent question regarding this phenomenon, its mass character, the fact that this ideological religious movement was based and instituted by the exploited masses of people of the Roman Empire. It is a social revolutionary movement that explains its success at the time and its capacity of transforming the ancient world into the future stage of development until the seventeenth century, combining its necessary religious form with its popular social base. Engels wrote, ". . . it had to manifest itself under a religious form, like every notion that would be able to take hold of the masses during that period and until the seventeenth century."<sup>13</sup>

According to the theoretical model proposed by Engels in his maturity, the characterization of a religious movement as progressive or reactionary can only be deduced from the specific historical conditions of its foundation and development and on its impact in the process of transformation of social relations as stated by Roger Garaudy, "for a Marxist, religion is never the motor of history, but it is not always an obstacle to progress. Religion will play a different role according to the historical condition."<sup>14</sup>

In order to appreciate the pastoral concerns of liberation theology, it is significant to understand the lessons they derived from Engels model of primitive Christianity as a successful religious movement. The implication of such an analysis can clarify the adoption of Engels hermetism today with regard to a contemporary interpretation of Christianity that proclaims to be faithful to its roots. At the same time, it follows a strategy of identification with the aspirations of the oppressed classes of today that can assure its success and survival as a progressive religious movement in the future.

The presentation of Engels model of a Sociology of Religion that explains the success of primitive Christianity can lead to a better understanding of the influence that the Marxist framework has had in some liberation theologies. As stated by Gustavo Gutierrez, ". . . many agree with Sartre that 'Marxism, as the formal framework of all contemporary philosophical thought, cannot be suspended.' Be that as it may, 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."<sup>15</sup>

After the presentation of Engels' model of the Christian revolution in the Roman Empire, the points of confrontation with the Marxist interpretation by liberation theologies would be clear to precise.

#### Engels' Sociological Model of Primitive Christianity

A. The role of ideology in the crisis of the slave mode of production of the Roman Empire.

According to Engels it is the death of the ancient world that permits the conditions of triumph of the new religion. For the author, in periods where the social system is in crisis, the old philosophies and religious dogmas lose their consistency and are challenged.<sup>16</sup> However, in the slave mode of production the effect of the crisis was particularly strong on the ideological structure due to its role within that mode. In the slave mode of production, the dominate influence lies with the judicial-political instance that exercises a hegemonic role in the maintenance of the cohesion of the social formation of the society. It prescribes the place of every individual in the social hierarchy. It is the law that establishes the relations of ownership of the slave to his master. The social relations do not need any legitimation from religious or other ideologies to assure the social stability of the reproduction of such relations of production. When the relations are challenged, it is direct coercion and force that keeps them in place, not persuasion. The division of labor is simple with regard to a clear-cut social division of labor and rights. For some, there is total absence of freedom while for others there is the full enjoyment of democracy according to rank within the city-state.

The absence of a mediating role of the ideological structure gave this instance of the mode an increased autonomy. The ancient world could afford high degrees of liberty of consciousness and a great diversity of choice in ideological and religious matters. The conditions of the slaves were particularly affected because they were uprooted from their homelands, distancing themselves from their traditional religious

practices, and at the same time exposed to the variety of practices of slaves with different cultural and religious traditions.

For A. D. Sujov, who develops Engels model, the distinctive feature of the Christian's religion claims its force in that it is not a religious movement characteristic of the ancient slave society but of the feudal world ingestion during the crisis of the old world.<sup>17</sup> The author characterizes the religious ideologies of the slave mode of production as follows:

1. Religion did not play an important role in the developed slave society (the Roman-Greek world), that is why the institutions of priesthood did not achieve an influential function during that period.

2. The personification of social phenomena did not achieve a predominant role in the religious structure.

3. The typical religious form of the slave regime was polytheism.

4. The religions of the slave society had a strictly national character.

5. The doctrines of the next life represented the existence of the present life and were pure prolongations or extensions of earthly existence.<sup>18</sup>

As a corollary, the social protest movement of the slave society were free of preponderant religious components. Sujov quotes A. F. Bauer<sup>19</sup> in analyzing the revolt movements of Spartacus and Euno, which did not have a significant philosophical or religious expression.

For this current of Marxist thought represented by Sujov and based on the research of Engels writings, as developed by N. A. Figulovskaia<sup>20</sup>, Christianity was not a characteristic religious movement of slave society but helped transform the old world and structure the formation of the feudal world.

Sujov<sup>21</sup> characterizes the ideological feature of the religions of the feudal world as follows:

1. Religion plays a fundamental role in the social life of feudal society based on the non-economic constraints imposed by the process of production to assure the transfer of economic surplus from serf to feudal lords. Persuasion is the key factor to assure the reproduction of the social division of labor. The church plays an important role as an organization that enforces both the economical and political system.

2. The incarnation of the forces of nature passes to a second level of importance and the first place of symbolic representation in religion is played by the personification of social forces.

3. The doctrines of life after death achieve complete development and the after life is totally conditional on rewards or punishments earned by the observance of moral obligations fulfilled during earthly existence.

4. Religions preach the need of a division for classes in society and teach obedience of the oppressed to their rulers.

5. The religions of feudalism have a supranational character.

6. In the period of feudalism, monotheism is the typical religious form.

Based on the characterization of Christianity as a religion that helps bring about the feudal world from the crisis of the slave society, the orthodox Marxist school follows Engels' model identifying the conditions of its success. First as M. N. Meymn<sup>22</sup> wrote, that the characteristic of the slave conditions facilitated their adoption of the new religion because they were:

1. A heterogeneous conglomerate of people, of different nationalities, speaking different languages, so no one of their own traditional religious views could win over the rest.

