

CHAPTER 4

Salvation as the Work of the Trinity: An Attempt at a Holistic Understanding from a Latin American Perspective¹

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There is little doubt that Wesley's concerns for the social and economic issues of his day, both as an attempt to understand them and as an effort to meet them in concrete ways, has in recent years attracted the attention of Latin American Methodists. Social action has always been present in the Methodist mission to Latin America and in the life of the autonomous Methodist churches. But in the transition from the mission situation to the indigenous churches certain critical questions had to be raised: Was the social activity of Methodists in Latin America a participation in a genuine Latin American project of social transformation, or was it a mere transposition of foreign, specifically Anglo-Saxon, philanthropy tied (consciously or unconsciously) to a liberal-capitalist, neo-colonial/imperialist project? Can Methodism be understood as an attempt to "reform the nation," or is it to be seen as religious accompanying music to the introduction of industrial capitalism? Is there

room in Wesley's undoubted concern for the poor for a more radical understanding of social change?

Latin American participation in the Oxford Institute, at least since its 1973 meeting, has turned around these questions in different ways. The book written by Latin American authors (including the Methodist and other heritages) and edited by Dow Kirkpatrick is an effort to analyze some of these questions while raising important critical issues.² And the excellent work, particularly in relation to the publication of the Bicentennial edition, that several Wesley scholars are doing on Wesley's social attitude and thought gives us rich material with which to move forward in this discussion.

There is, however, a deeper question that needs to be raised both for theological and missionary reasons: *Is the social, economic, even political concern, which is undoubtedly present in the Wesleyan tradition, intrinsic to the evangelical renewal, or is it only a significant, but after all peripheral, side effect of its evangelistic drive?* If the first option is the case, how is it or how can it be articulated theologically and expressed both in evangelical proclamation and in social participation? The question has come to me from two different directions. It has arisen in the dialogue with Catholic and Protestant friends with whom I and many other Latin American ministers and laypeople are committed to the theological interpretation of the Latin American struggles for liberation. But interestingly enough, there was another way in which I perceived the centrality of this question. In the last few years I have had the privilege of participating in several seminars on the Wesleyan heritage with Latin American ministers. Most of them were ministering in poor areas and belonged to churches in the "holiness" branch of the Wesleyan tradition—that is, the Salvation Army, Church of the Nazarene, Pilgrim Holiness, and Holiness Pentecostals. We spent most of our time reading and commenting on texts of the Wesley brothers: hymns, appeals, thoughts, journals, and sermons. Their spontaneous response when they found texts related to social questions—which they freely mixed with singing, praying, and stories of their own pastoral experiences—seemed to show that they sensed in all they were reading a unity or holism that attracted them but for which they did not have a theological undergirding within their rather individualist, subjectivist, and spiritualist evangelical heritage.

To pursue these two directions in a responsible way would require more time, knowledge, and talent than I have.³ I, as a Latin

American evangelical pastor and would-be theologian, will therefore simply follow my conversation with my friends and coworkers in what has been called Liberation Theology and offer what I think would be a possible approach to the quest for this holistic understanding of salvation as the basis for our mission today. I hope, however, that others with better knowledge of Wesley's work will take up the question of his own way of integrating theologically his evangelical "battle for the soul" of his people and his concern for their social and economic condition. My rather superficial impression has been that we can find some dispersed clues, for instance, in his theological argument against slavery, but that in his own mind and certainly in his language there is no conscious or deliberate effort to integrate the gospel of salvation and the social condition.⁴ However, I have been particularly impressed and challenged by Theodore Runyon's look at Wesley's eschatological picture of "the great salvation" projected back into his interpretation of a holistic understanding of holiness, as hinted at in his introduction to the 1977 Oxford Institute meeting on "Sanctification and Liberation" and which he has developed in his book *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*.⁵

