THE HOPE OF LIBERATION
IN WORLD RELIGIONS

MIGUEL A. DE LA TORRE

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—Miguel A. De La Torre—
editor

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To my mother Mirta (1934–2005)

One of the world's oppressed
May she find in death the liberation that eluded her in life

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INTRODUCTION

—Miguel A. De La Torre

Cuernavaca, Mexico is known worldwide as "The City of Eternal Spring." This charming resort city is a tourist attraction for Mexicans and foreigners who come to enjoy its many gardens, tennis courts, spas, golf courses, bathing resorts, gourmet restaurants, and luxury hotels. Tourists can browse through its many quaint shops for exquisite traditional handicrafts, specifically baskets woven from multicolor straws. Not far from the city of Cuernavaca sits an indigenous town on the summit of a nearby mountain range whose inhabitants attempt to preserve their Nahuatl spiritual and cultural ways from the onslaught of globalization. Many in this community live in huts with thatched roofs and dirt floors. In one of these huts, which I recently visited, there lives a three-generation family. Those who are old enough spend their days weaving baskets, the same baskets which tourists haggle over, trying to get the lowest possible price. Not long ago, one of the daughters, barely a teenager, gave birth to her firstborn. Only a week old, the child was underweight, suffering from a persistent cough. Sadly, this child will probably join the thirty thousand children worldwide that die each and every day of hunger and preventable diseases (Fukuda-Parr, 2003:8). Another deadly statistic for which this family provides a human face is their lack of clean water. For them, water comes from a polluted well on the side of a hill. They join the 1.1 billion people worldwide who lack clean drinking water and the 2.4 billion who need access to sanitation.[1] When this family wishes to quench their thirst, more often than not they walk over to the local bodega and buy a

Coca-Cola. It becomes the multinational's best interest not to support any governmental initiative to build a water processing plant.

On the other side of the world, a young thirteen-year-old teenage girl leaves her small impoverished Thai village for the Patpong district of Bangkok, the notorious red-light center. By working in the sex industry, more likely as a prostitute, her earnings will be enough to support the basic needs of her entire family. Although she leaves out of a sense of filial obligation, other girls have been known to be sold into sexual slavery by their parents for as little as $266. The young girls of Thailand, as well as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan (and more recently Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe) become desirable commodities for those wealthy enough to pay for their services.

The sex industry in Thailand got underway courtesy of the U.S. military. During the Vietnam War, Bangkok became the "Rest and Recreation" (R&R) center for U.S. soldiers needing to de-stress from the demands of warfare. By the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. military presence in Thailand spent more than $20 million for prostitutes, transforming that country into what has come to be known as the "sexual Disneyland of the world." The Thai sex industry was a profitable business, the demise of which would have led to the financial ruin of many capitalists. Consequently, U.S. soldiers were replaced with foreign tourists, specifically from the industrialized nations of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, and Japan. Today, the United States remains one of the major "sending countries," contributing to the flourishing of the international child sex market. While exact figures of American tourists who travel abroad to engage in sex with minors are difficult to ascertain, arrest and detention records at popular travel destinations in the developing world, like Bangkok, reveal a significant U.S. presence. Sadly, the globalization of the economy is partly paid for through these young girls. Sudurat Srisang, founder of Fight Against Child Exploitation, notes that sex tourism has become a way of obtaining funds to pay off Thailand's debt to the IMF and the World Bank (Andrews, 2004:1).

The Rise of an Idolatrous Religion

The indigenous family living on the outskirts of Cuernavaca and the young teenager making her way to Bangkok have much in common. For one, they are part of, to borrow a term from Frantz Fanon, "the wretched of the earth." Their lives are hard, brutal, unjust, and short,

thanks mainly to neoliberalism[2]—the globalization of the economy. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*, "Empire can only be conceived as a universal republic, a network of powers and counterpowers structured in a boundless and inclusive architecture. This imperial expansion has nothing to do with imperialism, nor with those state organisms designed for conquest, pillage, genocide, colonization, and slavery. Against such imperialisms, Empire extends and consolidates the model of network power" (2000:166–67). How? By developing a decentralized economic network called neoliberalism which encompasses financial institutions, multinational corporations, and mass media.