2. Besides having been uprooted from their own heritage both culturally and religiously, they could not have families or dependents to pass their own traditions to, so in one generation those traditions weakened to the point of disappearing. Only an established church could assure the continuity of a religious tradition among slaves without families.

Engels' model has been expanded by Utchenko<sup>23</sup> also quoted by Sujov, stating that Christianity did not have the competition of other religious forms of the old society because none provided for a common ground for both slaves and masters. According to the author, "in the slave society, religion did not arrive to constitute an explicit rapport between the class of exploiters and exploited. It did not arrive to establish a sufficient relationship between the exploited and the faith in the divinities of the exploiters."<sup>24</sup> Christianity, however, was able to establish this common ground and bring together to a new faith of both slaves and master.

B. The causes of the deterioration of the judicial-political order under the expansion of Roman Imperialism.

According to Engels, Roman conquest disarticulated the dominated countries, first in its political and judicial structures and then indirectly in its ancient social life conditions.<sup>25</sup> The process also had a feed-back effect on the metropolis, contributing to its own internal crisis of its political and economic structures.

Engels identifies first of all the three mechanisms that play to disorganize the conquered nations.

1. Under the influence of Roman presence the old caste systems are replaced by the simple differences between Roman citizen and non-citizen in the native society.

2. The author emphasizes the fact that Roman law and Roman judges took the place of the native forms of justice, overriding any legislation in opposition to Roman regulations.<sup>26</sup> The result was the loss of the traditional judicial culture among the conquered people. The process contributed to the deculturalization of those nations and facilitated, over time, their assimilation into Roman culture. For both Marx and Engels, Roman law was the first legal structure on a supranational base that codified the dominance of a commodity-oriented mode of production.

3. For Engels, the third mechanism relating to the infrastructure of the society had the greatest effect in the disorganization of the supra-structural political institutions of the ancient world. He wrote, "the economic exploitation exercised by the Roman state is the principle cause of the dissolution of the empire in its slave forms . . . . If the empire tried to reduce the roles of the pro-consuls in the interest of the state, its replacement by a high tax system for the Empire treasury had a even heavier effect on the local population, this form of exploitation had the most terrible disintegrative effects."<sup>27</sup>

However, the crisis was also induced in the metropolis. The effect was an increase in the operational cost of the state apparatus. Engels identifies three grave consequences due to Roman expansion.

1. The growth in the size of the state apparatus in administrators and personnel that forced the state to consume a higher proportion of its revenues for its subsistence.

2. The increased cost of financing occupation armies in the different regions of the Empire by reducing the ranks of the free Roman proletariat at home and by deviating their workers from productive activities and by the same process, increasing its dependency and demand for slave domestic labor at home.

3. A. Casanova who expanded on Engels' models, develops the last and worthy consequence for Rome: identifying the increase of the domestic army of tax collectors and the internal tax levy imposed on the productive sectors of Roman economy; contributing to render increasingly unproductive the slave production plantation system of the Roman agrarian economy; contributing to slow down the development of the productive forces under slavery.<sup>28</sup>

The combined effects both in the periphery and in the center of the Empire due to its own expansion under conditions of commodity production contributed to the social disorganization and crisis of the institutional framework of the ancient world.

C. The effects of the crisis on the social class structure.

The effects of desegregation affected each class in specific domains according to their position in the structure of social stratification. According to Engels<sup>29</sup>, in the periphery of the Empire, the effects of the military presence, Roman law and the burden of the tax collectors, disorganized the traditional power bases increasing the class polarization between the rich and the poor. The present need for currency provoked by the tax levies created, in the regions where the natural subsistence economy was prevalent, a compelling dependence of the peasantry on the money lenders. A greater disproportion was created in the distribution of wealth, pauperizing the poor and increasing the wealth of the already rich.

In the metropolis, the growth of the state apparatus and the multiplications of the required income for the bureaucracy reduced in the dominant class their ability to give direction to the state. According to A. Casanova<sup>30</sup>, the senatorial aristocracy grew uncertain with regard to their ability to increase their revenues, or "otiom." The class of large, rural landlords increased their pessimism and skepticism confronted with the decrease productivity of slave-run plantations. The patrician class abandoned politics to devote themselves to managing their private states which needed an increased personal supervision to generate a profitable revenue.

For the author, pessimism was the general characteristic of everyday life for the ruling class, especially during the second century when the administration of the Empire became even more difficult in political terms. According to Jean Bayet<sup>31</sup>, a series of grave internal struggles developed within the different factions of the dominant class, accompanied with civil unrest and generated a loss of confidence in the ruling class in their capacity to govern. The loss of faith in themselves created a psychological and spiritual environment of malaise and a state of exasperation that turned toward a religious outlet for the crisis.

Engels identifies the effects on the dominated classes distinguishing between the free working class and the slaves. According to Engels<sup>32</sup>, the free proletarians in the provinces were forced to work under their market value due to the competition of slave labor. The situation created as migration of rural workers toward the cities. The impoverished proletariat increased the ranks of the army and did not find an expanding urban labor market to absorb them, creating a marginalized subculture of urban poor.