Let us now turn to the issue as posed in our Latin American theological work. Liberation theologians are in fact a very diverse group of priests and ministers, mostly doing their theological and teaching work as part of their pastoral responsibility, related by some common concerns and in most cases also by personal friendship, but with very different theological and ecclesiastical backgrounds and ways of articulating their theological views. There is no such thing as a "normative" liberation theory of salvation. There are, however, certain common central emphases that are relevant for our subject. The most important one is the view that God's manifold activity for the sake of humankind and the world (which in Scripture is variously described as deliverance, redemption, justification, and salvation; and which relates to material, social, and personal dimensions with immediate or eschatological reference of judgment, forgiveness, or empowerment) *should always be seen in its unity, as responding to one single divine purpose. Consequently, all these different aspects of God's activity, and our human response to them in faith and action must be understood in their unity and interrelationship.* It would therefore be wrong to see some of them as less significant than others or as secondary and perhaps dispensable "consequences" of others.

It is true that Liberation Theology has emphasized certain

aspects related to social, economic, and political realities that deeply affect the life of our peoples and that have frequently been either ignored or seen as only marginal or secondary for the Christian message, for theological understanding, and for discipleship. It is easy to document that different issues have acquired particular prominence at particular points throughout the history of the church. This is due to the dynamic and historical character of the Christian faith and must both be seen as an invitation to a deeper understanding of the faith and be corrected by placing it within the overall unity of God's action that I am trying to emphasize.

If we grant, for the sake of our argument, this unity of the different dimensions that are included in the biblical and theological language of salvation, the main question that arises is: *How is the relation between these different aspects to be understood both in their unity and in their differentiation?* And the question that follows for Liberation Theology is: *What is more precisely the place of liberation/justice within this unity, and how does it reflect on other aspects, or how is it informed by them?* In this essay I will try to open a consideration of these questions in three ways: (1) by a very brief reference to the biblical vocabulary of salvation; (2) by a discussion of the way in which one of the most significant Latin American theologians, usually seen as the "founding father" of Liberation Theology, answers the question; and (3) by a reflection on how these questions can be seen in the light of a trinitarian theology.

The Biblical Vocabulary of "Salvation"

It is not my intention to engage in a detailed study of this vocabulary. There is ample detailed work, summarized in the best known theological dictionaries of the Old and New Testaments. It is precisely these studies that suggest to me three points that are relevant for our concern.

1. Scriptures, particularly the Hebrew Scriptures, exhibit a great freedom in the use of terms variously translated as salvation, liberation, deliverance, safety, and redemption, which in turn are closely related to justice, peace (*shalom*), health, and freedom in terms of their realization or recovery. Rather than establishing different kinds of action, the various terms used describe different aspects of this action: to "have space," to be freed from choking or constriction, to

receive help in a situation of powerlessness or sickness, to escape from a dangerous condition, to feel safe, to secure one's rights, or to receive a correct judicial sentence. While the New Testament uses "salvation" more specifically as a technical term for God's action in Jesus Christ, it still relates it to different types of intervention: healing, liberation from enemies, forgiveness, acquittal in judgment, as well as eschatological salvation. Pauline writings are the most inclined to give the various terms a more specific theological definition, but even they still use the term "salvation" in a wider sense.

2. In the wider use of the vocabulary of salvation, the subjects engaged in saving action—redeeming, liberating, restoring—can be diverse (kings, leaders, or common people) and not necessarily "superior" to the receiver of this action. The circumstances calling forth this action can range through a variety of forms of danger: sickness, persecution, prison, natural events, and even consequences of wrong actions. In this sense the vocabulary is not necessarily "religious," though divine decision and action are almost always implicit or explicitly present.

