

distinctive achievement of modernity; if we are thus to prevent the freedom and subjectivity which undergird democracy from inverting into a kind of "totalitarianism" "of the strong over the weak" (EV, nn. 20, 23); then we must succeed in detaching these achievements from the interpretation given them in liberalism—including liberalism of a conservative stripe. My argument has been that the needed detachment from liberalism will require us to understand more fully what John Paul II means when he insists that *veritas* is a matter of (christological) *splendor*. □

## Theological dimensions of human liberation

Stratford Caldecott

An "authentic theology of integral human liberation" starts not from abstract notions of "the people" and their "oppressors," but from a personal encounter with Christ in prayer and the sacraments.

Pope John Paul II walked a difficult tightrope in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991). On the one hand, he was concerned to emphasize that the Christian faith is not an ideology (CA, n. 46). He wished to stress that the Church does not have economic "models" to present (CA, n. 43). Politics, too, has a kind of autonomy, and no political society should be confused with the kingdom of God (CA, n. 25). On the other hand, Christians within their diverse historical and cultural situations are faced with social and economic problems that must be confronted responsibly (CA, n. 25). Catholic social teaching must therefore be given a "concrete form and application in history" (CA, n. 59)—that is, by Catholic economists, social scientists, and politicians.

"The Kingdom of God, being *in* the world without being *of* the world, throws light on the order of human society, while the power of grace penetrates that order and gives it life. In this way the requirements of a society worthy of man are better perceived, deviations are corrected, the courage to work for what is good is reinforced" (CA, n. 25). A world formed by an interlocking of millions upon millions of self-centered wills runs like a vast machine: into such a machine, Christians (to the ex-

tent that they live up to that name) will never quite fit. To say this is to say also that the machine will not be unaffected by their presence. It may become less (or more) "efficient"; it may, at certain times and in certain places (by the involvement of lay Christians in political and economic life), be restructured, or "re-engineered," around an entirely new principle.

In *Centesimus Annus*, then, the pope calls for a recovery of the Christian imagination in politics. He writes: "The crisis of Marxism does not rid the world of the situations of injustice and oppression which Marxism itself exploited and on which it fed. To those who are searching today for a new and authentic theory and praxis of liberation, the Church offers not only her social doctrine and, in general, her teaching about the human person redeemed in Christ, but also her concrete commitment and material assistance in the struggle against marginalization and suffering" (CA, n. 26). We must move beyond all that was "short-lived" in the attempts to find "an impossible compromise between Marxism and Christianity," towards "an authentic theology of integral human liberation."

#### *True freedom*

Both John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger have themselves attempted at various points to plant the seed of such a theology with their analysis of the idea of freedom. An example from Joseph Ratzinger: "He who can merely choose between arbitrary options is not yet free. Only he who takes the measure of his action from within and need obey no external constraint is free. Therefore, he is free who has become one with his essence, *one with the truth itself*. For he who is one with the truth no longer acts according to external necessities and constraints; essence, willing, and acting have coincided in him."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, we escape from the limitations of our nature into the infinity of being when limitations no longer constrain us from outside. The key to "integral liberation" is therefore the discovery of a new principle of action. Maximilian Kolbe was never freer than when he was offering his own life for a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz—an action founded on the interior freedom that came from a love of God's will.

<sup>1</sup>Ratzinger, "Freedom and Liberation: The Anthropological Vision of the Instruction 'Libertatis Conscientia'," *Communio* 14 (Spring 1987): 55-72.

As the pope says in *Veritatis Splendor*, "freedom is acquired in love, that is, in the gift of self" (VS, n. 87). "It is at once inalienable self-possession and openness to all that exists, in passing beyond self to knowledge and love of the other" (VS, n. 86). Christ has "set us free for freedom" (Gal 5:1), for we are never truly free until our true self, our true vocation in Christ, is accepted and lived. Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20), and "the true will of man is the divine will" (Blondel).