For Engels<sup>33</sup>, it is within this social group of the lowest group of the lowest class of urban poor in Rome that the first Christians were recruited. He wrote that it was precisely this type of proletarianized free laborer, the lowest strata of the people where a revolutionary movement would recruit its followers. In the cities, the free men who had lost faith were comparable to the mean whites of the slave states of the United States in the nineteenth century and to the adventurers and vagabonds of the European cities of his time.

With regard to the slaves, they were according to Engels<sup>34</sup>, the finished product of this entire process of dissolution of the ancient world. They had no future to look forward to within the slave society, only their past was meaningful when they were free before conquest. Men and women from different nationalities, races and religions, however, were all equalized under a common disgrace of submission. For slaves, paradise was behind them, in feeling of alienation was total which situated them in a common ground with the other segments of the impoverished classes that had lost faith in what their society and its ideologies had to offer. The free men without hope look at the old "polis" where their ancestors as citizens enjoyed relative prosperity. The peasant also looked toward the past, to a time before the communal land holdings had given way to the extended patrician plantations; the slave also looked toward the past before he was made prisoner of conquest.

The outcome for Engels<sup>35</sup> of the desegregation of ancient society was that hope could not be found in an ideology of that system except under signs of the effects on the "iron hand" of the Roman Empire that had subdued, for the first time, all their different oppressed classes to a common experience of "Equality." For Engels, the equalitarian "iron hand" of the Roman Empire created the conditions for the first time for the symbolic representation correspondent in the ideological expression of Christianity, that even if in a negative formulation proclaimed all men equal before God!

For Engels<sup>36</sup>, once the social bases and traditional political organization of society together with national independence were destroyed, the old religious foundations collapsed with the rest of the old social body. However, the Roman Empire not only

created the vacuum, but also its equalitarian "iron hand" permitted the formation of the new social forces that would constitute the base of primitive Christianity. The structural conditions prepared the way for an ideological demand that was able to be matched by the Christian ideology and its message of liberation.

D. Primitive Christianity as the ideological operator of the oppressed masses of the Roman Empire.

Engels Sociology of Religion as applied to the study of primitive Christianity, which reflects his thoughts of maturity, retained three basic propositions advanced by Marx in his early writings. First, "religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering."<sup>37</sup> Second, ". . . the arm of criticism cannot replace the criticism of arms. Material force can only be overthrown by material force; but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses. Theory is capable of seizing masses when it demonstrates ad hominem and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man, the root is man himself."<sup>38</sup> The third and most important proposition has to do with the concept of liberation, for which Marx used the term emancipation, writing: "The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man. It ends, therefore, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being . . . where is there, then, a real possibility of emancipation in Germany? This is our reply. A class must be formed . . . which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, without therefore, emancipating all their other spheres, which is, in short, a total loss of humanity and which can only redeem itself by a total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society, as a particular class, is the proletariat . . . the emancipation of Germany is only possible in practice if one adopts the point of view of that theory according to which man is the highest being for man."<sup>39</sup>

Engels retains the first notion of Marx which is that religion is at the same time the expression of the miseries and suffering of the real world, but also a protest against those miseries and sufferings. As pointed out by Roger Garaudy<sup>40</sup>, Engels in his study of the peasant wars in Germany develops the role played by religious ideologies in the justification of the revolutionary struggles led by Thomas Muntzer a topic later fully explored by Ernest Bloch.<sup>41</sup> In reference to primitive Christianity Engels develops the same perspective as P. Blanquart has written. "This emerges from the general category of religion in the sense that religion is illusory because she is impotent and its impotence lies in that she ignores the mechanisms of nature and of society, so she is incapable of dominating them.



Christianism would then be a particular form of religion that corresponded to a particular form of misery, the misery of the Roman Empire, that can be defined by three principal characteristics.

1. The primitive state of the sciences and by consequence the weak dominion over nature and the existing social relation of the time.

2. Its universalism.

3. The non-antagonistic explicit relations between social classes as such."<sup>42</sup>

The underdeveloped state of secular knowledge of nature and society would explain the necessary religious ideological form acquired by this popular social movement of the oppressed, for Engels as we have pointed out, this condition would be identical to all of the mass popular movements until the emergence of "scientific socialism."

However, the second characteristic, the "Universalist" character of their ideology is the true expression of the suffering and misery which was, for the first time, universally resented by the universally oppressed.

If the form of this theory was illusory and ideological its content reflected the fact that it did respond to the ideological demands of the oppressed. Its universalism was possible, because it addressed a universal revindication -- that of equality. For Engels, "In Catholicism equality was first stated in negative terms as the equality of all men as sinners before God, and in positive formulation which was narrower as the equality of the children of God rescued the ones as the others by the grace and the blood of Christ . . . . Both conceptions founded Christianity in its role of the religion of slaves, of the banished, of the oppressed . . . this conception was not only an outrageous one in the brains of the ancients, but also a crime and in its beginnings it was logically persecuted in Christianity."<sup>43</sup>

According to Gilbert Murry, "Christianism was constituted on the basis of a universal protestation against a universalized exploitation"<sup>44</sup> Universality was achieved because theirs was a universal demand of the oppressed for equality that it's ideological message was able to satisfy. It's this characteristic that would convert this theory of ideological form into a mass movement, once adopted by the oppressed masses and turn it into a material force that transformed the real world.

For Engels, the second proposition of Marx's applied to primitive Christianity. The religious ideology was adopted by the oppressed masses and became a material force. According to Engels<sup>45</sup> while all other elements of the old world were being dispersed by the dissolution process of the Roman Empire, Christianity, on the contrary, was experiencing an inverse process; it was attracting and absorbing all the displaced particles of that shattered world.