3. God is, in the biblical vocabulary, the "Savior," "Liberator," or "Redeemer" par excellence. In this sense we find in both the Old and New Testament a clear awareness that there is a limit to the salvation/liberation/redemption that human beings can accomplish. The priority and singularity of divine intervention remains central to the biblical language of salvation, even when human beings are frequently the mediators or agents of God's action. The distinction that some scholars have tried to establish between "deliverance, help, salvation through human beings" and "deliverance, help, salvation through God" seems rather far-fetched and artificial, particularly in terms of vocabulary. Bergmann is far more correct when he admits in his study of one of the important words used for salvation that "in none of these cases *nasal* becomes a specific theological concept."⁶

Salvation and Liberation/Justice in Liberation Theology

This brief exploration of biblical vocabulary gives us a great freedom in facing our subject. It is clear that God's saving action is related to the whole of human life and the world: material and spiritual; present and eschatological; political, social, and personal. It is also clear that divine and human action are not equated or confused, but neither are they unrelated. Finally, the ways in which these actions

take place—as preventing, protecting, freeing, healing, restoring life, rescuing, acquitting, ransoming, or defending—belong together and sometimes can be used interchangeably. This freedom does not, however, relieve the theologian from the task of establishing theological distinctions. “To distinguish is the only way I know to avoid confusing,” Congar is reported to have answered to a student impatient about fine theological distinctions. We must remain aware that such distinctions are, to a large degree, theoretical theological constructions, necessary for understanding and praxis but are not to be reified or sacralized as God-established compartments of divine salvation.

Liberation Theology has tried in several ways to maintain the unity of God’s relation to human life and history without ignoring or erasing the necessary distinctions. Whether we have succeeded in doing it is another question. Let us consider the work of one of the most articulate representatives of Latin American theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez.

1. Gutiérrez immediately poses the central question: “To speak about a theology of liberation is to seek an answer to the following question: What relation is there between salvation and the historical process of the liberation of man?”⁷ The urgency of the question arose from pastoral experience: How can you minister in the name of Christ to an impoverished and marginal people (he was pastoring a shantytown district, *pueblo joven* in Peruvian jargon) who are struggling to emerge to a “human life”? In searching for an answer, he needed a theological approach that would help him to overcome the ordinary ecclesiastical and/or otherworldly response: “Go to church and wait for heaven!” He found the nucleus for his answer in Catholic “new theology,” the rethinking of the classical Catholic emphasis on the continuity between nature and grace in dynamic historical and anthropological categories.

Teilhard de Chardin had reframed the continuity of grace and nature in terms of an evolution towards a full hominization of humanity, with the Christ event introducing a new dimension by anticipating in the person of Christ that full humanity, which was the goal and full realization of the divine project. Gutiérrez picks up this emphasis with his talk of a “Christ-finalized” history. Karl Rahner, on the other hand, had seen the work of grace in human life not as the introduction of an alien element, but as the fulfilling of a “supernatural existential,” a sort of indelible mark of the divine intrinsic to human life.

On the basis of these understandings, history had to be seen as a *single history*: "There are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, 'juxtaposed' or 'closely linked.' Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history."⁸ And there is *one human project*: "Salvation—totally and freely given by God, the communion of men with God and among themselves—is the inner force and the fullness of this movement of man's self-generation, which was initiated by the work of creation" (and naturally, for Gutiérrez, resumed in Christ and directed eschatologically).⁹

At the same time, any theology concerned with the concrete issues of human life has to look for the historical mediations of this salvation. In developing this, liberation theologians have usually resorted to three theological themes: (1) the central concept of love as God's own self-definition: the outgoing, other-concerned, unre-served self-giving as the principle for this recreation of the human; (2) the biblical "story" of God's intervention in judgment and liberation in the history of God's people and in Jesus Christ; and (3) the concern for the poor, the outcast, and the "little ones" as the touchstone for God's redeeming acts—and consequently for our human response.