This conception of freedom is found, too, at the basis of the contemporary renewal of Mariology, which the pope has done his best to foster. For while Jesus is the source of human freedom, Mary at his side is "the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, all creativity, all art, all economic enterprise, all political activity, every human action, can be made perfect only by being founded on the faith exemplified by Mary, and on an interior loving acceptance of the will and co-operating grace of God akin to hers.

An authentic liberation theology would start, then, from the notion of freedom as liberation from sin—liberation from the "false self" created by the closure of the human will upon itself. Only on this basis would it be prepared to "judge a prevalent and all-intrusive culture" (VS, n. 88), with its "serious forms of social and economic justice and political corruption affecting entire peoples and nations" (VS, n. 98).

In our own Western culture, such a theology would help us to see through the veneer of economic prosperity to the spiritual poverty within, the profound alienation of those who sell their labor as a commodity, and of those ensnared in the web of false needs created by consumerism (CA, n. 41). It would enable us to perceive more clearly the collective selfishness and lack of respect for life that lie behind the pillaging of our environment, the arms trade and the wars that continually undermine human development.

#### *Theological method*

Our approach to the "new" theology of liberation will be based on certain presuppositions about theology and theology-

<sup>2</sup>Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (1986), n. 97, cited in John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), n. 37.

cal method. According to these, theology is distinguishable from other sciences by the fact that, whatever assistance it may draw from other disciplines (such as philosophy or sociology), it is concerned primarily with the data of revelation. Theology begins with an act of *recognition*—recognition of the divine form revealed in Christ—an act which blossoms in *contemplation*. Mary, who “pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk 1:27), is the supreme model of the theologian, and it is no coincidence that John the Beloved Disciple, who “took her into his home” (Jn 19:27), is also known as “the Theologian” and is associated with the Gospel that unfolds the theological vision of the early Church. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “Sacred theology is based upon the written Word of God, linked with sacred Tradition, as on a perpetual foundation, being thereby firmly strengthened and constantly renewed as it examines in the light of faith every truth contained in the mystery of Christ” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 24).

An authentic Christian theology arises from contemplation of the form of Christ in Scripture and tradition. We have “beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14). It arises first as *poetry*, or at least as prose that has a lyrical, poetic quality.<sup>3</sup> The force that drives it is not some intellectual anxiety about how one doctrine is to be reconciled with another or with human reason, but first and foremost the overwhelming desire to *praise God*, to give public honor to the splendor of the Beloved, and thus to bring others to love him also. A theology that detaches itself from contemplation and praise does indeed become merely prosaic. Dry and academic, removed from feeling, it is rendered incapable of inspiring acts of faith, hope or love.

Theology, like all the sciences that have a distinctive object of study, also has a characteristic means of knowing that object. The physical sciences observe matter and energy by means of the five senses and instruments that extend their capacity. The science of theology studies God as revealed in Christ by means of the “eyes of faith.”<sup>4</sup> These eyes of faith are also “eyes

of light,” for the act of vision in this case requires an interior illumination (the infused theological virtue) in order to correspond with the exterior light transmitted through the medium of the Church. The light of revelation must be received by the believer, and it is the loving and trusting act of faith (made possible by divine grace) that enables him to do so. This is a kind of knowing by “connaturality”: the interior dawn of grace renders us more like the light, and so capable of knowing the light.

It might be objected that, if the true object of theology is Christ rather than society or “the presence of Christians in the world,” any concern with present injustice and its alleviation becomes merely peripheral. The response to this must be in terms of *what we mean by Christ*. Jesus Christ is not simply a historical figure; he is risen. Theological contemplation reveals Christ as a supra-temporal reality, having descended from heaven, been transfigured in his earthly life and raised to the right hand of the Father. Even the anchorite (to take an extreme case), seemingly so far removed from the world of human conflict and social justice, is concentrated not on some imagined past but on a personal Presence and a present reality. Far from being situated on the periphery of society, the contemplative—battling with inner demons—stands with the “Warrior-Logos” at the heart of the struggle for liberation and world transformation.<sup>5</sup> The Christian theologian in the world sees one and the same Christ walking on the water in the Gospels, lying in squalor in the gutters of Calcutta, and languishing on Death Row.

