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Makers of History or Witness to Transcendence?*

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Today's Christians have no choice but to take history seriously. Their own theologians – Bonhoeffer, Teilhard, Hromadka, Gutierrez, Cox, Alves, Metz, and others – have discredited the God who serves as a crutch for human deficiencies. None of the vital challenges posed by emerging social forces – world underdevelopment, the spread of mass technology, and new demands for total human liberation – can be met by postulating answers in “the next world.” At their ordination to holy orders Christian ministers have traditionally recited Psalm 15: “The Lord is my allotted portion of the heritage, He is my cup.” Nowadays, however, even priests and bishops know that it is this world, along with its problems, which is their inheritance. They are conscious of betraying the Gospel if they do not put their shoulders to the task of building history.

But can one labor at historical tasks with full commitment while remaining, or becoming, a religious being? For Kolakowski quite rightly asserts that there exist some “acts which are either performed completely or not at all. We cannot partially jump from a speeding train, partially marry, partially join an organization, or partially die. Accepting the world is one of those acts which cannot be performed partially.”¹ Is it possible to keep faith with a transcendent God who

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1. Leszek Kolakowski, “Ethics Without a Moral Code,” in *Tri Quarterly*, No. 22 (Fall 1971), p. 153.

lies beyond history, even though he acts within it, without deluding oneself or conniving with the structures of evil which still triumph scandalously in the here and now? The taunt discharged a century ago by Marx, "religion is the opium of the people," still reverberates deep in the conscience of troubled Christians. They fear he may be right or that, as Nietzsche expressed it, Christianity is simply "a Platonism for the people." Yet if Christians forego metahistorical transcendence, do they not thereby betray religion? Marx and Engels understood the dilemma perfectly when they wrote of "a theologian who constantly gives a human interpretation to religious ideas and thereby constantly repudiates his fundamental assumption, the super-human character of religion."²

One of the most agonizing tensions faced by Christians in the development context is precisely this: how to be present to history without abdicating their specific witness to a transcendent absolute beyond history? French theologian René Voillaume describes:

the temptation for the Christian to commit himself with his whole being to all sorts of scientific, economic, social and political activities, so as to bring Christian influence to bear on the structure of tomorrow's world, at the possible cost of reducing Christianity to being no more than the best solution to worldly problems, *de facto* if not *de jure*, and losing the sense of a spiritual kingdom, of the transcendent nature of Christ's mission, of worship, and of the divine supernatural destiny of all humanity.³

On the other horn of the dilemma, however, no committed Christian wants to be accused of non-involvement in the struggle to liberate oppressed humanity. The warning issued by Teilhard de Chardin in 1916 still echoes in their ears:

so long as the world appears to me merely as an opportunity for gaining merit, and not "a final work" to build up and bring to perfection, I shall be but one of the lukewarm, and judging me by my religion men will regard me as below standard, and a turncoat. And who would dare to say they were utterly wrong?⁴

To combat underdevelopment, injustice and exploitation in this world is not something one does so as to win heaven, but because it is an urgent human task worthwhile on its own merits. Like others,

2. From *The Holy Family in Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Edited by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, Anchor Books, 1967, p. 363.

3. René Voillaume, *Au Coeur des Masses*, Paris: Cerf, 1965, p. 532.

4. Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *La Pensée religieuse du Père Teilhard de Chardin*, Paris: Aubier, 1962, p. 349.

Christians need to be historical if they are to conquer their full humanity. The Uruguayan theologian Juan Segundo wrote a recent book called *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*.⁵ This is indeed the crucial question: Can Christians be the Artisans of a New Humanity, the Builders of a Liberated Human History? I shall try to answer this larger question by separating it into four questions, each of which depicts an arena of conscience in which Christians face difficult historical options.

1. Should one work at reforming institutions or at converting people?
2. Is class struggle the way to liberation or must Christians choose the way of reconciliation?
3. Does Christian transcendence represent "alienation" from history or, rather, a summons to incarnate mystery within human history?
4. What can Christians do to bring a "human" face to socialism?

I. Reform Institutions or Convert People?

Sin is a central category in Christianity. It has two meanings: the abiding tendency of the human race as a whole towards evil, and the inclination of each person towards selfishness, manipulation of others, and ego-gratification. The message of Christian deliverance has traditionally been garbed in the language of freeing the individual from sin: from greed, pride, lust and sloth. From this emphasis one readily passed to the notion that "conversion" of individuals is a prerequisite of social improvement. By stressing the conversion of individuals Christian apologists have, perhaps inadvertently, made people skeptical of the ability of institutions to produce greater justice. Whoever is convinced that human beings, even after they are regenerated by grace, remain imperfect and subject to sin, will not place great hopes in the capacity of new structures or institutions to destroy exploitation. One question will always linger in their minds: What good will new structures ultimately do, since everyone is sinful and new forms of oppression will inevitably spring up?

Sophisticated Christians are no doubt mindful of the systemic impact of institutions on human behavior. They understand that even the noblest intentions of individuals cannot fully resist the pressures wrought by pervasive cultural patterns or neutralize the constraints imposed by impersonal institutions. Accordingly, such Christians are just as skeptical of the ability of "good people" to produce justice as they are of the efficacy of "just institutions." For this reason they reject the conservative argument that greater social justice can only come from a "moral rearmament" of individuals in society.