Engels explained the success of primitive Christianity based on the fact that it's ideological content found a corresponding demand. He wrote "That is why of all the thousand of prophets and preachers in the deserts that were spreading their numerous innovations in religious doctrines, only the founders of Christianity were crowned with success."<sup>46</sup> The secret of their success, was the secret of religions that were founded by those who experience themselves and express the religious needs of the masses.

The author explained that, "Christianity had achieved to strike a cord that was sensitive in numerous hearts. To all the complaints of the miseries of the times and about the universal condition of material and moral misery, the Christian conscience of sin had a response."<sup>47</sup> It is this characteristic of their theory expressed in primitive Christianity that explains why its set of ideas took possession of the masses of the Roman Empire as Engels stated. Gilbert Murry highlights this characterization of Engels writing ". . . this was the essential characteristic of primitive Christianity as pointed out by Engels, absent of the theological elaboration it was the true expression of the religious needs of the masses."<sup>48</sup>

However it is the third characteristic of this ideological system according to Paul Blanquart that permitted the new ideology to be recuperated by the dominant classes co-opting its revolutionary aspects. The lack of consciousness of the explicit antagonistic character of the relations between social classes was the central element of this ideological system that corresponded to the socio-economical matrix of the time. The message of the Gospel addressed the ideological demand of the masses under the effects of this matrix, but also permitted it to work as an ideological operator for the whole society winning the acceptance of the decadent ruling classes.

Gilbert Murry in reference to the satisfaction of the ideological demands of the oppressed that Engels addresses, introduces and systematizes Plejanov's concept of an intermediate level between the ideological forms in people's minds and the structural effects of the socio-economic matrix of an historical period. Quoting Plejanov, Murry will write that a new dimension must be introduced, that of a social psychology which ". . . appears before being thought and is determined in the final analysis by the prevailing relations of production."<sup>49</sup>

Murry, in explaining his social psychology as the mediator by which an idea becomes a material force and is adopted by the masses, illustrates the concept borrowed from Claud Levi-Strauss of ideological operator. Ideological operator is a concept used by Levi-Strauss and quoted by Murry to identify a "... phenomenon by which an ideology becomes susceptible to action over a society and to transmit, a guarantee that a considerable numbers of ideas and feelings will find its way to integrate into the cultural heritage of Humanity."<sup>50</sup>

Murry complements Levi-Strauss' concept by adding that for an ideology to function as an ideological operator it must express in its substantive content and be appropriated with the vision of the world of the raising revolutionary classes of an epoch.

Primitive Christianity responded to both characteristics. It first appeared as a response to the ideological demands of the oppressed, corresponding to the social psychological configuration of the intermediate level identified by Plejanov which is situated between the ideological supra-structure and the relations of production, especially with its main revindication of equality among all human beings. The second characteristic, it's universalism, however, also integrated a space for other classes of society which were not oppressed but were also in need of a spiritual deliverance. For A. Casanova Christianity is the product of the convergence of the decaying dominant ideologies and the raising revolutionary ideology of the oppressed classes. Casanova affirms the thesis of J. Bayet with regard to this convergence and its effect creating in the structure of the ideological system of Christianity the internal contradiction of a mixed class content.<sup>51</sup> Casanova's interpretation of Engels' model of primitive Christianity is reinforced by A. Vittorio Lanternari's thesis that highlights the contradictory class content of religious movements in general. Lanternari explained, "that is the development of any religious culture one must distinguish its momentum as a popular movement as the antithesis of its momentum as official conservative forms."<sup>52</sup>

How does one explain this dimension of universalism, which functioned both as an ideological element that corresponded to the socio-economical matrix of the times in the social formations where the oppressed adopted the religious ideology of primitive Christianity and, at the same time, opened the door to a symbolic system that also was operational to segments of the decaying ruling classes of the epoch? The expression of the contradictory class content was identified as the non-antagonistic class relations implicit in the Christian world view. What was the symbolic transformation that permitted this ideological structure to contain an Equalitarian and Universalistic dimension, integrated to a conciliatory perspective of class conflict and class interest; conditions that after all enable it to become an ideological operator for the whole society; an essential

characteristic that also explains its success as the ideological operator for a multi-class society of antagonistic elements?

Jean Remy<sup>53</sup>, quoting Max Weber, explains the symbolic transformation operated by primitive Christianity in accordance to the model proposed by Engels stating, ". . . primitive Christianity was developed among people without families, notably among the slaves, who came from different nations, and mixed into family groups. From there, Christianity was able to transpose a symbolism of the universal brother beyond the families, in order to create the "true" family; like in the monasteries, where you leave your family and rediscover a new fraternity, independently of your social origin . . . . Christianity contributed to displace the father figure of a family as the center key element of religious cult, diffusing a new symbolism of the Brother and of the greater family which did not need to rest on any kinship system."<sup>54</sup>

Remy, quoting Bellah, would explain that in the symbolic structure of primitive Christianity, there is no direct transposition of the social structure and its paternal authority figure into the symbolic religious structure.<sup>55</sup> Bellah's thesis quoted by Remy is that Christianity by contamination passed from the symbolism of the old testament to symbolism of the father figure who exercises his authority in a more affectionate environment, much more unconditionally.<sup>56</sup>

According to Remy, Christianity developed a progressive distinction of the family religious symbolism and displaced the father as the central element of religious cult. For Remy the new symbolic structure introduced the symbolism of the universal brother as the center element of worship. Borrowing from Max Weber and Jean Remy, I would conclude that Engels analysis of the egalitarian dimension of primitive Christianity coincides with the new symbolic structure based on the universal brother. For Jean Remy the symbolic transformation from a father image religion to a brother image religion is opposed to the hypothesis of the psychoanalytical perspective which affirms the central father image in religious cult as a transfer of the family paternal image.<sup>57</sup>

The extension of the new symbolic structure of fraternal relations included those segments of society from antagonistic class relations developed from this brotherhood inclusion within the church of faithful regardless of their social origin. The central element that was absent was the reference to a symbolic kinship system in the new religious symbolic structure of Christianity.