But to limit the marginalization of the world's underside to just the economic forces that created the new world order after the collapse of the Berlin Wall underestimates the potency of globalism. Neoliberalism moves beyond an economic order based on private property where buyers and sellers compete to obtain the best price on goods and services. Neoliberalism is a "spirit" which encompasses both an emerging culture and a corresponding morality that justify the economic arrangements brought about by neoliberalism, an economic arrangement that more often than not dehumanizes those made poor by neoliberalism. When the world's disenfranchised are commodified, cultural consequences follow, specifically the disintegration of communal and familial life. As the world's poor compete with each other in the race to the bottom of global compensation, traditional institutions that foster faith also suffer, not due to lack of interest, but lack of time, as more waking hours are expended in the pursuit of the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter).

The emergence of a global culture complementary to neoliberalism provides both a model for the world's poor to emulate and a substitution for the role faith has traditionally played. A century ago the "white man's burden" was to bring civilization and Christianity to the world's heathens and savages (understood as nonwhites). Civilizing and Christianizing the natives were a cover story for the colonial venture that subjugated (mainly through military might) the vast majority of the world's resources and people for the development of imperial centers in Europe and North America. Today, rather than bringing the natives civilization, we bring them democratization, the new buzzword. Rather than bring them the faith of Christianity, today we spread the gospel of neoliberalism. As a spirit, neoliberalism has become the major competitor of Christianity for the souls of humanity. Moreover,

it has gained converts from other faiths, too, not just Christianity. I would argue that neoliberalism as spirit is more successful in winning converts than any other faith tradition presently in existence.

Neoliberalism as a religious movement is an economic doctrine that can only be accepted by faith. The economic truth of neoliberalism is maintained through a rigidly structured nondemocratic hierarchy in the forms of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As guardians of economic truth, these institutions succeed in making their neoliberal theories appear as the norm, the only legitimate choice for those who are rational beings. Belief in the market, and its free flow of goods, leads to a salvation characterized by "a rising tide that lifts all boats," regardless of what the empirical data may show. Such beliefs are perpetuated through institutions which function much like a church that claims its own religious form of self-justification. Like most faith tradition, the economic pronouncements expounded by the World Bank or the IMF can neither be validated nor invalidated, but rather accepted through faith—a faith which lacks any moral or ethical foundation. This neoliberal faith is instead based on the power amassed by a decentralized network of institutions, and the militarily "advanced" nations it profits, which in turn verifies the universality of its economic doctrines. There can be no salvation outside the global market forces of "free trade." Furthermore, even if these market forces create widespread devastation, destitution, or destruction, neoliberalism by faith continues to be confessed as the way to salvation. While past evangelists attempted to convince the nonbelievers of old to believe in their doctrines on God, today's neoliberal evangelists seek to convert nonbelievers into entrepreneurs who can in turn intensify and expand the market (De La Torre, 2004a:78–79).

Neoconservative Catholic ethicist Michael Novak, commenting on the collapse of the Eastern bloc, boasts, "We are all capitalists now, even the Pope. Both traditionalists (Third World) and socialist methods have failed; for the whole world there is now only one form of economics" (1993:101). Novak is not alone in his assertion that capitalism is compatible with (in his case) Christianity. Capitalism as God's ordained economic order is a presupposed concept found within many mainline churches of the so-called First World, a presupposition we can witness spreading to improvised societies (within both the "First" and "Third" World) in the form of prosperity theology.[3] Regardless of the neoconservative agenda of linking God with a neoliberal economic order, liberation theologians have resisted neoliberalism. For libera-

tion theologians Clodovis Boff and George Pixley, "The theological status of [neoliberalism] today is precisely that of a vast idolatrous cult of the great god Capital, creator and father of so many lesser gods: money, the free market, and so on" (1989:144). Unfortunately, this resistance has failed to be effective, mainly because the global forces of neoliberalism were and continue to be underestimated.

Part of this underestimation was manifested in the misplaced trust Latin American liberation theologians had in the state as the means for creating a more humane society. Through the democratic process, attempts were, and continue to be made to elect individuals sympathetic to the marginalized. While such a strategy may have proven effective at one time, it is now naive. No doubt the move, specifically in Latin America, from right-wing U.S.-sponsored dictatorships toward a more democratic process should be welcomed as good news. Still, any good that may come from democratization is forfeited because the sovereignty of states have been coopted by neoliberalism. Regardless of any leftist-leaning, the state remains in danger of becoming the means by which market forces organize what is produced, who produces it, what is paid to those doing the producing, and who profits from what is being produced. Rather than protecting the poor, even in states headed by leftist elected leaders, the state's *raison d'etre* has become securing territories so that the production of goods or harvesting of resources can take place and, if need be, suppress any resistance to this global order. In effect, sovereign nations have been overrun by neoliberalism, either through "structural adjustments"[4] imposed on nations, or a self-interested willingness to be aligned with the world's only superpower. Hence, any hope that the state could have been a check on the operations of neoliberalism has led to disappointment, for states are now constrained by external economic forces constructed to serve the neoliberal global order.