5. Juan Luis Segundo, *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*, Orbis Books, 1972

The dilemma can be crudely expressed in the following terms: making everyone good does not necessarily result in a just society; conversely, adopting good institutions alone does not guarantee that a society will be just. The solution, therefore, is to devise change strategies whereby efforts to change people's moral values can best support organized attempts to modify imperfect institutions. Christians cannot resolve their dilemma unless they believe, implicitly at least, that men can sometimes forge institutions which are morally better than themselves. Such a belief undergirds Christians' acceptance of the priesthood — men can be ministers of God's grace even if their personal lives are not virtuous. In the political order, adherents of democracy make the same assumption; they think that judges and juries can be forced by their role to rise above their passions and that constitutional guarantees are a better safeguard of rights than relying on the honesty and wisdom of rulers or magistrates. Marx likewise noted that capitalists are exploitative, not because their hearts are sordid, but because their position in relations of production compel them to pursue certain interests. Leaders in contemporary Marxist societies like China and Cuba also recognize that the creation of new moral values in what they call "the new man" must accompany the implanting of new institutions. Human beings are not by nature inclined to place service of the community on a higher priority scale than self-aggrandizement or private gain. Hence the need for constant group criticism, for revolutionary committees to keep vigil over the "moral purity" of revolutionary cadres, for a punitive system which imposes harsh sanctions on so-called "crimes against socialist property." It is ironic to learn that in "advanced" socialist societies like the Soviet Union theft or loafing are punished so severely. One had supposed that such punishments were a reversion to the primitive ages of capitalism. During its Industrial Revolution England punished crimes against property by sending culprits to the gallows; and seventeenth-century French clothiers resisted the introduction of modern printed calicoes by the death penalty. "In Valence alone on one occasion 77 persons are sentenced to be hanged, 58 broken on the wheel, 631 sent to the galleys, and one lone and lucky individual set free for the crime of dealing in forbidden calico wares."⁶ Acquisitive instincts are not easily uprooted, even when the overall structures of a society are tailored to confer prestige and position on those who serve the common welfare. Consequently, the skepticism *vis-à-vis* institutions of those who believe in the perdurance of sin finds empirical support in historical experience. Nevertheless, "progressive" Christians today flatly oppose the use made by their conservative fellow-believers of belief in the perdurance of sinfulness as an excuse for approving the institutional *status quo*. They agree with Kolakowski that the conservative

6. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, Simon & Schuster, 1966, p. 18.

constantly oscillates between the claim that the world is so perfect that it requires no change and the thought that it is so rotten that it defies change. It is not important which of these ideas predominates, because they both have the same consequences in practice He does not mean to say that the world contains no positive values but only that they have all been realized. He uses his conviction that the world is somehow "frozen" in its crippled state to protest against all reform; for he thinks this evil world is not only the best of all possible worlds but that it has realized its highest values

The conservatives, like the authors of earlier theodicies, are certain that all good has been realized in the world; that while evil is indeed evil, it cannot be eliminated, and each change that takes place is a change for the worse.⁷

Complicity with present evils born of inertia is what progressive Christians fight to overcome. Yet, their task is not an easy one, since they too know that sin will continue and that even new structures and social systems can never, by themselves, abolish the possibility of evil. In Camus' words,

Revolution, in order to be creative, cannot do without either a moral or a metaphysical rule to balance the insanity of history. Undoubtedly, it has nothing but scorn for the formal and mystifying morality to be found in bourgeois society. But its folly has been to extend this scorn to every moral demand.⁸

Therefore, even revolutionary Christians are less sanguine than most Marxists regarding the likelihood that new relations of production will destroy all alienation. Christians continue to believe that, at the deepest level, alienation means the sinful self-isolation of the human ego from divinizing influences which are proffered, but never imposed, by God. Human beings must also be converted, even if their institutions are good, so as not to revert to the vilest forms of oppression or mystification.

Even "theologians of liberation" aspire after grace. Gustavo Gutierrez reminds us, in a recent essay, that

Jesus is opposed to all politico-religious messianism which does not respect either the depth of the religious realm or the autonomy of political action. Messianism can be efficacious in the short run, but the ambiguities and

7. Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

8. Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Vintage Books, 1956, p. 251.

confusions which it entails frustrate the ends it attempts to accomplish.⁹

Otherwise stated, Christians can never place unbridled hope in the reform of institutions. Even when they accept class struggle as necessary, they are under no illusions that the proletariat has been vested in any absolute sense with the historic mission of redeeming humanity. The proletariat is also heir to human passions and vices. Because Christians are summoned by their own faith to refuse to make idols of anything other than God Himself, they cannot accept in unqualified terms the notion that any social class is the redeeming messiah of all mankind. Marx's claim that the oppressed classes carry *universal* human values within themselves is ambiguous. To the extent that they are oppressed, that is negatively speaking, his statement is true. But to the degree that they assert themselves positively by concrete historical choices, the proletariat cannot incarnate universal human values. They too are particularistic, they too are able to exploit others, they too can get carried away by their own self-conferred grandeur. In its roots, Marx's image of the proletariat is very romantic. He almost sounds like one of those nineteenth-century Russians Solzhenitzyn describes, who had "to change his clothes and feel his way down the staircase to go to the people."¹⁰ But those who are themselves members of the proletariat do not idealize the companions who share their misery: like all men or women, they too can be selfish and stupid, lazy or aggressive, bitter or treacherous. Conservatives draw from this observation the conclusion that government can only safely be placed in the hands of "qualified elites." But critical Marxists and revolutionary Christians conclude instead that even "the people" must have institutional barriers to prevent them from "lording it" over others once they accede to power.

