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### 1. The theological task.

Our theological task cannot be simply defined. If we ask the basic question: "what is theology?" we will be met with the counter-question: whose theology? In Europe, theology has traditionally belonged in the universities, far removed from the problems of society. It was the professors' and the candidates' task to do theology and this was carried out through theoretical discussion and book-writing.

In the 1960's we experienced a change. Dialectical and existentialist theology were abandoned and a certain anti-intellectual sentiment could be felt among the theologians. Theology were now to be understood primarily as socially oriented. Theoretical reasoning was considered abstract, it was "pure theory". The ideal "thing" would be a theology directly related to the transforming of the present in order to overcome the oppression in this world. Right up to this moment the tension between theology as theoretical reasoning and as a program of social and political liberation has been the underlying issue, and so far no clear agreement has been reached.

It is my opinion that this problem needs to be brought into the open before any further discussion on theory and/or action can go on. What is the relation between theory and practice in theology? Or to put it in Wesleyan terms, what is the relation between reason and experience? It is a characteristic trait in Wesley that he understands experience as a component of genuine knowledge. However, it does not serve as a source of theology, but rather as a confirmation of knowledge already given by Scripture and Tradition. If we therefore dismiss theoretical discussion and reasoning, we also destroy the ground upon which we build. There cannot be any social and political change without understanding what we are changing. How do we expect change to come about and what kind of change do we aim at? This can only be done by theoretical reasoning in continuous interaction and confrontation with praxis.

There is a very obvious danger in liberation theology. It is that we may be changing ourselves and society without knowing what we are really doing. Liberation theology is important for the world, but it must be counterbalanced by a continuous discussion on theory to make sure that we know what we want to do and why it ought to be done. We need a theology that is always kept within the polarity of action and reflection. If this polarity is broken, we shall either have a program of political action or a theory of salvation where neither is the gospel because they tell us nothing about man's response to God's action in Christ. Our theological task therefore is to keep both the theoretical and the practical elements within the polarity so that, whatever we do either theoretical reasoning or social/political action - we know the what and the why of our actions. If this polarity-structure is properly considered, I think liberation theologies can help us considerably in working out an adequate methodist theology for today.

### 2. The theological basis.

In order to be true to the Wesleyan way of theological thinking, I find it necessary to take some time to consider the Biblical message before any specific theological exposition can be made. One of the main tasks of Systematic Theology as I understand it, is to present the kerygma of salvation from a highest possible coherent point of view, interpreted and adapted to the actual needs of the world of today. This is usually carried out by selecting a certain angle from which the genuine biblical concern may become clear. We may think of ideas such as "the glory of God" (Barth), "the courage to face the ultimate reality" (Tillich), "the demand for decision" (Bultmann) or "living according to God's promise of future fulfillment and the hope it engenders" (Moltmann). All of these can be said to stand at the center of the biblical message and we should look at them, not as mutual excluding, but as complementary to each other. All of them are tied together by the salvation that God brings to the world. Whether one chooses to emphasize the individual's justification, the relation between individuals/groups of individuals or social and institutional sanctification or the creation of cosmos, these are all emphases of the same salvation.

In the Old Testament we find God caring for the individual. At the heart of this is the election of Abraham who believed God and this was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). From the one man Abraham God raised up a whole nation with social and institutional arrangements. Because God was holy, the people was holy as well and so the whole organized community was also considered sanctified by this God-given holiness. This meant that the organizational structure of the society was expected to forward justice, peace and safety for all. The same was to hold true for nature. Here God had made a structural order to prevent chaos (cf. Ps. 104). Thus we see that salvation in the OT is established on every level: for the individual as a member of the society by keeping the law, for cosmos by means of the orders of nature.