It is certainly possible to love my neighbor without the assistance of the Christian faith. But the key to loving him *as myself* is to be able to see him in the light of God’s love, the full range and depth of which is revealed only on the Cross.<sup>6</sup> The goal of theology, then, is the same as the goal of the Christian life as a whole; to know Christ Jesus, and to see all things, all people, in him (in order to see them aright). This is the fundamental presupposition that will shape our approach to what is often loosely called “spirituality.” Rather than evoking some vague other-

<sup>3</sup>One thinks of, for example, not only the Apostles Paul and John, but Ephrem, Romanos, Ambrose, Augustine, John of the Cross, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Paul Claudel.

<sup>4</sup>An expression made familiar by Pierre Roussetot and employed with certain reservations by Hans Urs von Balthasar, for example in *The Glory of the Lord I*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 175-77. Roussetot, *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>See Part IV, “The Battle of the Logos,” in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 427ff.

<sup>6</sup>For a theology of love see especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary F. McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), ch. 1. On the difference between altruism and Christian charity—and between both of these and the mere “anti-selfishness” that perhaps could be identified with “enlightened self-interest”—see John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (1994), n. 14.

worldliness, in a Christian context the word should mean simply the living of life in the Holy Spirit, a life in which action is inspired and guided by prayer. The "spiritual life" becomes another way of referring to the path of integral human liberation.

The same presupposition will shape our understanding of the *Church*. The Christian community arises out of a spiritual life, because the new relationship with Christ places us in a new relationship with other human beings. Not only does it unite us through the common Spirit with other Christians (alive or dead, near or far; the democracy of the dead and the distant), but it directs our love to the service of those in need, to all who are put on our path, Christian or not, rich or poor. Further, it enjoins on us the love of our enemies and oppressors.

Finally, it will shape our appreciation and use of the canon of *Scripture*. The Bible conjoined with sacred tradition (*Dei Verbum*, n. 9) provides the community of the Church with a fundamental cultural matrix, part of which consists in a "mother tongue" and vocabulary of prayer. Thus it establishes the basis of its memory and its self-understanding. But in order to read Scripture in harmony with tradition, we must read it from the "center" outwards. The Old Testament (for example the stories of Exodus) will be read in the light of the New (for example, the Passover and the Temptations in the Desert), rather than vice versa.<sup>7</sup> Beyond or within this diverse collection of texts, a unity of purpose will be sought. Historico-critical and literary methods will be used to explore the diversity, but unity or meaning will be sought through prayer. The aim is not an aggressive probing of the texts so much as an openness to the meaning that God wishes to reveal (which is found in its totality not in any verbal formulation but in the Person of Christ himself). The correct spir-

<sup>7</sup>See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Liberation in the Light of Salvation History," in *Liberation Theology in Latin America*, ed. James V. Schall (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982). Balthasar discusses the connection between the temptations in the wilderness and the journey of Israel in *The Glory of the Lord VII*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 69-76.

A kind of priority of the Old Testament over the New is still defended by Carlos Meesters in *Defenseless Flower* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 42-45, despite the fact that in many respects this writer is sympathetic to patristic styles of exegesis. His work with the base communities in Brazil taught him that the liberating encounter with the risen Lord of history in the word of Scripture is possible only by moving beyond an exclusive concern with the historico-literal meaning of the text, beyond the "letter" to the "spirit."

it can be attained only by participation in the Church's whole preceding tradition of prayer and reflection mediated by her teaching magisterium—submissive in equal humility to the demands of intelligence. In this way it may be hoped that any new interpretations that emerge from the text (which is inexhaustible) do so in an organic relationship to it and are not forced upon it from the outside.