Inherent to Christianity is the belief that people can never be fully converted to goodness. As Claudel once put it facetiously, "There are parts of me which have not yet been evangelized!" Nevertheless, the evil which they commit is not irreversible; and it can be minimized. Above all, it is worth the effort to struggle to eliminate it. Hence the question, "Is it better to work at converting people or at changing institutions?" can only be answered by saying: "One must do both." Christian progressives, like Marxists, give priority to altering oppressive institutions, without, for all that, neglecting to emphasize the essential corruptibility of men even in socialist institutions. They acknowledge that socialism can generate its own special forms of alienation. Yet, on balance, they prefer to run this risk than to support an oppressive *status quo*. The only

9. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Jesus and the Political World," *Worldview*, Vol. 15, No. 9, (September, 1972), p. 44.

10. In *The First Circle*, chapter 61, "Going to the People."

alternatives they rule out are passive complicity with present injustice, and a naïve belief in the redemptive power of liberating institutions. They see liberation, in a critical spirit, as a dialectical task: an endless process whose gains are always fragile, but whose promise justifies all sacrifices.

My conclusion is that Christian "makers of history" have a difficult uphill battle to wage against the distrust of institutions that is innate to their acceptance of sin as firmly rooted in human life. One is not surprised, therefore, when some theologians of liberation seem to fall into a simplistic Rousseauism as they preach the merits of new institutions. It is as though they naïvely believed that men wielding power in those institutions could not err or could no longer be seduced by temptations to private wealth or ego-satisfying power over others! In most cases, however, such language is mere rhetorical overkill. Many use it because they deem it necessary to refute the abiding conservative bias which attaches to the traditional Christian insistence on human sinfulness.

One final remark can illuminate the drama faced by Christian ethics as it reflects on the development debate. I am thinking here of the uneasiness many progressive Christians feel over what appears to be the logical outcome of the Marxist tendency to downplay sinfulness and to upgrade liberating structures. New interpretations of the biblical category of "original" sin will doubtless become necessary. Perhaps Adam's sin was *hubris* only in the sense that the perfections he enjoyed were not recognized by him as gifts. Instead, he clung to them as coming from himself. Accordingly, the fuller knowledge of "good and evil" which the tempter placed before his eyes could be viewed by Adam under two aspects:

- as a missing perfection he must have (since all perfection must be his);
- and as evidence that God had "cheated" him by denying him something valuable, to wit, full knowledge.

As it turned out, knowledge of good and evil was not a further cognitive perfection, but the *experience of misery*. At the cosmic level, the human race rightly aspires after its own redemption. And such redemption MUST COME IN TIME, IT MUST COME WITHIN HISTORY. Any redemption, therefore, which is outside time is alienating to men.

But perhaps the human race, like Adam, is summoned by destiny to display a modicum of ontological humility, to recognize its finiteness by admitting that it may perhaps be radically unable to achieve total redemption in time. If the human race, in its collectivity, interprets this radical impotence as an unjust deprivation of its due on the part of jealous gods or absurd existential forces, it will reject any form of transcendence which would keep history "open" to some transcendent fulfillment partially outside history.

For mankind, therefore, to erect its own historical efforts into an absolute idol constitutes collective *hubris* analogous to Adam's personal sin. Revolutionary Christians fully committed to history are beginning to sense that they may need to reinterpret their own theology of history in some such light. They are encouraged by the pleas of such "heretical" Marxists as Ernst Bloch, Ernst Fischer, Leszek Kolakowski, or Roger Garaudy to help them incorporate even trans-historical transcendence into the human struggle. Garaudy's reflections are especially germane here. He declares that "Christians do not know how to live in a revolution"¹¹ and explains that sin is not the revolt against authority or pride, but the failure to fight against injustice, the "desertion of the creative human task."¹² Nevertheless, he adds, Christians have two tasks:

- to contribute their resources of faith and vision to the transformation of this world so as to fulfill human beings; and
- "never to forget to ordain this renovation of life on earth to a finality which is ever higher. Faith, in this perspective, is no longer an opium, but the ferment of the continuous creation of the world by man, and the opening of human history onto an horizon that has no end."¹³ Hugo Assman, a Brazilian theologian and sociologist, outlines the possible Christian contribution to liberation in even more precise terms. He writes:

It is clear that a rereading of the Bible, especially of the words of Christ, in the context of history raises for us a series of radical questions to which Marxism is unable to give the necessary attention. Perhaps the culmination of these questions is the Christian affirmation about conquering death, that radical alienation about whose overcoming Marx had nothing important or satisfactory to say.

The historical aspect of the problem of death is not the affirmation of our faith in a "hereafter" (which, as we know, does not eliminate temptations to egotism), but rather this: that the God who raised up Jesus is not a God of the Dead but of the living and that because life is the "milieu" of God he wants it to be also the "environment" of men. When we understand this in a historical and trans-historical way, in terms of a Christian eschatology whose ultimate questions are necessarily mediated to us through questions posed by our immediate situation in

11. Roger Garaudy, *Pour un modèle français du socialisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 371.

12. *Op. cit.*, p. 362.

13. *Op. cit.*, p. 372.

history, we are able to penetrate to the heart of that mystery of love which is giving one's life for others. Marxism in fact asks the same of all revolutionaries.¹⁴

Christians have no trouble agreeing that the greatest sin today is omission: absenteeism from the liberating struggle. Yet liberation itself must be given its full dimensions; it cannot be enclosed within purely finite borders. But more on the nature of transcendence somewhat later.