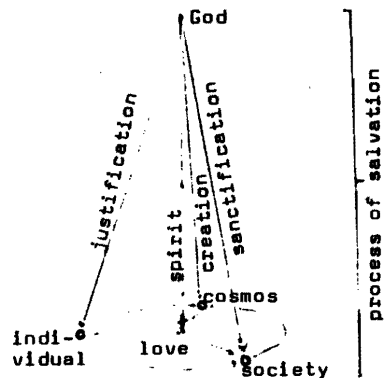
The New Testament implies both a continuance from the past and a radical breaking away from it. The continuance consists in keeping the threefold individual/society/cosmos related to salvation, but this salvation-process is now freed from its limited setting in the Jewish nation. Salvation is in the NT a universal matter. It concerns every man and every aspect of his life, individual, collective and cosmological. The basis for this is the Christ-event as the anticipation of the divine goal for the future. In Christ salvation in its totality is present, for himself, for his relations to mankind and all aspects thereof (including the social and institutional spheres) and to the whole of creation. By participating through faith in this event we are brought into the sphere of salvation. Once inside we are being called to take part actively in the actualization of salvation. Through the power of the Spirit or "the law of love", we share in the process of salvation which is being carried out in all the spheres mentioned, i.e.:

- the individual sphere where optimum development for each person is to be sought,
- the various social connections and institutional spheres, representing an attack on all the destructive forces and promoting a just organizational structure so that peace, safety and justice can be for all,
- a global and cosmic setting where nature is offered to man as a gift, but not to be used as private property. It is the responsibility of stewardship.

### 3. A theological exposition.

Methodist theology definitely ought to be "transformationist", not only on the social and ethical level, but on the biblical and theological as well. This means that we have to accept the urgency of the task of translating the Gospel into thought-forms relevant to the twentieth century so that hearing and response is made possible as we continually try to relate our theological understanding to the individual, social and cosmic sphere of salvation.

The sketch below may illustrate how I am thinking theologically when I say that our theology ought to be "transformationist".



Salvation is not just an experience for the individual, but a process in time and space embracing creation as a whole. The different aspects of creation is related to the process of salvation through the acts of God in history. The individual is related to God through his faith in Jesus Christ. This faith-relationship brings about the act of God towards the individual which is usually termed "justification". Justification is primarily the forgiving of sins whereby man is set free from the prison of the past to face his God, other individuals, society and the cosmos in respect to the future of salvation.

Society's relation to God can be seen through how it causes the crucifixion of Christ. The cross shows us Christ suffering in the hands of people who are enslaved in unjust and evil structures. Thus the law is being used to kill the Son of God, to suppress life itself. But the raising up of Christ shows us how these forces of destruction are conquered by him. This victory has made it possible for us to oppose all the destructive forces which are threatening life and to hope for a final victory in the future. The individual's relation to society may, in the context of salvation, be described in terms of love manifested in concrete actions to build a just organizational structure in society. The positive evaluation of human work, however, is most

deeply grounded in the acts of God towards society, usually termed "sanctification". Sanctification is primarily God acting in individuals, groups, institutions and society through human involvement and co-operation in order to obtain the optimum development both for man and society according to the divine will expressed in justice, peace and safety for all.

This brings us to the cosmic dimension of salvation. In this realm salvation may best be described as creation. Through Christ's incarnation God himself shares the suffering of the world and participates in the history of everything created. But in His resurrection creation itself becomes related to the final goal of salvation. Through God's new creation everything created will be participating in completing the salvation. In this process of salvation both individual and society participate in a relationship that is determined (characterized) by love. However, it is actualized in a responsible use of nature as something given, not as property, but as a blessing applied according to what is best for nature itself, for society and for mankind.