#### *Dimensions of receptivity*

Having established these preliminaries, I want now to touch upon the particular contribution of Hans Urs von Balthasar to the discussion of Christian "states of life," and particularly his theology of the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience), all of which has implications for our approach to "integral human liberation."

The function of the counsels (according to St. Thomas and others), is to emancipate our spirit from dependence on earthly things, so that we may more freely contemplate God, love him, and fulfill his will. As formal vows, of course, the "counsels of perfection" define an objective state of life to which only some are called, and which is not necessary for salvation. Viewed in terms of their interior meaning, however, the counsels correspond to the essential dimensions of any life lived in imitation of Christ. "Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple," says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 915), before going on to describe the life of the consecrated.

Balthasar makes this clear in *The Christian State of Life*: "From this perspective, the three counsels represented by the vows . . . are seen primarily as means to an end that is the same for all: perfect love. . . . Holiness coincides so closely with that which gives form to the evangelical state that every vocation to holiness is also a vocation to live according to the *spirit* (if not necessarily according to the outward form) of the counsels."<sup>8</sup> One might also recall at this point the instruction of St. Francis de Sales to a lay woman: "Strive then, Philothea, to practice these three virtues well, according to your state; without placing you in the state of perfection they will nevertheless bring you to perfection itself, for we are all bound to practice them,

<sup>8</sup>*The Christian State of Life*, 43-44, 377.

though not all in the same way.<sup>9</sup> Slightly later in the seventeenth century, Augustine Baker, O.S.B., in his book *Sancta Sophia* gave "instructions profitable to seculars" wherein he spoke of the "obligation" of a devout person to "imitate" the duties of a religious life, including the counsels.

The counsels indeed may be said to define the *form of the Cross* in the spiritual life of the Christian, whether that life be lived in a religious, lay or priestly state. They are intimately connected with the infused virtues of faith, hope and love, as Balthasar writes.<sup>10</sup> I would go further, and speculatively link each of the counsels to one virtue in particular: obedience to faith, poverty to hope, and chastity to love.<sup>11</sup> The ascetical spirit of the counsels opens up three *dimensions of receptivity* in the human subject; the corresponding virtues of the life of grace supply the positive content corresponding to each subjective disposition. The same relationship may be seen in mariological terms, with the counsels corresponding to the archetypal Christian attitude exemplified at the Annunciation: that is, *Mary's fiat voluntas tua* (faith-obedience), her virginity (love-chastity), and even her marriage to Joseph (hope-poverty). The latter, indeed, according to the tradition, is entered into as a conscious act of self-dispossession and self-oblation in order to prepare the way of the future Messiah.

The counsels, then, are nothing less than the "form of Christian holiness," and the means by which we may learn to obey the two great commandments enjoined by both Old and New Testaments: the love of God and love of neighbor. This twofold love requires an interior freedom that comes only by detaching ourselves from our possessions, our passions, and our self-will. These are the dimensions of freedom that we must now examine in slightly more detail.

<sup>9</sup>*Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. Michael Day (London: Burns & Oates, 1956), 121. For Balthasar's own thinking on the counsels, see (in addition to works already cited) "Are There Lay People in the Church?" in *New Elucidations*, trans. M. Theresiade Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and "Towards a Theology of the Secular Institute" in *Explorations in Theology II*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). Read also Libero Gerosa, "Secular Institutes, Lay Associations, and Ecclesial Movements in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 342-61.

<sup>11</sup>At the same time, I would not wish to deny that the virtues (and counsels) are coherent one with another, and that self-giving love enfolds all these different aspects and expressions of the life of grace.

(1) *Poverty* in itself, of course, as mere deprivation of possessions or even of the means to sustain life, is hardly "liberating." Indeed, as Christians we are obliged to respond to material need with compassion, by sharing whatever we possess. What does liberate is the "poverty of spirit" that is closely entwined with humility and the hope of the kingdom (Lk 6:20). To be poor in spirit is compatible with great wealth, but only on two conditions; firstly that we are genuinely prepared to embrace exterior poverty the moment this is asked of us, and secondly that our possessions are at the service of the common good. "None of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns" (Lk 14:33); it is possible to be rich yet interiorly detached, just as it is possible to be poor yet envious.