II. Class Struggle or Christian Reconciliation?

The divisions wrought by class struggle in societies at large have now made their way into the very entrails of churches throughout the world. On the right we find those who appeal to the classical Christian position of preaching reconciliation. They advocate that the Church not take sides with the poor *against* the rich, and not become the unconditional ally of the oppressed *against* groups which oppress them. Their governing premise is that Christ came to save everyone: slaves and freemen, rich and poor, the mighty and the powerless. The Church, they argue, is to stand as a witness to the reconciling powers of God's grace. Therefore, it is justified in exhorting the rich and powerful to pay heed to the demands of the underclasses, while simultaneously appealing to the latter to adopt solutions which will not totally rupture the fabric of the "Christian community." Within this conception, pastors and ministers of the Gospel, in particular, should guard themselves against lining up with any single faction of the Christian flock. Advocates of this position point to events in Jesus' life in which he befriends the wealthy or those in power, and occasions where he refuses to engage in purely political action even on behalf of the Jews, then occupied by the invading Romans.

Many Church documents of high authority warn against a diagnosis of social evils founded on class struggle. Two examples illustrate the point sufficiently.

In the opening paragraph of his encyclical *On the Development of Peoples* (*Populorum Progressio*) issued in 1967, Paul VI declares that the Church is at the service of all and that it is her duty "to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in history is a matter of urgency." Moreover, when describing conditions of extreme oppression, he later states that "recourse to violence, as a means to right these wrongs to human dignity, is a grave temptation" (# 30). Nevertheless, the Pope acknowledges that a revolutionary uprising might be justified in exceptional cases "where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to

14. Hugo Assman, "The Christian Contribution to the Liberation of Latin America," a paper presented at the meeting of ISAL (Iglesia y Sociedad en America Latina) in Naña, Peru, July 1971. Translation, mimeo by Mrs. Paul Abrecht.

fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country." But his main admonition is to avoid revolution, a course which, he says, "produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters" (# 31). The Pope reveals the true cast of his thought on this matter in Bogota in 1968. There he

categorically rejects violent revolution as a means of creating a new society. He rejects it as "contrary to the Christian spirit . . . violence is not evangelical, it is not Christian." He also rejects it as odious because it entails want and ruin and "civil and religious decadence," and because it inevitably ends in a "burdensome dictatorship." And finally he rejects it as inefficient: "Sudden and violent changes of structure would be deceptive, inefficient of themselves."¹⁵

Later in the encyclical, Paul VI urges rich nations to place their superfluous wealth at the service of poor nations (# 49). He also calls for improved planning and for a new kind of World Fund drawn from monies previously spent on armaments. But above all, he pleads for "dialogue between those who contribute wealth and those who benefit from it" (# 54). Development is the new name for peace and must be achieved by the common efforts of all. His final exhortation reminds us that "at stake are the peace of the world and the future of civilization. It is time for all men and all peoples to face up to their responsibilities."

A "Conference on Society, Development, and Peace" held at Beirut in April, 1968, and sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican Commission on Peace and Freedom makes a similar prescription.

There can be non-violent revolutions. All our efforts must be directed to change without violence. But if injustice is so imbedded in the *status quo* and its supporters refuse to permit change, then as a last resort men's conscience may lead them in full and clear sighted responsibility without hate or rancour to engage in violent revolution. A heavy burden then rests on those who have resisted change.¹⁶

Here as in the encyclical and other church documents, a pointed diagnosis in terms of structural exploitation is followed by recom-

15. Francois Houtart and André Rousseau, *The Church and Revolution*, Orbis Books, 1971, p. 216. The phrases in double quotation marks are drawn from public statements made by the pope in Bogota.
16. *World Development: Challenge to the Churches*, Exploratory Committee on Society, Development, and Peace, Geneva, 1968, p. 20.

mentations that all nations and classes work together for a world of greater justice. The underlying assumption is that there are no irreducible antagonisms between the interests of the "haves" and those of the "have-nots."

Many radical Christian groups, however, accept class struggle both as an undeniable fact and as a starting-point for devising strategies of change. For them, class struggle is the present historical context within which they must labor both for social justice and, ultimately, for Christian reconciliation. To abstain from supporting the demands of the oppressed, they argue, is tantamount to taking sides with their oppressors. They believe that, in Latin America, the only Third World continent where Christians constitute a majority and where their religion exercises a deep cultural and political influence, a strategic alliance between revolutionary Christians and Marxists is necessary in the process of liberating the masses. Class struggle, they contend, has already proceeded so far in Latin America, that the only two options left are either dependent capitalism and perpetual underdevelopment, or socialism. They do not take their acceptance of Marxian economic analysis to be a betrayal of their own Christian faith; it is, rather, the pledge of their serious commitment to liberating struggle, even as they probe to discover non-alienating modes of belief and religious practice. Such efforts in the direction of a new religious *praxis*, they insist, is the only argument that can refute Marxist atheism. By their actions, they reiterate the argument made more theoretically in 1967 by Czech theologian Josef Hromadka, namely, that atheism is not inherent to Marxism but is the result of its historical conditioning in 19th-century industrial Europe.¹⁷ This hypothesis has, in effect, been adopted by revisionist or radical Marxist philosophers: Machovek, Fischer, Schaff, Bloch, and others. What is more politically significant, however, is the active involvement of Latin American priests and ministers in the class struggle. One must assume that they continue to take their own Christianity seriously. How then do they reconcile their participation in class struggle with the ministry of Christian reconciliation?