It is worth noting some possible correlations with Wesley at this point. For example, Gutiérrez, and even more explicitly Segundo, work with an anthropology that qualifies the sinful condition of "natural man." Segundo does it by means of the doctrine of prevenient grace defined at the Council of Orange (529 C.E.): "From the beginning of humanity God's grace placed all persons on the path toward the intimate relationship with God and celestial life." Wesley appealed to the same notion in his attempt to find a "point of contact" for our human experience of grace, insisting that prevenient grace is a universal and unmerited benefit of the atonement. The nineteenth-century British Methodist theologian William B. Pope developed Wesley's scattered comments on prevenient grace into an ethic where all human life is wrapped up in the atonement.¹⁰ The christological-soteriological emphasis in both Wesley and Pope (where prevenient grace is not merely a remnant of creation or "general grace," but a universal grace directly tied to the atoning work of Jesus Christ) is a refinement of prevenient grace that resonates with the distinctive concerns of Liberation Theology. Liberation theologians also put emphasis on love as the key to understanding what all salvation is finally about. This is quite close to Wesley's interpretation

of sanctification as a total control of thinking, deciding, and acting by the motivation of "the love of God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

2. While Gutiérrez closely relates salvation and liberation, he is very careful not to identify them totally. He actually constructs a carefully elaborated framework to establish both the unity and the distinction of what he calls "levels" (I prefer the idea of "dimensions") in this one history. Succinctly—and rather schematically—put, he speaks of three levels: sociopolitical, historico-philosophical, and transcendent-redemptive. In each case there is an epistemology (a way for knowing), a theory, and a praxis appropriate to the level.

At the sociopolitical level, the way of knowing has to do with science (quantity and objectivity). This leads to a theoretical elaboration of the data in order to devise a way of achieving socioeconomic and political liberation (think of Wesley's attempt to identify in very concrete political and economic terms "the causes and cure of poverty"¹¹). But the empirical knowledge of sociopolitical reality aims ultimately at controlling reality, including human reality, through technical knowledge. This inevitably pushes us into Gutiérrez's second level of historico-philosophical concerns, into an inquiry into the meaning of nature and human existence and an exploration of the possibilities of human realization. At this philosophical level another theoretical construction appears: the understanding of history as a process of liberation, the conflictive history of freedom, both in relation to nature and to the structures of society. And at this level humans develop utopias, projections of possible "new worlds" and possible "new ways of being human."

3. This is the point at which Gutiérrez draws a qualitative distinction between the "immanent" and the "transcendent" levels. While there is a continuity between the first and second levels, there is a clear break, although not a lack of relation, between the first two and the third. Epistemologically, human philosophy raises the question of ultimate meaning. Theoretically, we posit the utopia of a new human being in a new world. But Christian faith introduces here a diastasis: To the question of knowledge it responds by the challenge of faith (what Gutiérrez calls an "epistemological leap"), and to the question of utopia it responds with the announcement of grace (God's freedom).

Thus there is a "human praxis" of research, theory, and social and political action—which exhausts the horizon of human action—

and there is a "praxis of faith" that, while including all of this as God-given and necessary mediation, places it in the context of faith. Christian praxis therefore accepts the autonomy of the sociopolitical level and develops what Segundo calls "the adult Christian," who no longer tries to replace human knowledge by Christian theology. It participates in human hope and quest, and exercises in that level a prophetic ministry, challenging halfway utopias and having "the option for the poor and marginal" as a guiding criterion. While accompanying the human quest and struggle with full commitment, a praxis of faith—ecclesial participation and spirituality—issues in the proclamation and announcement of salvation (evangelization): the good news of grace and the invitation to faith.

4. While I can accompany Gutiérrez in most of his analysis of the relation of Christian praxis to the praxis of social, cultural, economic, and political liberation, I have felt—probably as a Protestant—that the theological point of departure, the concept of the "one history" and of the "universal process of humanization," should be better defined and qualified. We certainly must reject a dualism that either relegates the life of the world to a totally profane level—or worse, to the domain of the demonic—or confuses the church with the kingdom of God. In both directions a false dichotomy is introduced that ends in total social irresponsibility in some cases, in ecclesiocratic attitudes in others, and probably in dual behavior in all.