For Remy, ". . . the church was viewed as a great family . . . opposite to the kinship system that before played the central role in the symbolic social exchange of the previous

situation."<sup>58</sup> The new consciousness, based on the relations among equal brothers within a greater family structure, excluded any reference to imagine and consider the class antagonisms that objectively continued to persist within society, facilitating not only the adherence of segments of the ruling classes to join the church but also enabling the new religious ideology to serve as ideological operator of the whole antagonistic multi-class society. The result would be that the recuperation of this revolutionary mass movement by the "converted" ruling class would be possible and that the ideological structure of primitive Christianity carried the seed for such a future transformation.

E. The consolidation of the new ideological hegemony was assured during the formation of the feudal mode of production.

The last condition that explains the rise of Christianity to its hegemonic status as a religious ideology is intimately related to its role in the new mode of production ingestion. The Marxist concept of mode of production is at the heart of the understanding of the predominance of this religious ideology in the historical social formations of the Feudal mode of production in Europe. The relationships of the supra-structural elements to the infrastructure has traditionally been viewed in a simplistic mechanical way by those who have tried to develop a new form of economic determinism from the concept of mode of production.

Marx however, identifies a relationship in this totality of global society between these different levels, supra- and infra-structure. In "Capital," he states: "I seize this opportunity of shortly answering an objection taken by a German paper in America, to my work, "Zurkritik der Pol. Oekonomie, 1859."<sup>59</sup> In the estimation of that paper, my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the judicial and political supra-structure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond; that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political, and intellectual life generally, all this is very true for our own time, in which material interests were preponderate, but not for the Middle Ages, in which Catholicism, not for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme. In the first place, it strikes one as an odd thing for anyone to suppose that these well-worn phrases about the Middle Ages and the ancient world are unknown to anyone else. This much, however, is clear, that the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest, it requires but a slight acquaintance with the history of the Roman republic, for example, to be aware that its secret history is the history of its landed property."<sup>60</sup>

Since the appearance during the Roman Empire the religious ideology of Christianity best corresponded to an economic system of expanding commodity production. For Marx's this characteristic held true until its full development under the capitalist mode of production. He states in "Capital"<sup>61</sup> that in a society where the product of work acquires generally the form of a commodity and by consequence, the most general relationship between the producers consists in a comparison of their products and under this umbrella they compare to each other their private work on the title of equal human labor. As such a society finds in Christianity with its cult of abstract man the most convenient religious complement.

For Marx's the substitution of the Capitalist mode of production entails the rejection of the cult of abstract man for the recognition of concrete man. His rejection of Ludwig Feuerbach as a representative of Christian theology even after he substituted the worship of abstract man rejecting the worship of a man created God, is based on the principle that he still promoted the cult of abstract man as an ideological form compatible with generalized commodity production and capitalism.

However, during the period of consolidation of Christianity in the post-Constantine era the specific transformation that permitted this symbolic system to become hegemonic was its correspondence to the small territorial production system of the emerging Feudal mode of production. In reference to Engels model, Jean Remy<sup>62</sup> clarified the characteristic of the symbolic system of emerging Catholicism. He wrote: ". . . certain analysis notably of Engels can be retaken to answer in what measure did the Middle Ages period, in which the agricultural society was centered in the small territorial unit, did not contribute in Christianity to overturn a symbolism based on the father in benefit of one based on mother. This transformation can be seen in the fact that we saw substituted the couple Adam-Eve, the couple husband-wife, with which sin entered into history for the new couple Mary-Jesus, mother-son. The church was viewed like being at the same time the spouse of Christ and the mother."

The return of an authority centered symbolic structure based on the feminine symbolism of the mother entails the type of power structure that accompanied the raise of Christianity to ideological hegemony. The fusion of the church and the state, even if a "caring" state under church oversight inaugurated the conditions of power relations that the new patrimonial state would use to ensure the dominant religious form of a transformed Christianity.

Since its beginnings the Christian ideology contained by it's illusionary alienating form the seed of its oppressive role against man, according to Engels' model. Even if it's manifestations would have needed for an appearance of material

conditions that flourished only after Constantine. From the start this ideology distracted man from centering on its true object of worship which needed to be, since all times, man himself. The root of the potential for this ideology to turn against man after it's access to power, when it fused with the state apparatus of the Roman Empire, was located not only in contradictory class ideological structure, but in its religious, illusionary form as an ideology that displaces man from recognizing that man is the supreme being for man and not a man-created imaginary God.

For Engels the substitution of the religious ideological forms as emancipating ideologies for the masses required the emergence of the theory of scientific socialism and the constitution of its protagonist, the modern industrial proletariat. Together all the scientific, technical and social material conditions that accompanied the era of capitalism, contributed to its overthrow for the establishment of Socialism. The end of the mode of production based on generalized commodity production would inaugurate the era of the end of Christianity, together with the emergence of the socialists mode of production. The foundation of this concluding evaluation of Christianity is to be based on the third basic proposition on religion that Engels retained from Marx's criticism of religion.