The principle that determines the relation between individuals, society and cosmos has been called "love". We are actually speaking of a "law of love"! The same principle applies to our relation to God, but here it ought to be called "Spirit" in order to underline its divine character and basis. Spirit is a dynamic principle manifesting itself in a process which not only brings hope to the world, but brings it to its fulfillment in God. If the Christ-event is understood as anticipation of the divine goal for creation, "Spirit" is what brings the anticipated into actualization. This process takes place in time and space, it is not only something "other-worldly". It is a process of transforming individuals, society and creation in order to receive the final event. The Kingdom of God cannot be waited for in passivity; it has to be expected actively in every moment of our existence. "Transformation-theology" is therefore most definitely activity-oriented, but it must be able to transform the whole of our existence. Also the activity must be firmly rooted in a genuine theological knowledge of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Without this theological knowledge we shall not have a firm ground and a definite aim for our work.

### 4. Theological analogies.

As to useful analogies and points of contact between Wesleyan and current theological movements, I would suggest the following: process theology, the theology of hope, the theology of history and Teilhardian theology.

In process theology it is especially the understanding of God as "becoming" that is important. The distinction between the two natures or aspects of God, the primordial and the consequent is fundamental for establishing a real relationship between God and the world. Such a distinction makes it possible to overcome the traditional split between flesh and spirit so that to serve God would not be something different from serving the neighbor. To be concerned for God is to be concerned for the world. God's consequent nature makes him a genuine participant in history, both in the suffering and the progress which ultimately will lead to fulfillment because the two natures are united in the one God of the future. This does not mean, however, that process

guarantees progress in the present. What it does give, is meaning and hope to our activity here and now. To decide and act in the present for the new possibilities given by God is to actualize the potentialities brought to the present from the past and, as I understand it, to anticipate the divine future.

I believe that the methodist emphasis on salvation as a process ought to be seen in the light of this understanding of God. God is not a divine absolute being waiting passively "up there" for the consummation. He is himself involved in salvation everywhere and in every moment. We also view salvation ultimately as progress, stressing the human co-operation in the fulfillment of God's will on earth. As in process theology this does not mean that progress is guaranteed in the present. It rather serves as an impetus to act wherever it is necessary to change the present according to the basic principles of justice, peace and safety so it will in the highest possible degree emphasize the anticipating of the final future.

The theology of hope is also an important point of contact between Wesley and current theological movements. If a methodist transformationist theology is to be adequate and effective, it has to be transformative; that is, it has to lead to social involvement and be tested by experience (praxis). If theology itself shall have any future, it must point to what future we want, how we want it to come about and for whom the future is intended. The future of God and the future of humanity begins in transforming the present, and it is this transformation that the theology of hope is speaking of. God's actions in the past history of the world and of Israel in particular is the basis for his actions in the future. This hope for the future is what gives sense to actions in the present and brings us to social involvement. What we have to do here and now is accordingly determined by three biblical dimensions, named: God's actions in the history of Israel, the future action of God which will fulfill the promises given by his past actions, and the present action of man, directed and encouraged by these promises and hopes.

Methodist transformationist theology ought to consider the relation between God's actions and the human involvement which Moltmann here is speaking of. The point here is to emphasize that God acts in the present by using man's actions. I believe we have to work out clearly the distinction between God's actions and our own involvement inspired and motivated from what God has done and will do.

Another point that ought to come in here is the theodicy problem, which is very important to Moltmann. How is it that a God who creates a field of destructive and constructive possibilities can be said to be the God of Christ if He does nothing with the suffering brought about by this development except to promise a final victory? Central to the Christian understanding of God is that he is the suffering God. By being Creator he participates in our history. By believing in him as incarnate I Jesus Christ we know that he is a fellow-sufferer to the whole of mankind, thereby creating a new relationship between himself and man, a relationship of hope which promises that in the end all suffering will be overcome - a victory already anticipated in the resurrection of Christ. Is methodist theology perhaps too much oriented towards a "theologia gloriae"? How can we bring it closer to a "theologia crucis"?