At the same time we should recognize that within the unity of history a distinction is necessary. The shift in the use of the vocabulary of salvation between the Old and New Testament that we saw earlier cannot be dismissed as simply the result of changed cultural environment or the influence of a Hellenistic anthropological dualism. It can be easily illustrated by the conditions of Gentile converts. While for a Jew conversion meant the *reinterpretation* of his people's history, for the Gentile it was the *assuming* of another history, the history of Israel and of Jesus. We are not dealing with a separate history; it is always the story of Herod, Pilate, the Jewish priests, and Nero. But with its roots in a mission that is indissolubly tied to a particular historical nucleus, the faith of the Gentiles becomes subject to a twofold historical reference: their "natural" history and this other story that becomes also the history of their faith. For us Gentile Christians to confess the Kingdom is not only to enter into the meaning of our own history but also to take distance from it and to be grafted into another history: to confess the exodus, the captivity,

Bethlehem and Nazareth, Golgotha and the tomb of the Arimathean, as our own—not merely in their *meaning* or their *exemplarity*, but in their particular and unrepeatable (*ephapax*) historicity.

It is at this point that I find the concept of "one history" as interpreted by Gutiérrez, and particularly by Segundo, insufficient. The problem can be identified at least in four ways. Christologically, they tend to interpret the history and the person of Christ as prototypical, illustrative, figurative, or exemplary. To be sure this reductionism is overcome in worship and spirituality, but in the development of praxis, Christology tends to become a hermeneutical instrument rather than a constitutive reality (this is much more evident in Segundo than in Gutiérrez). This happens, for instance, in their insistence on "love" as the central category to identify the presence of God in history. In principle this seems to me quite right and fruitful. When Segundo says that the gospel can be summarized in the conviction that "no love is lost in this world," he is undoubtedly right. But when love is identified as an anthropological category, it displaces the critical role of God's love incarnate in Jesus Christ as the measure of authentic love. We run into a dangerous ambiguity in which the "weight of sin," to use the Anselmian expression, seems to be underestimated.

Precisely, as a consequence of this uncertain location of the story of Jesus, the events of the cross and Resurrection tend to become "paradigms" for suffering and hope that we reproduce, rather than once-for-all events into which we can enter eschatologically through the power of the Spirit.

Again, in terms of eschatology, the conflictive character of God's action in history runs the risk of being reduced to the progressive, though conflictive, overcoming of structures of injustice and oppression, and of losing the awareness of the radical nature of evil ("the mystery of evil") which the apocalyptic tradition preserves.

Finally, these theological imprecisions have a missionary/evangelizing consequence. They tend to weaken the radicality of the call to conversion: Instead of a "turning," a "new birth," it can become a growth, a new awareness, a greater commitment. The specificity of "an encounter with Christ" (to use the typical evangelical language) can be totally equated with a commitment to the poor and the struggle for justice, with serious loss for the life of both faith and service of the individual Christian person and of the community.

Certainly, this criticism does not evacuate the significance of the

fundamental affirmations of Gutiérrez or Segundo concerning the unity of God's action in the world, the understanding of historical liberation as a necessary dimension of salvation, the option for the poor as a focus for understanding Christian praxis, or the eschatological significance of human action for love and justice. What we need is a theological framework in which these foundational elements of Liberation Theology can be protected from misunderstanding and be solidly rooted in God's self-revelation. I think this can be found in a trinitarian basis that is implicit in the work of Gutiérrez and partially explicit in that of Segundo, but which perhaps can be carried further.