Liberation for Marx will come to be as emancipation of the oppressed with the final collapse of religion. As stated before, for Marx, the criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man. It ends, therefore, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being. The emancipation is only possible with the proletarian revolution and it requires to adopt in "practice" the point of view according to which man is the highest being for man.

For Marx's liberation beside being the overthrow of Capitalist exploitation requires the overthrow of religion where God is the highest being for man. Under primitive Christianity, the conditions of this emancipation did not exist, however, today they are the tasks at hand. Liberation is revolution and at least in "practice" requires adoption of the view that man is the highest being for man.

Together with the Marxist sociology of religion certain liberation theologies also adopted in theory or practice the basic foundation element of this perspective, the elimination of God as the highest being for man.

The Problem of Atheism in the Adoption of the Marxist of Revolution  
by Certain Theologies of Liberation and Their Pastoral Concerns.

Joseph Comblin<sup>63</sup> rejects the notion that Marx's theory of revolution is necessarily related to atheism. He states that the fear that Christianity is secularized in the revolution can be caused by the fact that maybe the revolution is secularized because it did not find a place within Christianity, resulting from Christians and not out of historic necessity. According to Comblin: "with regard to Marxism itself, we accept too easily, following Marxist's themselves, that they are necessarily tied to atheism. But we have demonstrated that Marx did not really examine seriously the problem of God, and we can not see why under these conditions, we could not keep the essence of this thoughts and at the same time retain the existence of God. Aristotelism, was it closer to biblical teachings than what Marx's philosophy was?"<sup>64</sup>

Joseph Comblin, professor at Louvain together with others shared the guidance of generations of students that were influenced by the assumptions that he reflected. Among those Gustavo Gutierrez and Camilo Torrez need to be mentioned. The balance of those assumptions weighted heavily on the outcome of all our lives. Camilo died in the revolutionary practice of the Colombia guerrilla movement after returning from Louvain, Gustavo took back to Latin America his version of this theological outlook that has influenced many other Christians to take the road of Camilo and for others to search the fulfillment of their calling in other forms of practice devoted to serve the people. However, the pastoral implication of their option has seldom been stated. Independently of the fact if I could agree with their assumption, that Marx's theory of revolution, is not founded on the radical rejection of God, and even if they choose to interpret that Marxism can be adopted without its fundamental theoretical proportion, right or wrong, their pastoral concern, has rarely been identified.

In my opinion, it is this pastoral concern that has lead them to adopt conclusions of the Marxist sociology of religion as they apply to the understanding of the rise of Christianity. Comblin identifies these pastoral concerns writing: "Certain fear that a theology of revolution will distance one from God, but we could also believe that it will on the contrary be a path toward God. How could we know in advance? We should question the state of secularization such as we customarily understand it in the western world. We could not achieve this by returning to a definitely archaic medieval Christiandom, but in opposing the current evolution of modern western society. Because this society in effect develops under the sign of secularization. It is the product of the actual western society, Capitalist and one-dimensional: an economic system in expansion and submitted to its only law of growth. Secularization is the subproduct of modern Capitalism."<sup>65</sup>



As a path toward God, as an antidote to the process of modern secularization, the revolution that brings the end of Capitalism then can open new pastoral possibilities for the church under socialism. Comblin rejects the irreversible nature of modern secularization and states that also western theology that submits to this state of definite and irreversible conditions should be rejected. He writes: "Western theology tends to consider the actual evolution as definite and irreversible. They consider secularization as an accomplished fact. This is why their attitude with regard to the world is decisively optimistic . . . a theology of the revolution includes a protestation of this western society. The relations that we have at the present between the church and society in the western world are not considered at all as an established fact, nor as an acceptable state of fact. Instead, by far, of adapting to the conditions that predominate in Europe and in North America, Christianity should be its vigorous opponent. Any acceptance of the present state of secularization is an accomplice with the domination that the western society exercises over the world."<sup>66</sup>

The commitment of this theology of revolution and "liberation" has been consistent over the last three decades both in the old and new continent. From an intellectual, academic current it has developed into a social movement of considerable influence. In its objective to oppose the domination of the western society over the world, it has been assisted by the Eastern society lead by the "father" land of socialism the Soviet Union and its satellites.

Comblin<sup>67</sup> also identifies to us these strategic interventions by the Soviet block to propagate and develop this social movement since the mid 60's on a world scale. The first world gathering of the assembly of official representatives of the theology of revolution took place in the meeting of Christians for Peace that reassembled for the second time in Prague from June 28th through July 3rd July of 1964. Followed by the meeting of Christians for Peace that got together in Sophia, Bulgaria October 18th to the 22nd in 1966, where the embryonic framework of a theology of revolution was established. The most transcendental gathering however took place in the Soviet Union March 17th to the 22nd of 1968 in the Saint Serge monastery of Zagorsk near Moscow, where the first theological consultation on the theme of revolution was performed. The extension however to the specific setting of the third world revolutionary applications of a theology of revolution were developed immediately following the Moscow Assembly, this time in Prague again for the third world assembly of Christians for Peace from the March 31st to April 5th.