The Franciscan love of "Lady Poverty" is, of course, quite incompatible with the habitual, self-centered pursuit of wealth and comfort, for "You cannot serve both God and Mammon" (Lk 16:13). The discipline of fasting should therefore be mentioned here as an important but often neglected element in the spiritual life. It has direct, as yet almost unexplored, social implications. Olivier Clément summarizes the teaching of the early Fathers as follows: "Fasting prevents us from identifying ourselves with the world in order merely to possess it, and enables us to see the world in a light coming from elsewhere. Thus every creature, every thing, becomes an object of contemplation. Fasting puts between ourselves and the world a wondering and respectful distance. It enables us to hunger for God as well, and to welcome our bodily hunger as an echo, the 'sighing' of creation. And so for the Fathers fasting from food is inseparable from prayer and almsgiving, from the loving relationship re-established with God, and from spontaneous, inventive sharing with one's neighbor."<sup>12</sup>

(2) If spiritual poverty betokens the subordination of desire for such things as food and security to our desire for God, then *chastity* applies the same principle to our natural desire for companionship and human love. As embodied creatures, of course, we are constantly pressed towards some physical expression of love. The evangelical counsel reminds us not to become the slaves of impulse—even in marriage, for the marriage vow places the body of each spouse at the service of the other, in an exclusive and indissoluble relationship to one person.

<sup>12</sup>*The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (London: New City Press, 1993), 141. Original French title: *Sources* (Paris: Stock, 1982).

In whatever state of life, the opportunity for any physical expression of love must be regarded as the gift of God, as grace. If we seize it as though by right, we are forcing God out of the center of things to the periphery. If we are prepared at all times to respond to God's initiative, if even our most decisive actions are formed in this secret dimension of receptivity, patience and gratitude, then our physical relationships and even our bodies themselves will be redeemed, and transformed by that redemption. "Hope shimmers at all times as a light of grace from God, bending over men as an unfathomable freedom not yet understood."<sup>13</sup>

Chastity pertains particularly to that "purity of heart" that makes possible the vision of God (Mt 5:8)—that beatific vision which is the consummation of our "nuptial" relationship with God in Christ. This is the true freedom we hope for, since "The one who sees is free, and time and space belong to him."<sup>14</sup> "Creation itself will be set free" (Rom 8:21), for it participates "in the light that falls on him," and he "cannot take hold of anything for himself alone that is not equally meant for everything created." The whole of creation—"the wide earth, the intimacy of a home, the familiarity of a landscape . . . in all its beauty and wildness, in its captivity"—shares his hope, his "dream of freedom, access to the Creator, to his presence and his love."<sup>15</sup> The "scope" of chastity, as a virtue and as a way of life, is therefore more than social; it is nothing less than cosmic.

(3) Finally we come to *obedience*. Since the Second World War this virtue has tended to be viewed entirely in a negative light,<sup>16</sup> as indeed the very antithesis of freedom. We must therefore ask: Obedience to whom? In what spirit? Only once an initial discrimination has been made does it become possible to see that a certain kind of obedience might still be a means of liberation. The key, again, is provided by St. Francis, whose second "Admonition" deserves to be quoted in full (italics are mine): "The Lord said to Adam: Eat of every tree; do not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He was able to eat of every tree of paradise since he did not sin as long as he did not go against obedience. For the person eats of the tree of the

knowledge of good who appropriates to himself his own will and thus exalts himself over the good things which the Lord says and does in him; and thus, through the suggestion of the devil and the transgression of the command, what he eats becomes for him the fruit of the knowledge of evil. Therefore it is necessary that he bear the punishment."