The problem of suffering is closely tied up with the problem of evil and sin. If God is understood as the suffering God who gives hope to man when we look to his raising Jesus from the dead, evil and sin can be understood as that which keeps us away from the hope. To live without hope is to live in sin. Man does not believe himself capable of what is required of him. To break out of this vicious circle is to give hope to man, a hope for the future act of God at the end of history. This action will also lead man to act. By means of these actions God will create the future. Therefore man is to act in the present in order to overcome the existing gap between what God has promised and what remains to be fulfilled. In my opinion it is interesting to note that this conception of sin can be compared to Wesley's distinction of sin as a root of evil in the soul and its concrete manifestations which is to be conquered by grace through sanctification. If sin is rooted in hopelessness such a conquering is also possible and even necessary. The point is to break the evil powers of poverty, force and alienation which are keeping man inside definite boundaries. By breaking the vicious circle of senselessness and godforsakenness, hope will be brought to man and consequently over sin and that which tries to destroy our hope for a new future.

The theology of history presented by W. Pannenberg is the next analogy to be presented here. One of the most important points is his view of history, including Universal history as the place where God makes himself known. God's actions in the world's history is there to be seen by anyone who wants to see. These actions are self-revelatory, proclaiming indirectly the will of God to the world and his being Lord and God over everything created. Because this self-revelatory action is only indirect and partial, we cannot consider each action of God in history in isolation. We have to view history as a whole, that is his actions in the past, present and future. This would mean that God's self-revelation is not yet completed. It can only be viewed as a whole at the end of world history when he has completed all his actions. Openness to the future is therefore of fundamental importance in the theology of Pannenberg. Even God himself can be understood in these terms as God being the power of the future and the future as God's mode of being. God belongs to the future in such a way that he will not be God in every aspect of his being before his divinity will appear at the end of the world. This final end, is however, already anticipated in Christ. In the resurrection of Jesus, the completion of the world has already happened even if it remains to be realized for mankind. Pannenberg's view of Universal history as where God's actions are taking place, thereby gradually revealing himself as the power of the future, leads us to consider salvation as a process actualizing itself through human involvement in personal, social and ecological affairs. If God is at work in the world revealing himself to man, this will have to be done through worldly events. Therefore it does matter to us what we do in politics, economy, ecology, science, technology, etc., because these actions are potential carriers of God's self-revelation. To actualize the love of God through the Spirit in just and righteous actions is important in every realm of life. God will reveal himself through these as a righteous God who justifies the sinner, as the God of justice who opposes the forces of destruction, thereby sanctifying individuals, groups, institutions and society by means of human involvement and co-operation, and as the God of cosmos who will complete his work through a new creation.

The theology of Teilhard de Chardin reflects first of all the revolution in natural science effected by Darwin's theory of evolution. Teilhard developed a worldview where the process of evolution is central with Christ as the energizing focal point of this process. This kind of theology has its strength in the field of a Christian theology of nature. If salvation is something that concerns not only man, but reality as a whole, including cosmos itself, I believe that Teilhard's vision of the world process together with American process theology, can provide us with important material for a theological interpretation of nature and the cosmological process of salvation. His understanding of evolution as a transformation-process of creative unification whereby God is leading the Universe towards a convergence of maximal consciousness, tells us how God creates and saves his world and how our relation to this process as created beings can be understood. His notion of "the Universal Christ" could also be a valuable introduction to a christology not necessarily reflecting merely an individualist way of thinking.

## 5. Conclusion.

John Wesley's central theme is salvation as a process. All other elements of theology must be related to the understanding of this salvation. In the process of salvation there are three dimensions: the individual, the social and the cosmological. These are related to the process through the self-revealing divine acts in history, which point to a future fulfillment of a perfect relation between God and the world. In the individual dimension these acts can be described as justification of the sinner. Through repentance and faith man is freed from his guilt and shame to live a new life according to the will of God. He receives the divine gift of love by the Holy Spirit, thereby having the power to respond to the process of salvation. Through the love-relationship he is now related to society and cosmos in order to work actively for the completion of the process of salvation. This is to be actualized as a gradual transformation of the individual, the social, and the cosmic conditions in such a way that these may be in conformity with the divine will. In the individual dimension this is called holiness in heart and life and is experienced as the witness of the Spirit.