A Trinitarian Framework

In recent theological production of liberation theologians this trinitarian presupposition has become increasingly more explicit and precise. I refer to Gutiérrez's *El Dios de la Vida* (1989); Ronaldo Muñoz's *El Dios de los Cristianos* (1987), and Leonardo Boff's *La Trinidad: La Sociedad y la Liberación* (1986).¹² I myself have discussed the need for a trinitarian framework for Latin American Protestant theology in *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*.¹³ A recent dissertation by the young Argentine Lutheran professor, Guillermo Hansen, is perhaps the best and most developed explicit discussion of this question: "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Liberation Theology: A Study of the Trinitarian Doctrine in Latin American Liberation Theology."¹⁴ In relation to our Wesleyan tradition, the trinitarian imprint is clear. It is clearly related to the work of Christ in John and Charles Wesley's hymns, and it underlies the discussion of creation and anthropology in John Wesley's sermons and treatises. Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt have pointed out Wesley's trinitarian framework in his doctrine of grace—prevenient, justifying, sanctifying.¹⁵ The extent to which this is organically related to the Methodist evangelical revival needs to be more carefully researched and evaluated.

As far as our Latin American evangelical theology is concerned, Methodists included, the trinitarian dimension, while never denied formally, has not nourished our evangelization and service. To conclude this presentation, I will simply mention three directions in which I think that trinitarian doctrine offers the fundamental theo-

logical framework for articulating the relation of salvation/liberation and justice.

1. Liberation Theology has developed its trinitarian approach beginning with the biblical story: The history of God's acts of liberation witnessed in Scripture reveal a trinitarian pattern that finds its explicit expression in the several triadic formulas in the New Testament. In this sense we begin from "the economic Trinity" and move to the affirmation of the "immanent" or "ontological Trinity." This seems to me to be correct because we cannot discover God's triune being except through God's revelation. Boff is also quite right in insisting that this revelation corresponds entirely to God's own being: "God's revelation to us is the actual being of God. So, if God appears to us as a Trinity, this is because God's actual being is a Trinity. . . . The reality of the Trinity makes the manifestation of the divine in history be trinitarian . . ." ¹⁶

But we must perhaps also insist that, while in the order of knowledge the "economic Trinity" is prior, in the order of being the immanent Trinity is prior. God does not become trinitarian in God's acts, the acts reveal an eternal trinitarian transcendence. This is important for our subject because it corrects a tendency of what Hansen has called "a hyperinflation of the human" in some early Liberation Theology. It is possible to give such a weight to God's history with God's world that God becomes a process which is somehow made possible by human action. The absolute priority of the immanent Trinity in the order of being is the theological safeguard of God's priority in the order of salvation. At this point we can affirm theologically the divine initiative that we pointed out in our brief reference to the vocabulary of salvation. It is also the battle that was fought in the early centuries and that produced the basic definitions of trinitarian dogmas. The classical Protestant insistence on the priority of grace thus finds its ultimate ground not in some arbitrary plan, but in the very nature of God's "preceding" reality.

2. Closely related to this point is the question of synergism, the meaning of what we earlier called "human mediation" in God's acts of liberation, and which now we can best characterize as the "assuming" or the "incorporation" of the creature in God's saving work, both in the evangelistic call to repentance and conversion and in the liberating acts of justice for the sake of the poor. In the article "Methodism's Theological Heritage," Albert Outler has made some very important points in relation to what he calls Wesley's undeni-

able synergism, which he characterizes as covenantal synergism, "in which both preventive and saving grace are recognized as coordinate providential activities of the one true God of love who, in his love, makes and keeps covenant with faithful men."¹⁷

Hansen has carried forward the understanding of synergism in his dissertation by recovering and reinterpreting in a different connection the traditional concept of enhypostasis. I cannot attempt to summarize here his carefully developed argument, but the central point relevant to our subject is well expressed in a brief paragraph:

It is in this manner . . . that we reach our final point, namely, that precisely in the enhypostatic nature of Christian praxis, the event of the divine-human "cooperation" coheres, not as a reality pertaining to two casual, agential entities involved in a reciprocal-conditional exchange, but as the relationship existing between the hypostatic termini posited by God's decision to be God not without the creatural—i.e., to be triune.¹⁸

If enhypostatic means "to find one's identity in the other," then the divine initiative gets its historical identity as it becomes incorporated ("incarnate") in human praxis, and human praxis gets its transcendent meaning and reality as it is assumed by the Holy Spirit. Certainly the author is aware of the protections needed by such a formulation. He points out that we are not yet at the point where "God is all in all" but in the intermediate time where the human actor still maintains "the characteristics and constraints of any human witness and praxis (thus always subjected to the judgment of God)."¹⁹ I myself would wish this caveat to be further developed in terms of Luther's notion of *simul justus et peccator*. But the central theological insight, which is not so distant from the Eastern understanding of theosis of which Wesley was well aware, seems to me a necessary overcoming of the dualistic presuppositions that have plagued the discussions on synergism and so-called human/divine "cooperation."

