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The Relationship between Economy and Theology in the Spirituality of Latin American Resistance

To speak of Latin American spirituality starting from the relationship of the economy and theology is without a doubt one of the fundamental topics in the quest to understand social resistance as a hopeful element when the human being, oppressed and without many alternatives, is confronted with the reality of a hegemonic system where only the names of first-world countries have a place.

UNDERSTANDING LATIN AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

In this world reality, one registers badly the name of the "old continent", Europe, and her aspirations of world conquest in a suicidal career for economic, political and commercial control of all those spaces, where the human being has a possibility to live and to find life; a career that will have the outcome of death and destruction for all alike.

It is on the European continent that Christian thought takes on a social responsibility of commitment with the Reign, by means of organising social movements which tried in their moment to liberate the human being from systemic oppression. It is not our intention to make a journey through all the movements and expressions of resistance in Europe; for that, we will consider economic history and its theological implications.

For the social movements of resistance in Latin America, it is important to know the history of liberation of Europe; and for this, it is necessary to recover their historical memory because in this way we will be able to motivate a joint fight, whose purpose is to transcend historically and to make a salvation history out of our history.

Although most of our prominent Latin American theologians have been instructed in European universities, it is undeniable that the love and pain for their countries has been the fundamental element of the search for alternative freedom.

It is in this love and pain for the neighbour that Latin American spirituality becomes — as Leonardo BOFF put it — "on the way to transformation," entering into a dramatic and dangerous context, while at the same time hoping to encounter the humiliated and offended humanity which inhabits the South of the Planet" (BOFF, 2001, 13).

It is not a coincidence that amid this spirituality on the way to transformation, there is a strong connotation of "resistance", creating a Latin American spirituality of resistance. Resistance presents itself in the face of the mechanisms by which our countries are oppressed.

Economy and theology are fundamental parts of the mechanism of oppression and at the same time of liberation, because it starts from these two realities that Latin American women and men find the greatest concerns, exploitations and hopes.

Although theology has the purpose of propitiating a freedom encounter with God, it is equally the discipline that takes charge of the study of the revelation of God from experience and human transcendence and in creation.

It is from theology that new spaces of liberation are built. It is the encounter with a God who walks next to our people, who soils Godself with mud while walking, who walks among the stones and suffers our afflictions.

It is the vision of a God who incarnates Godself in our nation — not as an observer, but as an activist. Our nation

can know God because God wears overalls, a helmet, and gloves. This is our God: a God who liberates our nation.

In our broken Latin America, the experience of knowing God is not static. God does not become a dogma; God transforms every day so that together we can look for freedom by means of liberation. To know God, to serve God, is to be an activist for the nation, for the people who have less; it is to build the Reign on Earth.

BETWEEN IDOLS AND HERESIES

Everything that goes against total life, against the encounter with our neighbour and with the resurrected Jesus Christ, falls in the domain of idolatry and heresy. The market becomes (by means of the economy and theology of the market) a fight of gods and demons in which interest, wealth and subjection intervene.

"Theology is reflection, in diversified levels of elaboration, about the gods (and demons) in whom human beings, in one way or another, believe, and with whom they presume to have different degrees of contact with history" (ASSMANN, 1997, 14).

The argument, then, becomes implicated not only with theoretical economic postulates, but rather, it carries us to the field of economic processes. From this we make our hypothesis that ASSMANN establishes: "In economic theories, and in economic processes, one verifies a strange metamorphosis of the gods and a hardened fight among them. This suspicion, with all that it implies, should disturb the scientific mettle of any economist" (ASSMANN, 1997, 15).

The metamorphosis that ASSMANN considers deals with the fight of gods and demons in the realm of society, not only on the subjective or metaphysical plane. The topic brings us to identify a "spirituality" of non-life, and the necessity of choosing the option for life.

The economy has the capacity to remove life by means of its mechanisms. "Capitalism leans on a necrophilic spirituality and on an anti-life, which recognizes only the abstract person. The economy in general scarcely fulfils the analysis of the institutional mechanisms of the system" (ASSMANN, 1997, 17).

Unfortunately, economic theory has been based on the exclusion of the poor and on the well-being of those who have power in our countries and at the global level. In this way, the economy as a critical tool is supported by a liberation theology that can rediscover the value of human life as a fundamental value in the experience of the peoples' faith, and in their spirituality and resistance.

"The constructive notion of theology reappears inside a binomial economy-theology, where it tries to relocate human life in the centre of economic logic, of which 'effective economic rationality' is the cloak and façade" (ASSMANN, 1997).

Many people described the symptoms of the "illness of the capitalist economic system": the poverty of the masses, the wealth of small groups, the exploitation of women and children. Some were betrayed, while others tried to explain the situation by appealing to divine laws: there will "always be poor among you" (Matthew 26,11).

In this way, the study of the economy as an element of the social totality should be a fundamental task, with the purpose of offering alternatives that consider everyone because we are all inside the economic processes, in order to overcome an exclusionary system.

The economy should analyse and offer alternatives consid-

ering the whole society as well as its particulars. The economy is related on a day-to-day basis with theology. The economy has profound implications for the diverse perceptions of life and its practices.