In the social dimension God is acting by promoting good and opposing evil and unrighteous structures in society. Since these structures already have been conquered in Christ, his victory is to be actualized by establishing new and righteous structures. Social sin is to be overcome by social holiness through sanctification. John Wesley said: "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness, but social holiness". Sanctification is therefore first and foremost a social process, a transformation that is to be real and experiential in society as to what the witness of the Spirit is about in the social realm of salvation.

In the cosmic dimension God is acting through creation, thereby transforming the world according to the divine will. In our love-relationship to the world we are brought into this process, experiencing a real transformation in nature (evolution) and in our conscious attitude to a responsible use of it (ecology). In nature itself this may be a growth upwards towards consciousness and the manifestation of the Spirit from highly complex organized matter. This is a goal-oriented growth (teleological) effected in cosmos by the processes of nature and on the human and social level by our active participation to establish relations and structures that will bring hope to the world for a final event of entire sanctification in every dimension of our existence.

## Appendix.

The incorporation of an ecological concern into the process of salvation needs a further comment:

The emergence of the ecological concern in the 70's, confused and often antagonized many of those who in the decade before had engaged in the struggle for a just and socially responsible society. One could sense a fear that the ecological concern was a rationale to halt world economic growth in the service of justice, a defensive move from the rich world to prevent a technological breakthrough, whereby would open up new possibilities for human welfare and freedom from toil.

But this is not so. Experience from high developed technological societies shows us that such societies do not provide an affluent life for all. Science and technology only changes the world's problems, but it does not do away with them. Rather, a technological society exposes the old problems in a new way. Distribution of wealth and income which is so important in a socially responsible society, does not necessarily follow as a consequence of technological development. Those who can afford to buy technology are those who control science. Technological experts are under influence of the men of economics and politics (and vice versa!) making political and economic institutions no more responsible and just than they were before. Working for a "sustainable society", that means a society which can be sustained indefinitely within the limits of the earth, with a quality that makes possible fulfillment of human life for all people, must therefore include a critique of how science and technology is being used by society.

The struggle for a just and a socially responsible society cannot be discussed only in terms of social action. We also need a theoretical discussion on science and technology and how we want these to be used by the society. If salvation concerns the whole of man, we must take into consideration how we are dependent upon the world we are living in and how society must be organized in order to sustain the earth so that a sufficient quality of life for humanity may be made possible for all. As human beings we are responsible to our fellowmen, to our descendants and to the Creator how we are using resources and technology

to improve the conditions of life. This responsibility concerns our salvation in such a way that what we are doing to the ecological system, will have consequences for the life of every other creature and for nature itself. The saving of the individual means that he becomes a participant in the process of salvation whereby he is to act in such a way that salvation will reach out to the world surrounding him. In respect to nature (cosmos) this participation includes a genuine ecological concern about such matters as energy policy and appropriate technology. If this is to be possible, we must develop a scientific and technological world view that can serve as a guideline for ecological strategy and action. I doubt that this can be done from a traditional liberation theology point of view, since this kind of theology has more to do with actions directed to an equitable distribution of wealth and income and the transformation of political and economic institutions that lead to injustice. The ecological issue arose on the other hand, not from social injustice, but from an awareness of the growing human pressures on finite resources and the ecological risks associated with a highly developed technology in western societies. This does not mean that the issues of liberation theology (social and political action) and a cosmological theology, with a strong ecological concern, are mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary, one belonging to the social dimension of salvation, the other to the cosmic dimension. This becomes clear when society itself through political and economical action decides about the future as to what is desirable and what kind of science and technology should be utilized in order to reach its goals. A theological critique of ecological action is therefore just as necessary as a critique of social and individual action.