3. Finally, I would point to the importance of paying attention to two basic trinitarian definitions as we try to understand the relation between salvation, now understood to refer to the totality of the operation of God's grace on behalf of humankind and creation, and liberation, now identified as God's action in the historical process of human liberation, and even more pointedly in our situations of poverty, deprivation, injustice, and oppression. The first is that *opera*

trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt (the persons of the Trinity remain indivisible in all outward activity); the second, is the "appropriations" that establish the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity.

I think of the importance of these theological definitions when we consider the diversity and the unity in the Christian praxis of faith, both of the individual Christian and of the Christian community—that is, such activity as the proclamation of the gospel, the invitation to faith, the pastoral service of comfort and guidance, the prophetic ministry of judgment, and the political service in society. There is a biblical distinction of gifts and vocations, which corresponds to the manifold character of God's own action in the world. There is also a distinction of spheres of action in the life of both the church and the Christian believer. But to detach the gifts, the vocations, or the spheres from each other, to absolutize any one, or to "grade" them as more or less significant in their relation to God, is to introduce in the work of God and in God's self a dichotomy that is then reproduced in the life of the church and of the believer.

It is difficult to deny that this dichotomy has had serious consequences. It has not only distinguished but also separated evangelization and service, conversion and the quest for justice, and the worship of God and responsibility in society. We have prioritized by our own decision which dimensions are more important in God's work; even more, we have felt authorized to choose which "god" we want to honor—let the liberals serve the Creator, the evangelicals the Redeemer, and the Pentecostals the Spirit! We have believed that Christian communities could specialize in one thing and set aside the others. It would be easy to follow the tracks of this heresy throughout our history and the present life of the churches. But if mission is participation in the fullness of God's mission, evangelization (to take one issue) cannot but be—together with the proclamation of the reconciliation realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—a testimony to God's good creation and the call to cultivate and keep it; an announcement of God's justice and the call to practice and serve it. Evangelization that is truly trinitarian will be an invitation to participate in faith in God's own life and therefore in the totality of what God has done, does, and will do to fulfill the purpose of being "all in all."²⁰

This does not eliminate, however, the need to respect the distinction, to maintain the identity of the persons of the Trinity and the specific missions of the Son and of the Spirit. In relation to a trinitar-

ian theology of liberation, this means several things, some of which we have neglected to the detriment of a Christian praxis of liberation.

1. It means we must affirm the relative autonomy of creaturely existence—the world, social reality, political and economic life—not as a closed in itself kingdom that has to be left to its own so-called “laws,” but as a realm of God’s creation where the Spirit is active and which is destined to be assumed in the final *kephalaiosis* (headship) in Christ, though according to its own peculiarities that we have to discover, discern, and respect together with our human brothers and sisters.

2. It means that precisely because this creaturely existence is destined to be brought together under the headship of the Son, we are not left without orientation in trying to understand its purpose and direction. The whole creation has been reborn and redirected in the ministry of reconciliation and redemption of the Son, and Christian praxis can discern in the whole biblical witness to God’s purpose the orientation for its concrete commitments. Here the hermeneutical work of the Latin American biblical scholars who have explored the “reserve of meaning” of classical loci such as the liberation from Egypt, the Exile, and the apocalyptic writings finds its theological location.²¹