They answer predictably in *dialectical* terms. They judge reconciliation impossible under present conditions. Therefore, they must work to change these conditions so that reciprocity may begin to reign. This is why to preach reconciliation now, at a time when permanent structures support paternalism, privilege, and exploitation, is not only to commit vicious hypocrisy; it is also to place the Church in a non-historical posture which can only benefit the *status quo*. Reconciliation is truly their goal, once basic justice has been achieved. But it is also a means they adopt, inasmuch as their struggle with the oppressed must be waged without hatred, vindictiveness or any blind stereotyping of enemies as incapable of overcoming the

17. On this, cf. Marlène Tuininga, "Un lutteur paisible: Joseph Hromadka," *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, No. 1, November 1967, pp. 27-29.

class consciousness which makes oppressors of them.

No satisfactory resolution of the tensions between the desire to shoulder the full historical burden of the class struggle, on the one hand, and the wish to be faithful to the demands of Christian peacemaking and reconciliation, on the other, has yet been achieved by Christians in the Third World. The vocal presence of partisans of both positions within churches is itself a manifestation of a larger class struggle whose outcome is still in doubt. Neither party to the debate is free, of course, to ignore totally the claims of the other. Indeed, many of the Church's faithful are themselves members of upper or middle classes. Therefore, even the champions of the poor feel a need to gain entry into the consciences of these groups and wean them away from their class loyalties — this in the name of the Gospel. Conversely, defenders of reconciliation are forced by reality to admit the validity of the claims of the oppressed. Even cautious Christians like Paul VI, occasionally find themselves in the position of advocating revolutionary change. The tragedy is that, as Houtart and Rousseau point out,

The lack of a sociopolitical analysis of the event leads, therefore, to results which are exactly the opposite of those intended. Having stated clear and precise principles, the pope, without intending to do so, upheld the position of the oppressor exactly as he did in Bogota, where his call for rapid social change was quite clear, but where all the strength of the principles was dissipated by his specific remarks about the pace of change and his appeals to the patience of the poor and the generosity of the rich. . . . It is certainly true that the Christian tradition encourages a nonviolent attitude. But when, in practice, the dominating powers use this language to maintain the status quo, then the affirmation of theoretical truth can very well lead to its opposite in practice.¹⁸

The opposite danger awaits those Christians who, in their zeal to root their commitment to the oppressed in the historical moment, adopt the class struggle model either too absolutely or too uncritically. They thereby risk identifying their church with a particular "faction" no less capable of "using" religion to its own ends than were capitalists and imperialists in earlier ages. This is a risk which "Christians for Socialism"¹⁹ in Chile and elsewhere are quite willing to run. As they see it, the only alternative is to abdicate their responsibility both for the oppressed masses and for the integrity of the Christian Gospel. The Church, they say, must not be

18. Houtart and Rousseau, *op cit.*, p. 261.

19. On this, cf. "First Encounter of Christians for Socialism, The Final Document," LADOC, No. 31 (October 1972), Doc. III 8 A, 6 pages.

for the poor, but of the poor. It must incarnate their hopes of deliverance from misery and oppression by sharing in their struggle to achieve human dignity. This it can do only by opposing the exploiters in struggle. Christian Socialists deeply believe that the Cardinal of Santiago, Chile, spoke the literal truth in November 1970, when he said that "in socialism there are more evangelical values than in capitalism."²⁰

III. Alienation from History, or Incarnation?

The conscious drive by societies to redefine and achieve "development" characterizes the present phase of history no less than large-scale technology, the existence of nuclear weapons, or the rapid secularization of all values. Christian ethics has responded to the emerging consciousness of the Third World by attempting to re-situate itself in "history." No category has more pervasively influenced Christian ethical reflection, both at the philosophical and the theological levels. Christians are always trying to be "present" to history, to read the "signs of the times," and to make of their religion a fully "historical" witness.

Stripped of all its trappings, this exuberant concern for "history" really means one thing. Christians seek to find in their faith and religiosity a high coefficient of involvement in the tasks of history: to build up science, to abolish want and war, to explore nature more fully, to bring human potentialities to fruition. They must, accordingly, interpret their God, their ethics, and their hopes — especially their aspirations after immortality and eternity — in such a way as to allow them to plunge fully into history. How can they do so? Before addressing myself to this crucial question, I should first like to explain why the question itself is relevant to development.

One looks for the answer, not to high theory or speculation, but to the realm of politics. The specific operative concept here is "political mobilization." What beliefs can serve as springboards for eliciting from people the sacrifices they will need to make to abolish poverty and build social systems which foster human dignity for all? Any philosophy which treats the miseries of this life as unimportant or as necessary preludes to felicity hereafter, enjoys a low mobilization potential. Its "coefficient of insertion in history" is weak. Conversely, any view on the ultimate meaning of existence and of historical destiny which links personal effort to collective struggle can have a high coefficient of insertion in history. These comparisons are not purely speculative: indeed most "underdeveloped" nations have populations for whom religious explanations of life and death still carry great weight. Accordingly, it is relevant to inquire into the coefficient of insertion in history of their religious viewpoint if we are to assess their chances of developing successfully.

20. Cited in "Participación de los Cristianos en la Construcción del Socialismo en Chile," Declaración a la Prensa, Santiago, 16 de abril de 1971.