Under the impulse of those formation meetings the spread of this social movement and its ideology the theology of liberation or of revolution entered the realm of the official church supranational sponsorships. Comblin identifies the first

preparatory documents on the issue of revolution were prepared at Upsal during the General Assembly of the world Ecumenical Council of Churches in July 1968. And through this channel, he points out their revolutionary perspectives entered in the churches. The Upsal document, for Comblin is parallel to the document of the Latin American Bishops Conference of the same year that came out of Medellin, Columbia, that specified a much more national aspect of revolution, and less its international aspect. Other sources also present the previously stated chronology of events that promoted the formation of this social movement.<sup>68</sup>

Independently from the appropriateness or not of conceding that Marx's theory of revolution could be adopted without its necessary atheist basic proposition in "practice" the theology of revolution and the theology of liberation associated with it have retained the following pastoral implications of the Marxist Sociology of Religion as it applied to Christianity:

1. The success of Christianity was tied to its adoption by the masses of the oppressed classes of the time of its emergence and its extension and consolidation has been assured by its continual presence in the large masses of the oppressed peoples.

2. The contradictory class content of the ideological structure, of this symbolic system has permitted its recuperation by the status quo and by the dominant classes. The lack of awareness or consciousness of the antagonist nature of social class relations is at the base of this phenomenon of cooperation among opposing classes.

3. That only when the ideology of Christianity has been the vehicle of the vindication of revolutionary classes has its continual revival been assured over the ages.

4. That the transformation of the revolutionary ideology of the slaves of the Roman Empire into the sanctioning hegemonic ideology of the status quo was possible by the coalition of the church and state after Constantine and since then to our days. Having a reactionary outcome, at least through the alliance with a state of the oppressive classes, leaving open the possibility for more positive result in coalitions with Socialist states.

5. That the alienating characteristics of religion, which converts it into the "opium of the people" is tied to the distraction of earthly concerns for the concerns of a future heavenly existence. Making the valley of tears acceptable while the heavenly kingdom appears in another life.

The pastoral lines that follow their conclusions are very simply implied with emphasis on:

1. An option for the poor that implies an explicit class option for the interest of the revolutionary vindications of these classes especially the proletariat and for the Socialist revolution.

2. The ideological struggle to eliminate by selective reading the interpretation of the gospel that can lead to a justification of class conciliation as implied in the commandments of reconciliation, love toward thy enemies and the brotherhood of the faithful, is expressed by conflict versus unity in the church.

3. That specially with regard to the most militant and committed lay Christian activist, Catholic action youth and other, their continued permanence within the church is conditioned to the ideological outlook that stresses the radical options with regard to revolution and opposition to the Capitalist system. A Christian vanguard that integrates to the revolutionary vanguard.

4. That the alliance with any Capitalist state should be opposed, but that the ties between Socialist states of a revolutionary nature should be supported and looked at as not contradictory but consistent with the goals of liberation of the oppressed. Solidarity with the state that oppresses the counterrevolution.

5. That in "practice" the effort of church should center on attending the needs of the material conditions of the people. That the "spiritual" services to the people are subordinated to the solution of the socio-economic vindications and concerns. Especially with regard to the macro-societal and structural conditions that affect the lives of the oppressed classes, and support of their efforts in their class struggles against their oppressors, real or imaginary. The justification of revolutionary violence as opposed to the structural and reactionary violence of the status quo.

#### Conclusion

Even if all contemporary data lead us to join Robert Heilbroner<sup>69</sup> in his conclusion that ". . . capitalism is morally the safer bet for the world today. Horrendous challenges apart. I too believe that the best contemporary chances for humanity lie in the decentralized Capitalist, not in the centrally planned Socialist sphere." Besides the issue that the Marxist Utopia in its Leninist or other applications since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to its state control societies has been the greatest sources of suffering for the human race in every

continent of our planet, some may still not want to relinquish the illusions of its promises of liberation. However, the arrogance of proclaiming the legitimacy of deforming and censoring Marx himself on his very foundational concept of human emancipation is inadmissible. Marx affirms the radical need to eliminate the concept of God but because some think that they can better conciliate his theory with their own beliefs, they deform his thoughts, which is impossible to leave unchallenged.

With or without any opportunistic pastoral concern to recuperate Marx's as others did with Aristotle's philosophy the denial of Marx's fundamental rejection of God is unacceptable. The appropriation of Marx's theory of human emancipation is built on the proposition that the struggle of man is to free himself from any creature imaginary or real that subordinates him. Liberation is only real for Marx when concrete man recognizes himself as the supreme being for man, as his own highest creature to himself. Marx's only sin was to proclaim what since the reformation up to today's subjective theologies have continued to imply, that in "reality" man is the supreme being for man.

As stated by Karl Barth<sup>70</sup>, "theology long ago became anthropology, ever since Protestantism itself and especially Luther, emphatically shifted the interest from what God is in himself to what God is for man." Feuerbach's conclusion which Marx assumes, by which man is the "creator of deity" was already present in Christianity, and represents its historical as theological failure. He wrote, ". . . I have sketched with a few sharp touches, the historical solution of Christianity, and have shown that Christianity has in fact long vanished, not only from the reason, but from the life of mankind, that it is nothing more than a fixed idea, in flagrant contradiction with our fire and life insurance companies, our railroads, and steam-carriages, our picture and sculpture galleries, our military and industrial schools, our teachers and scientific museums."<sup>71</sup>

For those that seek to oppose secularization by creating a new Middle Age of Socialism under a new alliance of state and church, they defeat their purpose because they have already surrendered to hypostases and new idols. Engels "scientific socialism" is the new religion in which God is the state and the party that runs the state. The Christianity they sponsor is a religion which has already accepted that new God in the name of proclaiming in "practice" man as the supreme being for man in the name of the "people," and the revolutionary institutions that are supposed to represent the people, the state, and the "party."