The essential point is that we are not God. Authentic human freedom is the freedom of a creature living by grace. The state in which we are created is a state of obedience to God, which is identical with the very highest state of human freedom. In a sense, *I am my will*; I do not possess my will, for I belong to the God who makes me what I am. The obedience of the counsels is first of all this obedience to God, an obedience whose positive content is supplied by the virtue of faith in God's word. It requires to be manifested in obedience to men, but in the third "Admonition" St. Francis again gets the balance right: "He who wishes to save his life must lose it" (Lk 9:24). That person leaves everything he possesses and loses his body who surrenders his whole self to obedience at the hands of his prelate. And whatever he does and says which he knows is not contrary to the prelate's will, provided what he does is good, is true obedience. . . . But if the prelate should command something contrary to his conscience, although he does not obey him, still he should not abandon him. . . ."

Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr made a powerful contribution to the theological understanding of obedience by relating it—as they relate all aspects of the Christian revelation and tradition—in the first place to love. For this Balthasar found support as much in St. Thomas as in his favored "saint of obedience," St. Ignatius: "For the perfection of love it is required not only that a man renounce earthly goods, but that, in a certain sense, he also renounce himself."<sup>16</sup> The lover wishes to give to the beloved all that he can, all that the beloved would value. Ultimately, this is the meaning of the act of worship. Self-surrender to God in obedience, so far from being contrary to freedom, is the highest use and expression of freedom. "Only one who stands outside love, who identifies freedom with egocentric self-determination, can regard this loving surrender of freedom as a deprivation of freedom."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Adrienne von Speyr, *The Victory of Love*, trans. Sr. Lucia of the Incarnation (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 65.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>16</sup>St. Thomas, cited in Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 45.

<sup>17</sup>Speyr, *The Victory of Love*, 60.

The purifying effects of the asceticism of the counsels do not remain simply interior. The kingdom "within" is also the kingdom "in our midst" (Lk 17:21), and the presence of Christ in our lives—in the "space" we make for him by the conjoining of asceticism and prayer—cannot but transform the worldly order. It does so not only by individual acts of charity, but in many other and unpredictable ways. In the light that shines from the kingdom, self-indulgence, injustice and oppression stand naked and exposed, even if no merely human calculation can tell when God will judge it right to strike them down. When he does, it is those who wait on him patiently in contemplation who are armed with the sword of the spirit.

#### Social theology

If we look now at the community to which we are introduced by the love of Christ, we see that it is not static or closed, but dynamic and open. The "space" in which we are set free is a rich and boundless land. This is no mere association of individuals, juxtaposed with each other in a juridical structure. We are so made that we can find ourselves only in each other, that is, by "losing ourselves"—or rather by "giving ourselves away."

True community is created by the process of self-dispossession, whether this be in some form of explicit service to others, or through formally living a vow. The threefold asceticism of the counsels turns us away from an exclusive concern with ourselves, and opens us up to those around us. It is in the encounter with Another who alone is able to *call forth something new* in us (infusing faith, hope and love) that we are formed as "theological" persons; persons centered on God. This centering of the self is a process that leads us deep into the Trinity, into the exchange of love that lies at the very root of our being.

The Other, Christ, calls us toward him in particular, concrete ways. That is why *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by J.-P. de Caussade can be read as a textbook of true liberation. "The Spirit blows where he wills. . . ." On a path revealed to us only as we walk it step by step, our Creator recreates us by giving us a task and purpose.

Thus the link between community and spirituality can be found in the notion of vocation, or mission. Here the rich theology of work that John Paul II began to develop in *Laborem Exercens* can be connected with the extended discussions of mis-

sion and personhood in Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*.<sup>18</sup> Catholic social teaching is rooted in theology, and specifically in the theology of the Trinity, which Balthasar illuminates by a reflection on the dramatic or "dynamic" aspects of the Incarnation in world history. The trinitarian relations are the source of all personal relations, and thus of all redeemed society: here is the true archetype of Christian *praxis*.