3. Finally, it means that the Christian praxis of liberation will demand at certain points specific social, political, and economic options that cannot be decided simply on the basis of scientific knowledge or of biblical and theological scholarship, however necessary and decisive both of these are. There must be at this point a “discernment” that assumes both the first and the second elements but which synthesizes and projects them by an act of decision. This Christian praxis happens “with fear and trembling,” because such decisions are always at the same time a “discernment of the Spirit” and “a temptation of the flesh.” The awareness of this ambiguity should prevent the absolutization of decision, fostering instead a recognition of its provisionality and a readiness for correction. But it should not lead to perpetual indecision, impossible and only apparent neutrality, or retreat into a paralyzed “piety.” Rather, it is an invitation to prayer and trust, which indeed are the final word in a Christian praxis of liberation.

9. *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 154.

4. *Salvation as the Work of the Trinity* (Míguez Bonino)

1. With this essay I wish to express our respect, love, and gratitude to Dow Kirkpatrick. He has been a decisive factor in the work of the Oxford Institute. But for us Latin Americans Dr. Kirkpatrick has been a friend who has accompanied and represented us, and who has worked and suffered with us—both in our own land and outside. Our participation in the Oxford Institute since very early was the result of his initiative. It was also largely due to his earnest effort that the Institute itself took up and incorporated specific Latin American concerns in the Wesleyan thematic that the Institute has developed.

2. *Faith Born in the Struggle for Life*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

3. For some further reflection on the second course of engagement, see José Míguez Bonino, "Wesley in Latin America: A Theological and Historical Reflection," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 169-82.

4. See also José Míguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 49-63; and Míguez Bonino, "Sanctification: A Latin American Rereading," in *Faith Born in the Struggle for Life*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 15-25.

5. See Theodore Runyon, "Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, 9-48; and Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998). Unfortunately, I was not aware of the earlier article when I prepared my paper for the World Ecumenical Conference, held in Rome in 1994, on "Sanctification in the Benedictine and Methodist Traditions." See also José Míguez Bonino, "Sanctification and Liberation," *Asbury Theological Journal* 50 (1995): 141-50.

6. U. Bergmann, "nasal," *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:760-2.

7. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 45.

8. *Ibid.*, 153. The Spanish original speaks of "one single becoming" (*devenir*), which is not exactly the same.

9. *Ibid.*, 159.

10. Pope's argument is developed in different sections of his three-volume *Compendium of Christian Theology* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1880), but see particularly 2:358-90.

11. Wesley, "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions," *Works* (Jackson): 11:53-59.
12. For English translations, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991); Ronaldo Muñoz, *The God of Christians* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990); and Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988).
13. José Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
14. Guillermo Hansen, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Liberation Theology: A Study of the Trinitarian Doctrine in Latin American Liberation Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Chicago Theological Seminary, 1995 [available through University Microfilms Inc.]).
15. Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt, *Gelebte Gnade* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1993), 223ff.
16. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 96.
17. Albert Outler, "Methodism's Theological Heritage: A Study in Perspective," in *Methodism's Destiny in an Ecumenical Age*, ed. Paul M. Minus Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 44-70; here p. 59.
18. Hansen, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 868.
19. *Ibid.*
20. See also Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, 144.
21. Several issues of the Latin American journal of biblical studies *RIBLA: Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana* (in Spanish, Editorial DEI, San José, Costa Rica; and in Portuguese, Petropolis/RJ, Brazil Editora Vozes) have explored different social and political issues in this perspective (economics, feminism, oppression, violence, and so forth).

5. "Pure, Unbounded Love" (Campbell)

1. *Hymns*, no. 229, *Works* 7:367.
2. See Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 2-5.
3. There was a debate throughout the 1980s within United Methodist circles on the legal status of the Wesleyan standards; see also Richard P. Heitzenrater, "'At Full Liberty': Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism," in *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 189-204; and Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1988).
4. See list of member and related denominations in World Methodist Council, *Handbook of Information* (Lake Junaluska, N.C.: World Methodist Council, 1992), 23-147.