In reality, the true battle of human liberation needs to face the real challenge of the most pressing question of our time. The issue is God or no God? For a truly radical way to face or at least beginning to define the challenges of secularization, the example of Roger Garaudy shows the right path. At age 70,

Garaudy converted from a long career that began as a Catholic intellectual, to an intellectual at the service of Stalin's Socialist Realism, to a Communist Party ideological leader, to a critic of despotism and a proponent of socialism with a human face, to the total surrender to God embracing Islam.

For Karl Barth, "In order to construct an adequate defense against Fierbich, one would have to be sure that along the whole line the relation to God is one that is in principle uninvertible."<sup>72</sup> Applied to Comblin, this would imply that the road to God does not lead through the human experience of revolution because the formula that God becomes man does not imply that man becomes God. As stated by Barth, ". . . so long as the relation to God is unconditionally inconvertible for us and does not remain so under all circumstances, we shall have no rest in this matter."<sup>73</sup>

The true question remains, what has to be done and what should have been done. According to Barth, the issue is, ". . . could the church, earlier than Marx, have said and shown in her practice, that the very knowledge of God inherently and powerfully involves and engenders a liberation from all hypostases and idols . . . have had the authority to prove that self-knowledge untouched by the knowledge of God is never true liberation but rather that it creates only new ideologies and new idols? The church will recover from the sting of Fierbich's question only when her ethics is fundamentally separated from the worship of old and new hypostases and ideologies. Only then will men again accept the church's word that her God is not merely an illusion."<sup>74</sup>

Either our God is the God of creation and of history that freed us from the hands of the Pharaoh or he is the God of necessity that only appears behind the "iron hand" of the "peoples national liberation armies" that after all freed themselves into the subjugation of golden calves and lost journeys in the deserts of the Gulak.

At the heart of the question of the adoption or relationship between Marxist ideology and certain liberation theologies or theologies of revolution is the issue of what really can be compatible between Christianity and this ideology. With regard to the Marxist sociological model of religion, it is clear that to undermine its basic proposition that the ultimate alienation is mans subordination to God or to any supreme being other than himself would be either naive or a total disfiguration of Marx's theoretical foundations and concept of liberation itself. Only a Christianity that has totally lost the ontological understanding of God's objective existence and his intervention in creation and history could presuppose to be compatible with a theoretical model built under the assumption that there is no God to begin with, and that such a concept has just served to deceive man of

his true object of worship which would be, man himself under concrete historical and class conditions.

For a Christianity that adopts an historical project that identifies its own destruction as the condition of the liberation of man is an ideology that has lost the sense of God's service to the human race through his revelation and the guidance of his supreme will as the real course of human liberation. For Marx identifies the overthrow of Christianity together with the overthrow of Bourgeoisie society and socialism or the system of a settled plan economy of freely associated men with a society striped of any mystical veil.

According to Marx, as stated in "Capital," "the religious world is but the reflection of the real world. And for a society based upon the production of commodities, in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values, whereby they reduce their individual private labor -- for such a society, Christianity with its cults of abstract man, more specially in its Bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, and is the most fitting from of religion . . . the religious reflection of the real world can, in any case only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow men and to nature. The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."<sup>75</sup> Either Marx is right and there is no God and then why not free the human race of this illusion, then liberation theology that adopts this perspective has a chance to be true. Or, on the contrary, there is a living and all merciful God, who's elimination from the lives of men would be the ultimate slavery and oppression, and then Marx is wrong and so are those who adopt his theoretical model. In his case, these liberation theologies would be no more than the ideologies propagating the Marxist interpretation of Christianity as they apply to our contemporary societies both in the Third World or in the industrial capitalist societies.

The ultimate tragedy of the social movement that follows liberation theology has been the price they have to pay for their "coalition politics" with the communist in Latin America and especially in Nicaragua and Cuba. Latin American liberation theology has had to give up being radical. Because as stated by Irving Louis Horowitz, "the radical defends the person against the movement, the radical defends the dissenter against the conformer. Above all, the radical assumes the risks and the liabilities of his position. Neither the communist nor those engaged in similar movements could ever do this. To the bitter end, communist engaged in 'coalition politics' . . . radicalism

entails a critique of organizational constraint. Yet, revolution can only be made in terms of a theory of organization . . . . If revolutionary man is driven to join forces with other advocates for rapid change, the radical man is driven to point out how limited these changes are in practice. The revolutionist, upon completion of his aims, seeks the fruits of victory; the radical is charged with the chore of seeking new vistas to conquer."<sup>76</sup>

In its quest revolutionary engagement, the Christian liberation theology movement in Latin America has become an accomplice of the torture and genocide that the Miskito Indian nation of Nicaragua has suffered from the hands of their allies, the Sandinista communist regime of Managua. The adoption of the Marxist interpretation of Christianity by certain theologies of liberation has prepared the way for their "strategic" alliance with the Communist Revolution. The transcendental ethical principles of this Christian movement were alive while they were radicals, as stated by Horowitz, "the radical alone can feel the shame of defeat at the moment of his triumph. This is why radicalism is a twentieth century humanism."<sup>77</sup> However, as soon as this movement became an ally in "coalition" with the Communist Revolution, they lost their shame and became blind to the new injustices of the Revolution. Their prophetic role was sacrificed on the alter of the state.

## Endnotes

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