What might this mean, say, to a peasant oppressed by an unjust landlord, or a factory worker forced to slave at a single mechanical task without security or an adequate salary to support his family? It means, first, that personal freedom is attainable even in such situations. Through prayer and response to God, the slave may be freer than his owner. Nor is this a ploy to restrict spiritual freedom to the interior realm, or to postpone any talk of revolution to the *eschaton*. God does not endorse the conditions of an unjust servitude, and we are obliged to strive for justice. Nevertheless, it remains true that "the actions of believers count as Christian only when they arise out of Christian prayer" (Adrienne von Speyr). We act as Christians when we are carrying out our mission; but we must first (and constantly thereafter) *receive* that mission as a call. The initiative must genuinely be God's, and any actions taken on behalf of exterior liberation must employ only means that are in harmony with the end being sought. "Ultimately you can't reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree" (Martin Luther King, Jr.). It is a lack of faith in the real presence of God in our lives and in our real belonging to him that causes Christianity to collapse into ideology. Ideology is predictable. God is not.

<sup>18</sup>Especially volumes II and III. See Marc Ouellet, "Woe to Me if I Do Not Preach the Gospel," *Communio* 21 (Winter 1994): 800-817. Ouellet is sympathetic to the concerns of Latin American liberation theology, but critical of a methodology that often starts with "the analysis of situations" and reduces the Trinity or the Incarnation to a "practical model, or a paradigm for the transformation of cultures."

It has sometimes been alleged that Balthasar lacks the basis for a social theology: see Gerard O'Hanlon, S.J., in the *Irish Theological Quarterly* 53 (1987): 161-83, and vol. 54 (1988): 175-89; and also in his contribution to *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). However, in *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 206-55, John Milbank discovers a way forward for "postmodern social theology" precisely in Blondel, de Lubac and Balthasar. (But read also the responses to Milbank in *New Blackfriars* [June 1992].)



It was Henri de Lubac's earlier conception of the nature-grace relation that could be said to have necessitated the detailed working-out of the relationship between divine and human freedom we find in the *Theo-Drama*. The implications of this change extend also to social theology, for it was precisely the separation of nature from grace that deprived the Christian faith of its worldly cutting edge. If grace is not merely "grafted on" to nature but is permitted to shape it from within, the creativity of God's people is unchained, and theology can again help to inspire cultural innovation, whether it be in painting or in economics.

The nature-grace revolution struck at the heart of secularization: that accelerating process which renders faith irrelevant to everyday life, and especially to the work of those who are not "professionally" engaged in religious activity. It provoked fears in some of a new integralism or religious totalitarianism. But these fears did not take into account the seriousness with which the new perspective treats human freedom—indeed, as Balhasar was able to show, no other perspective grounds freedom so deeply or securely. The relationship between Church and world changes, but not by the military conquest of one power by another, nor by the Church absorbing the State in a theocracy. The distinction remains as real as before, but the separation between the two is removed, permitting a fresh and creative interaction.

In the words of the *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (n. 81): "Christians working to bring about that 'civilization of love' which will include the entire ethical and social heritage of the Gospel are today faced with an unprecedented challenge. This task calls for renewed reflection on what constitutes the relationship between the supreme commandment of love and the social order considered in all its complexity. The immediate aim of this in-depth reflection is to work out and set in motion ambitious programs aimed at the socio-economic liberation of millions of men and women caught in an intolerable situation of economic, social and political oppression."

In section 58 of *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II writes that to obtain global justice "it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies." In section 52, he concludes that the effort to promote development and peace "may mean making important changes in established life-styles, in order to

limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individual and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources."

From the supreme commandment of love and the recognition of human dignity, the Church derives her entire social doctrine, which revolves around the twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. As we can see from the foregoing quotations, the implications of this doctrine are radical indeed. This is a theme to which the pope himself constantly returns, and not only in major encyclicals. On 19 March 1995, he told the craftsmen of Agnone: "Man's primacy should be concretely guaranteed in every circumstance, avoiding the subordination of work to profit by open or latent forms of capitalist and economic logic." According to Catholic teaching, work has priority over capital, the worker over the work of his hands, person over structure.