To conduct such an enquiry here is doubtless impossible. Nonetheless, it may be useful to indicate a few points at which competing interpretations of Christianity make a vital difference on the scale of political mobilization for development.

The two focal points in Christianity which affect the mobilization potential for development are: the relationship between human effort and divine initiatives in history, and the precise content given to eschatological doctrines. I have discussed this issue at length elsewhere, and I shall not here repeat my argument.²¹ Nevertheless, it is evident that Christians may walk "two ways of the spirit." In the first model, they downgrade earthly efforts through renunciation or abstention in the name of some apocalyptic fulfillment located in some other realm of existence. The dominant idea is that God is the principal actor in history, which is seen as a moral proving ground where each person establishes his/her fittingness for heaven. Similarly, hope in a *parousia* or Second Coming of Christ in triumph serves as further reinforcement of a stance which despises mundane activities. A second "way of the spirit," however, leads Christians to define themselves differently relative to God's action in history and the eschatological meaning of human destiny. They see God's action in history as mediated by their own commitments; what God accomplishes thus comes to be determined by what they themselves do. Not that God is powerless without them, but rather that He has chosen to create human beings with the full measure of freedom inherent in their individual and collective destinies as makers of their own history. As for the teleological dimensions of Christianity, the Second Coming and The Last Things, this view does not interpret the final *parousia* as some gratuitous intervention on God's part, as though He were pulling the human race's "chestnuts out of the fire" at the twenty-fifth hour. No, final redemption is prepared by the human effort to make the world more finished, more just, more expressive of all men's capacities – for good as well as for evil. It remains true, even in this perspective, that eschatological grace does transform this world, as the Scriptures say, from a world of corruption into a world of glory. But this can only take place if the collective human effort to prepare the glory to come has already achieved a certain degree of success. This vision is clearly historical and evolutionary. Its chief exponent is Teilhard de Chardin, for whom the God beyond history challenges men to plunge more deeply into history so as to render it worthy of their God's action. For Teilhard, faith and hope in redeeming grace are arguments which buttress his human commitment to the conquest of knowledge, to the creation of esthetic beauty, and to the maturation of societal evolution so as to advance the collective ascent of the whole human race.

21. Cf. Denis A. Goulet, "Secular History and Teleology," *World Justice*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (September, 1966), 5-18.

Other Christian scholars – Ricoeur, Gilson, Dawson, Maritain – have insisted on the need to accept this life as itself constituting an ultimate end of human efforts. It is not purely a means or a platform allowing the chosen few or, as the case may be, the redeemed multitudes, to gain eternal life. “Eternal” life, whatever it may mean, ultimately begins within time. Otherwise it is sheer fantasy. Yet, although secular history is an ultimate end having its own self-justifying finalities, it is a *relative*, and not an *absolute* ultimate end. Within its own order – of time, of change, of evolution, of dialectical antagonisms – it stands as the last word. And if that word is unintelligible at the tribunal of *human* language, *human* justice, and *human* creation, then life is indeed an absurd joke or a cruel condemnation. Therefore, God’s providence does not redeem massive evils such as war, genocide, failed lives, and that common annihilation we all face at death. These are historical experiences and it is in history that the alienations they bring must be overcome. Nevertheless, it is the belief of Christians that history is not an absolute ultimate end. Human history does not exhaust the totality of being’s mysterious possibilities. Hence, the cosmic order may not be the final ALL. The special mystery of human persons is that they can shatter the boundaries of their own cosmic destiny and gain access – provided they actively open themselves to full transcendence – to whatever possibilities might lie in other cosmic orders, in other realms of being. Teilhard gave poetic expression to this hope when he contrasted

the pantheist, the neo-pagan, and the neo-humanist or the neo-earthling with authentic Christian humanists. The former love the world in order to enjoy it; whereas the latter, *who do not love the world any less intensely*, do so in order to purify it ever more and draw from the world itself the energies they need to transcend it.²²

He further explains that it is because Christians have “pre-adhered” to God that they can triumph not only *over* the world, but *in* the world.

I am reminded here of a statement I heard Roger Garaudy make at a public session of Marxist intellectuals in Paris in 1963. He summoned his fellow Communists to open their minds to wider horizons because “Our Marxist humanism would be severely truncated if it were not ‘big’ enough to make room for John of the Cross.” At a time when many Christian theologians are eagerly jumping on the bandwagon of secularism, independent Marxist critics issue salutary reminders that history or secular tasks are neither gods nor idols. One betrays the cause of history by forgetting that what makes human

22. Cited in Madeleine Barthelemy Madaule, “La Personne dans la Perspective Teilhardienne,” in *Essais sur Teilhard de Chardin*, Paris: Editions Fayard, 1962, p. 76.

history important is its unrelenting drive towards transcendence. Societies we too facilely label "underdeveloped" may yet have the last word inasmuch as, for them, life and death are mysteries into which members of society must be initiated, not mere incidents to be recorded. Christians must not allow guilt over their past flight from history to beguile them into rejecting that very transcendence which "liberated" Marxists and critical secularists are now discovering as genuine concerns. The dialectic of existence is served neither by reductionist secularism nor by alienating supernaturalism, but by the living tension in which human beings, as Teilhard tells us, find an "issue" or a "way out" of the impasses attaching to their finiteness and contingency. Therefore, Christians may be full partners in the construction of history even as they witness to the transcendence without which their hope is empty self-delusion. Che Guevara urges Christians to join the revolution "without the pretension of evangelizing the Marxists and without the cowardice of hiding their faith in order to assimilate themselves."²³ A century ago Marx and Engels had written that the proletariat

cannot emancipate itself without transcending the conditions of its own life. It cannot transcend the condition of its own life without transcending *all* the inhuman conditions of present society which are summed up in its own situation.²⁴

Critical neo-Marxists like Schaff or Fischer now acknowledge that death is a true alienation, not merely a natural necessity. Consequently, they too are now raising the Christian question: "Death, where is thy sting? Death, where is thy victory?" Nowadays, the question applies to the human race as a whole no less than to each person within it. Nuclear annihilation as a real possibility makes of eschatology itself a historical category!