Resistance to the Neoliberal Global Marketplace

What then is the hope of the world's marginalized? Is Novak right? Is there no other system but neoliberalism? Although capitalism won as witnessed by the collapse of the Eastern bloc, are we left with just one choice? And if not, what other choice exists? I would argue that the alternative to the spirit of neoliberalism can be found within the faith of the people. Daniel Bell insists that within the present postmodern condition, a space has been opened—perhaps inadvertently—for the

sacred. In this space, Christianity (and I would add any faith tradition) can directly challenge global capitalism (2000:18).

In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx saw religion as the "opiate" of the people. For the twenty-first century, it is the emerging global entertainment culture, which derives from neoliberalism, that is effectively drugging much of the world's population. The political and economic thrust of neoliberalism seduces the world's marginalized through a global culture that to a great extent is based on U.S. middle-class tastes of music, movies, television entertainment, and the desire for the occasional Disneyland excursion. Ironically, what Marx once saw as the cause of people's despondence to the devastating effects of the prevailing oppressive economic social structures—religion—is becoming the hope of their liberation and salvation. For the real struggle is not between Christianity and Islam, or Hinduism and Buddhism. Rather, the struggle occurs between the world's disenfranchised and the materialistic religiosity of the world's elite. The faith of the people as a worldview understood by the world's disenfranchised, can very well hold the revolutionary message for a new vision of justice for all of humanity by providing the masses the spiritual strength and courage to resist the imposed neoliberal construction of reality.

I would argue that the alternative to neoliberalism, the hope for the vast majority of the world's population, can be found within their own faith traditions, specifically how those faith traditions equip the marginalized within their midst to seek their own liberation. While the actual tenets of any faith are important, the poor and disenfranchised usually approach their faith tradition differently than those who usually serve as the academic or ecclesiastic spokespersons of the faith. Any attempt to understand the faith of the people from the margins of the community will find itself rooted in the everyday, attempting to discover how their faith provides the means of surviving the condition of their disenfranchisement. Before exploring how different faith traditions throughout the world can provide such a hope in resisting the spirit of neoliberalism, it behooves us to first review the basics of liberation theology, specifically its first manifestation within Latin America.

Development of Liberation Theology

The liberation theology which developed in Latin America was influenced by five major events. The first, and probably most important,

occurred when Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) convened the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The purpose of the Council was to modernize Catholicism. One of the major documents to come out of the council was the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965), which emphasized the church's responsibility for "those who are poor or afflicted in any way." The document declared that the church could no longer tie itself to any particular economic or political system, but rather would have to find its purpose of existence through its solidarity with the most marginalized segments of society.

The second event which contributed to the development of liberation theology was the 1968 Medellín conference held in Colombia which attempted to implement the pronouncements of Vatican II within Latin America. Specifically, the conference discussed how the church can complete its earthly mission from a Latin American context of poverty and death caused in good measure by the U.S. economic policies designed to benefit multinational corporations. Third, Gustavo Gutiérrez published his groundbreaking book *Teología de la liberación* (1971), translated into English in 1973. The book provided a reflection on the proper role of theology in its attempt to be faithful to both the poor and the gospel and on how theology can be constructed by learning from the daily struggle of the poor.

Fourth, Christian Base Communities (CBCs) began to develop. These were spaces where the dispossessed gathered to discover how to use their religious convictions to bring about change to the reality of their marginalized lives. CBCs were physical locations where the dispossessed organized grassroots political action and received education, or as they would prefer to call "conscientization." Finally, the earlier 1959 Cuban revolution served to demonstrate that nations in Latin America could indeed break free from the U.S. hegemony. While Cuba was never accepted as a model to emulate, it did prove that society need not be organized along a pro-U.S. capitalist paradigm.

Much has taken place since the early heady days of Latin American liberation theology. During the 1980s, U.S.-supported military dictatorships gave way to elected civilian governments. With the election of leftists and a few former guerrillas to public office, some began to question the relevance of liberation theology. Others declared defeat in bringing about a socialist-based revolution. Is liberation theology therefore passe? Does liberation theology have anything to say to the world's poor and oppressed today?