In relation to interpretations, "We suspect that the economy works many times with theological budgets" (ASSMANN, 1997, 1). This is a proper perception, since in history we can identify that theoretical economic formulations have not only ethical implications, but also theological ones.

In the name of faith, economic theory can have a theological quality in its market rhetoric. Julio de SANTA ANA relates the theory of the market with theological perception when he affirms that "economic practice is a religion."

A LATIN AMERICAN VISION ON EUROPEAN SPIRITUALITY

In European history we can find characters (e.g. Isabel the Catholic, Martin LUTHER, Uldrych ZWINGLI, John CALVIN, Karl BARTH, Karl RAHNER, Dietrich BONHÖFFER, Jürgen MOLTMAN and Simone WEIL) who contributed with their actions and reflections to the resistance and creation of faith alternatives.

The first volume of Karl MARX's *Das Kapital* was published in 1867; the second and third volumes were published after his death, in 1885 and 1894. This work was based on Adam SMITH and David RICARDO, who formulated the labour theory of value, which affirms that products are exchanged as a function of the quantity of work incorporated into their production.

MARX analysed all the effects that this theory implied, to which he added his theory of capital gains. He considered private property to be undesirable from a social point of view and considered it unfair for people to obtain rent for the mere fact of being property owners.

He concluded with three statements: the return rate (the benefits) would tend to diminish over time; the working class would become poorer and poorer; and the economic cycles would be harsher and harsher. The last two statements would be the consequence of the first.

The arguments put forth to defend the theory of diminishing return rates were not convincing, and because of that, neither of the other two statements were sustained. MARX tried to transform a scientific theory into a political programme of social transformation.

Although in the Europe of the XIXth century, theology kept the Bible as the norm of faith and dogma as well as hermeneutics, it remained fundamental to the theological core that we should consider the relationship "I think" as the paradigm of conscience and the "I speak" as paradigm of communication.

For Enrique DUSSEL, "MARX only knew the description privatising Christianity that had arrived to him through HEGEL. For MARX, in the political-economic reality of Europe, just as HEGEL and his generation interpreted it, Christianity was the only possible religion." (DUSSEL, 1993, 251).

Although MARX did not sympathise with religion, he identified with the theological task, since in the dichotomy of demon-capital he gave preference to the enormous opportunity to create theological thoughts with the purpose of freeing the working classes and the oppressed by means of a "theology of the daily life". Starting from it, he criticised religion and expressed it metaphorically in *Das Kapital*.

Of course, we are not presenting MARX as a theologian, because his theology was fragmentary and negative; it is fundamental, however, to recognise that he is anti-fetishist and for this he goes against the gods of the capitalism and from his perspective, of the Antichrist.

It is in our theology of life, in our day-to-dayness, in our active commitment to the truth and the integrity of our actions, to denounce what is not, nor can ever be God.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF RESISTANCE AS AN ALTERNATIVE

I do not find a better way to go about concluding this article than José TAMAYO-ACOSTA's words when he affirms: "The liberation theology of Latin America is entered as a speech not structured mimetically starting from the European, but processed from the Latin American reality, with some own signs of identity, with an actual methodology, and it would like to respond, from the faith interpreted through liberation, to the political, socio-economic, cultural and religious challenges of Latin America." (ELLACURÍA, 1990, 51.).

Our invitation is to create new theological horizons that are based in a theology of life, of liberation of the human being from the systems of oppression. In the North and South of the planet, we can create a transformation-in-progress of the theologies and economies of the destruction and dehumanisation of our society.

Our yearning unites our efforts with those who do not navigate by the flag of religion, and we can find sisters and brothers in those who fight for holistic life.

HEGEL said that there is no revolution without reformation, referring to the French Revolution but in a same way to the Protestant reformation. In HEGEL's concept, reformation represented a revolt in heaven, which was manifested on Earth in the France of the XVIIIth century.

HEGEL might be paraphrased in the inverse sense of the above sentence: There is no reformation without revolution, without our conception of the neighbour undergoing a metamorphosis; without our actions being directed by the common good rather than goods; without rich people being able to see poor people, not just poverty.

I request the attitude of shaming us for not internalising this reality, for not constantly wondering: where will the poor sleep? I also request the necessary indignation in the face of the realities that I am called to look upon, I ask also to put my heart there — my passion — so that my wobbly and uncertain feet go towards them, to unite my hands to so many hands, my dreams to so many dreams.

For that reason "opting" becomes the obstinate "option for the poorest, too." Then I do not get tired of requesting consistency and fidelity with this project of the Reign of God.

Latin America and Caribbean, in her history of slavery and oppression, is also a daughter of Africa, the unknown mother. So many histories of fights, so many other desirable possible worlds. It is not enough to know that *it is there; it is necessary to undertake the road.*

Suggested Reading

- ALVEZ Rubem, *Cristianismo copio o liberación?* Salamanca, 1975.
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HINKELAMBERT Franz, *Las armas ideológicas de la muerte.* San José, 1977.
HUNTINGTON Samuel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* New York, 1996.
SANTA ANA Julio de, *La práctica económica como religión: crítica teológica a la economía política.* San José, 1991.
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TAMAYO-ACOSTA Juan-José, *Para entender la teología de la liberación.* Estella, 2000.

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