IV. The "Human Face" of Socialism

Few experiences are so rich in lessons for Christians as the public stance taken recently by the Chilean "Christians for Socialism" led by Gonzalo Arroyo. History, they tell us, summons Christians to work with all their energies to build socialism. They do not judge their Christianity to be superfluous or inhibiting to the process. On the contrary, their noblest aspiration is to help build Socialism "with a human face." What precisely does this expression mean, and how does it affect Christians' definition of their role in development struggles?

23. Cited in "Both Marx and Jesus," *Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 57.

24. *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, edited by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, Anchor Books, 1967, p. 368.

"Christians for Socialism" take Che Guevara's admonition seriously and make no effort to dissimulate their Christianity or to water it down. They agree with him that on the day "when Christians dare to give an integral revolutionary testimony, the Latin American revolution will be invincible." To give such witness, however, they must themselves help build socialism. In no circumstances are Christians justified in standing outside their society's real historical options and waiting for some pure and perfect system to appear. Socialism as a historical force represents the upward movement of organized societies away from the alienating contradictions of capitalism. Even when it is smoothly adjusted to meet the demands of the welfare state, capitalism is essentially responsive to effective purchasing power. But in a world of mass poverty and unjust social structures, responding to purchasing power means placing the *wants* of the rich on a higher priority scale than the *needs* of the poor. Markets are not to be scorned, however; nor should efficient managerial practices or modern technology be rejected. Nevertheless, as Karl Mannheim pointed out twenty years ago, market competition and free enterprise assume a qualitatively different character according as they are the organizing principle of an economy, or are used in subordinate fashion as regulatory mechanisms to control for efficiency, waste, duplication, and flexible response to expressed needs.²⁵

The Third World has been "underdeveloped" by the dependencies bred by capitalism. Therefore, the political commitment of Christians to create a humane form of socialism represents a historically more advanced position than the vain search for some antiseptic "Third Way" or the timid abstentionism of those who fear to repeat socialism's past errors. Here, I think, lies the crux of the problem. One must frankly admit that the Socialist experiments already witnessed on the historical stage have largely betrayed their human charge of hope. Socialist societies have usually performed worse than their principles. But this failure provides us with no worthy excuse for endorsing – actively or by default – a capitalism which, in its historical incarnations, has partly attenuated its evils, thanks to the influence of other values, in its matrix societies. Like everyone else, Christians must assume their share of historical risks.

Do Christians fear that Socialism leads to a totalitarian political order? Let them heed their own Christian warnings against idolatry and relativize the very political order they struggle to implant. Their religion forbids making an idol of any creature, and it commands them to guard the inner recesses of their conscience for "God alone." Let them, therefore, frame laws where social privilege is strenuously extirpated whenever it re-emerges. Thus, can Christians help

25. Cf. Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951, p. 191.

humanize the "face" of Socialism: by first humanizing it within themselves.

Besides combating political totalitarianism, Christians can contribute to Socialist construction their unflinching insistence on the priceless value of each human person. For centuries they have had to reconcile the rights of personal conscience with the requirements of obedience to social authority. They should be well defended, therefore, against the temptation to *reduce* an individual's worth solely to his/her social utility. According to Christians, God loves each human being with a unique personal love. Accordingly, Christian Socialists will need to assert the primacy of personal worth in new communitarian modes. Thus, will they incarnate more historically than before their own belief in the "mystical body" of Christ, and the collective destiny of the fully redeemed or "liberated" human race. They must not become ashamed of giving primacy to love as a human category. Czech Marxist philosopher, Milan Machovec, believes that:

Man is a limited being, but in love and moral engagement he is able to transcend the limits of his individuality. . . . I tend to think that genuine transcendence is the capacity for the "I" to seek out and find the "Thou."²⁶

And Garaudy pleads for an inward transformation of man and the creation of a new society in which love will become an objective reality of society rather than a mere prescription.²⁷

Perhaps the central affirmation of Christians who labor to build a new world order based on solidarity and the repudiation of all alienating structures is that no person is bereft of moral grandeur simply because he or she is not socially useful or successful. The radical democracy of Christianity is founded on the individual's worth in God's eyes. It is not the noble, the wise, or the successful ones of this world who will necessarily inherit the "kingdom of heaven." This is a permanent lesson to be remembered by Christian Socialists no less than by others. They may easily reach the conclusion that human greatness is measured ultimately in purely societal terms. But even a "socialist saint" is not necessarily the final paradigm of human success or virtue. If this affirmation seems shocking, so be it. It is a constant Christian affirmation. It should leave even Christian militants for a new social order rather humble in their judgment of others. Ultimately, they cannot probe the inner depths of their neighbor's moral value. Their greatest merit, however, is not to have used this disturbing Christian truth as an alibi for

26. Cited in Bernard Murchland, "Christianity and Communism: the Emerging Dialogue," *Worldview*, November 1969, p. 13.

27. *Op. cit.*

laissez-faire complicity with capitalism, or as an excuse for their own tepidity in building history.