Gustavo Gutiérrez, who is often credited with being among the first to articulate a Latin American version of liberation theology, probably said it best during the 1996 conference of the American Academy of Religion in New Orleans. He stated that he did not believe in liberation theology. Rather, he believed in Jesus Christ; while all theologies are born to die, a theological voice from the margins will always exist. Specifically, he wrote,

> In the past few years we have been witnesses to a series of economic, political, cultural, and ecclesiastical events, both in the international arena and in Latin America. This might cause one to think that important aspects of the time that birthed and developed the reflection of what we call liberation theology since the late 1960s, have come to an end. Undoubtedly, the convulsive events within that period of Latin America were stimulating and creative, while at the same time, tense and conflicted. Faced with new situations, many of the statements and discussions of that period of time do not respond to today's challenges. (1998:97)

But what happens when the poor, to whom Gutiérrez refers to, are not Christians? Then they must seek their own liberationist perspectives from within their own faith traditions.

Some would argue that whenever and wherever the poor existed throughout history, their spirituality, as a way of dealing with their oppression, was in fact a form of liberation theology. The religiosity and perspectives of the poor, regardless of whatever academic term was used to label their beliefs, were in fact a liberationist perspective. This was true of historical groupings of people, as well as future groupings, irrespective of a religious expression that is or is not Christian. It is not the intent of this book to simply export liberation theology (as though it was a commodity) and impose it upon other faith traditions. Rather, our purpose is to look within different faith traditions to discover if they contain their own understanding of liberation for their more marginalized believers, and if they do, what interfaith conversations can develop that can serve as a counterforce to neoliberalism.

Primary Concepts of Liberation Theology

Although no monolithic tenets for liberation theology exist, there are several concepts that appear to be generally accepted. While it is not the purpose of this introduction to provide a complete exploration of

liberation theology, it is important to at least review some of these major concepts.

a) Liberation as salvation. Liberation theology insists that liberation must be from all forms of oppression, specifically political, sexual, economic, environmental, and religious. In a real sense, to be "saved" (a very Christian-centric concept) is to be liberated from both personal sins committed and the social sins imposed. To a great extent, the process of liberation involves the process of consciousness-raising, the unmasking of the forces that create poverty, marginality, and disenfranchisement. So rather than convincing the nonbeliever to believe, the liberationist evangelical goal is to convince the nonperson of their personhood. The oppressed of the world cease to be objects to be used by a neoliberal means of production, instead, the nonperson is recognized as having worth and dignity (Gutiérrez, 1983:92).

b) All theologies are contextual. Liberation theology bills itself as a grassroots theological movement. That is to say, the theological reflections developed originate among the faith community, which at times will be at odds with the church and academic hierarchy. Because local cultural settings are seriously considered, one can expect different social and political contexts to produce different theological perspectives. For this reason we cannot speak about a liberation theology, but about liberation theologies.

c) Emphasis on orthopraxis (correct action), rather than orthodoxy (correct doctrine). Contrary to the deductive methodology employed by the dominant culture's theology which begins with a truth, doctrine, scripture, or church teaching and then moves toward creating praxis based on that starting point, most liberationists begin with the experiences of the poor and oppressed. Reflection based on the praxis of the poor leads to theological and hermeneutical "truths." This hermeneutical circle (seeing-acting-judging) insists that liberating praxis constructs theory (truth?) which informs and strengthens praxis (Segundo, 1976:8).

d) Preferential option for the poor. God is the God of the poor and oppressed. Because God always sides with the oppressed against their oppressors, believers in God must do likewise, for God only reveals Godself to those who do justice and stand in solidarity with the oppressed (Gutiérrez, 1983:209). As Gutiérrez reminds us, "To know God is to do justice" (51). Therefore, there is only

one point of departure—the reality of the oppressed, and only one goal—their liberation (Boff and Boff, 1984:24). To stand by while oppression occurs is to confess one's own lack of faith. God's option for the oppressed is not due to them being holier or wiser but merely due to their disenfranchisement. In a very real sense, to listen to the voices of the poor is to hear the voice of God.

e) Institutional violence. Violence is more than physical abuse; it incorporates the long-term violence imposed by political, social, and economic institutions that foster death through the denial of basic human needs (Gutiérrez, 1973:175).