The Church's commitment to the ideal of full employment alone is enough to raise a question over the prevalent "economic logic" of automation and efficiency, which clearly tends in the opposite direction. In *Centesimus Annus* the pope manages to speak of economic freedom and creativity without ever endorsing the modern cult of economic growth—the commitment to a continual increase in GNP.<sup>19</sup> It seems to be implied that we should be aiming at stability and long-term sustainability (within a context of global solidarity), rather than at the mere multiplication of financial transactions within an economy. For it could surely be argued that when the "creation of wealth" is defined solely in terms of increasing production and consumption, society will inevitably tend towards "consumerist" attitudes that are condemned by the encyclical in the strongest terms (CA, nn. 36, 41). Such a society is dominated by the pressure to want and acquire ever more material consumables. An associated dependence on drugs, pornography, and less dangerous pleasures promoted by the advertising industry will then permeate the entire social ethos, bringing "the innovative capacity of a free economy . . . to a one-sided and inadequate conclusion" (CA, n. 36).

The key, once again, is the concept of freedom. Economic freedom is merely one element in the totality of human freedom, "the core of which is ethical and religious" (CA, n. 42).

<sup>19</sup>For economic analysis see, for example, Richard Douthwaite, *The Growth Illusion* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992).



This is the freedom we have spoken of being attained through the practice of the evangelical counsels. It requires that we order and prioritize our various desires according to a correct scale of values, corresponding to the true nature of human fulfillment. Confusion here results in the state of social "alienation" which consumerism exemplifies. Since our primary human need is to be able to transcend ourselves by giving love to others, and ultimately to God, the visible face of human freedom is that restraint, that self-mastery, by which we succeed in subordinating our lesser needs to this primary "ethical and religious" goal.

An entire culture, the pope says, may be alienated "if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self" and thus to establish solidarity and communion with others (CA, n. 41). It is clear enough, both from this encyclical and from many other documents and speeches, that the pope views Western societies precisely as "alienated" in this way.

#### *The Marian revolution*

The revolutionary struggle to build a society that is not "alienated" is a struggle initiated by God in Jesus Christ. In Mary's Magnificat the Church has seen a manifesto of this revolution and a prophetic expression of God's "love of preference for the poor," as John Paul II writes in *Redemptoris Mater*, confirming the insight of the liberation theologians of Latin America. "The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly... filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty... scattered the proud-hearted" (RM, n. 37).

This great reversal of rich and poor is no mere exchange of one ruling class for another, but an exchange between heaven and earth, in which the kingdom of God is established among men by the Incarnation. An "authentic theology of integral human liberation" starts not from abstract notions of "the people" and their "oppressors," but from a personal encounter with Christ in prayer and the sacraments, and from a response to the universal call to holiness. "Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart" (CA, n. 51). "The acknowledged priority of the conversion of heart," however, "in no way eliminates but on the contrary imposes the obligation of bringing the appropriate remedies to institutions

and living conditions when they are an inducement to sin, so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it" (CCC, n. 1888). As we have already seen, individual repentance implies a conversion and transformation of social structures.

From all these considerations, it seems to me increasingly clear that Christian praxis in our time should lead in the direction of a new *culture of restraint*—a culture whose very economic mechanisms are formed by the Christian understanding of human nature, and shaped by the asceticism of the counsels into a form potentially more receptive of the love of God—and thus of the form of the Eucharist. That is where the revolution in truth begins: in a moderate but real voluntary asceticism, refusing to collude entirely any longer with a culture of self-indulgence, escapism, and death.<sup>20</sup> □

<sup>20</sup>Sections of this article have appeared in *Inside the Vatican* (October 1994), in the context of a debate concerning John Paul II's reading of Western culture. For a discussion of certain social and political questions pertinent to this debate, see my article below, "Beyond Left and Right: A Politics of Life."