A third dimension to the Christian "face of Socialism" is a liberating vision of material goods. What a paradox it is that contemporary Christians have needed the speeches of Mao-Tse-Tung to understand their own message of Gospel poverty. According to Mao, economic austerity must not be seen primarily as a necessary evil to be borne by poor societies in the early phases of capital accumulation. The conventional view is that curbing one's desires for consumer goods and curtailing the production thereof are measures designed to increase savings and to channel more investment into productive facilities. The aim, it is said, is to create a productive base from which an abundance of goods can be obtained in the future. Mao contends,²⁸ on the contrary, that alienation in some future abundance presently desired is no less destructive of internal freedom and moral solidarity than alienation in an abundance already enjoyed. Hence, he concludes that austerity is a permanent component of authentic Socialist humanism, not merely some necessary evil poor societies must tolerate in the early phases of their development. No doubt production must be increased, and new goods must become available to abolish malnutrition, to provide decent housing and sufficient clothing to all. But the first priority is to create a new consciousness in human beings, one in which competition is not based on acquisitiveness at someone else's expense. Therefore, the austerity practiced today is a necessary moral support of one's social solidarity with all others. To be content with modest sufficiency also provides one with a defense against the manipulative seductions of advertising or other devices aimed at multiplying wants. Moreover, an attitude of austerity reinforces the internal freedom of people engaged in herculean efforts at production by guarding them against the dangers of adopting technologies uncritically simply because they are efficient. Ellul's warning against the powerful tendency of technique to impose its own determinisms is taken seriously in China's development pedagogy.

Anyone familiar with the tradition of Gospel poverty will immediately note that Mao has understood the spiritual dynamics, as it were, of desire. Mao, like Christ, rejects both the Puritan work ethic and a philosophy of resting content in one's misery. Gospel poverty is not a disdain for material goods but the refusal to let even the desire for necessary goods destroy one's spiritual freedom. It presupposes a human level of want satisfaction in the society at large

28. I have derived my interpretation of Mao's advocacy of austerity from two sources. One is a series of comments made by Roger Garaudy in *Le Problème Chinois*, Paris: Seghers, 1967, pp. 224-227. The other is a conversation with Professor Paul Lin, a specialist in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Garaudy has confirmed both that my interpretation of Mao is correct and that he disagrees with it.

if it is to have its full meaning. Jesus never praised Gospel poverty as a warrant for the perpetuation of inaction in the face of social injustice or of rank inequality in the distribution of wealth. Not by accident have Dorothy Day, Charles de Foucauld and others discovered liberating joy in Gospel poverty to the precise degree that they have fought unrelentingly against social privilege and the institutional idols of wealth and acquisition.

Perhaps the success of Socialist endeavors in numerous societies outside China will require a new breed of Christians who will undertake to live the beatitude of Gospel poverty in order to protect Socialist construction against the seductions of mass-consumerism. For surely Socialism could never have a "human face" if it endorsed the notion that the fullness of good is synonymous with the abundance of goods. I have discussed elsewhere²⁹ the difficulties entailed in sustaining the "spirit of liberating poverty" without a belief in religious transcendence. What is germane to our discussion, however, is simply that Christian witnesses to the transcendent worth of Gospel poverty can be effective "makers of history" in the mode of Mao's Socialist humanism.

Conclusion

More clearly than ever before, we grasp how dialectical is the historical process. Secular "makers of history" have been led by their very struggles to reaffirm the need for transcendence. Their evolution is matched by that of Christian "witnesses to transcendence" who have been led by their own efforts at reinterpreting transcendence to plunge ever more fully into the history that remains to be made. Paradoxes such as these are stumbling blocks only to those who have never understood that yin needs yang, that action demands passion, and that resistance to unjust structures requires contemplation. James Douglass gives eloquent expression to this mystery when he writes:

If resistance is the yang of the Way of Liberation, then contemplation is its yin. The two are one, indivisible reality, and it is through them as one that the Way of Liberation is known. . . . As resistance seeks the social liberation of man from the pain of injustice, contemplation seeks his personal liberation from the pain of a deeper alienation, an impoverished and autonomous self. Man if liberated from his false self is united with the One, and personal separation and pain are overcome in the harmony of pure Being. Liberation understood thus in its con-

29. Denis A. Goulet, "Voluntary Austerity: the Necessary Art," *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 23 (June 8, 1966), pp. 748-752.

templative form is an idea which pre-dates the liberation fronts of today's global revolution.³⁰

The burdens assumed by those who would make history while bearing witness to transcendence become too heavy if they base their commitment on some rational calculus of probable success. That commitment can only be founded on a hope-laden calculus of possibility. One Christian advocate of renewed involvement in development, the Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves, has written a book called *A Theology of Human Hope*. His title takes me full circle, back to the theme of this lecture series: "Christian Ethics and the Development Debate." Without an ethics of hope, the picture is bleak: there can be no genuine development for all. But hope, if translated into historical commitment, creates new possibilities. And it is always worth making sacrifices for the sake of the possible.

30. James W. Douglass, "The Yin-Yang of Resistance and Contemplation," in Thomas E. Quigley, editor, *Freedom and Unfreedom in the Americas*, New York: IDOC Books, 1971, p. 112.