Liberationist Perspectives in a New Millennium

If liberationist theologians and ethicists are correct in asserting that a preferential option for the oppressed exists, and that their faith has something important to say about the inhuman conditions they find themselves in, then how their particular faith traditions manifest liberationist tenets becomes crucial in understanding different world belief systems. I believe that when world faith traditions are explored from the margins of society, specifically those who are normally disenfranchised due to their race, class, and gender, readers who are accustomed to studying world religions from a Eurocentric academic paradigm can be jarred from a normative way of thinking. To read from the margins of power, the reader is forced to move beyond a traditional understanding of the faith that fuses and confuses how those privileged by the religious tradition present their faith to the Euro-American audience with how the vast majority of believers, who exist on the underside of power and privilege, interpret that same faith for daily survival. Reading from the margins provides an approach to dealing with life issues that can be quite liberating.

The purpose of the book you hold in your hands is to explore how the theological concepts defined as liberation theology, which to some degree was initially a Latin American Catholic phenomenon, might be manifested within other world faith traditions. The book's modest focus will be on elucidating how the powerless and disenfranchised of the world look toward their belief systems to articulate a liberationist perspective of hope. The reader will be exposed to liberationist concepts from the perspective of marginalized communities through a survey of different world faith traditions presented by leading religious scholars who are "believers" or participants of the belief system of which they

write. The authors hope that the reader will come to comprehend the ever-growing diversity existing within the liberationist discourse.

The Difficulty of this Project

To seek liberationist perspectives within different faith traditions can lead to the pitfall of essentializing different religions. The authors of these chapters avoided the trap of arguing that all religions are basically the same, with a similar message of liberation. Such a reductionist view is avoided by clearly stating that each religion covered is different, some to which the word "religion" or even "liberation" can prove to be a difficult concept to apply. After all, we must remember that the construct "religion" and "liberation" are Western terms rooted in the Enlightenment that are imposed on the traditions and beliefs of others throughout the world. For this reason, the authors approached their individual faith traditions as insiders attempting to uncover any common ground that might exist. Members of different faith traditions hope to find some mutual vocabulary to counter the gains neoliberalism, as a false religion, is having within our different social contexts. An additional difficulty of a project like this is the vastly different levels of discourse occurring within the faith traditions being discussed. For some traditions, a liberationist discourse has been present for several decades. In others, the concept of looking within one's own faith to emphasize liberationist trends is a recent phenomenon, even though such impulses may have existed for centuries. Yet for others, this will be the first time that a belief system is discussed from a liberationist position. For some of the traditions covered, the discussion may appear more natural, while for others, the conversation may not be as congruent. In a very real sense, this book may be the first conversation concerning liberationist perspectives that cuts across a multitude of faiths. The difficulty of initiating first conversations is that there exists no previous models to follow. This holds true for the editor, as well as several of the chapter authors who are conceptualizing liberationist tenets within their own faith. Nevertheless, if we wish to mine the power and possibilities of people's faiths to serve as responses to the all-inclusive emergence of neoliberalism and the global oppression it produces, then the conversation must start somewhere.

The Hope of Liberation in World Religions is one place where this important conversation can begin to take place. If the reader is

expecting a detailed response to neoliberalism, or a list of praxis that can be employed to combat this global oppressive structure, then she or he will be disappointed. If the reader, however, is seeking to discover if such a liberationist discussion can even occur within different faith traditions, then the book has accomplished its goal. Here we begin the conversation of practicing one's faith, whatever it may be, from the margins of power and privilege—in effect, while in solidarity with the disenfranchised within one's faith and/or social community. The hope is that such an approach to world faith traditions will lead to further conversations and even cooperation in dealing with global oppressive structures.

Special Thanks

1

CATHOLICISM

—Rosemary Radford Ruether

Latin American Liberation Theologies

In this essay I will analyze the development of Catholic-based Latin American liberation theology in the 1970s and 1980s in what I will call its "classical" phase, and then describe the crisis of that stage of liberation theology and the emergence of a new stage of liberation theologies that focus on new constituencies: women, Afro-Latin peoples, and indigenous communities; and new issues, especially ecology. I will then do an in-depth discussion of two Catholic liberation theologians, Ignacio Ellacuria, a Spanish Jesuit martyred in El Salvador in 1989, and the leading Latin American feminist theologian, Brazilian Ivone Gebara.

Latin American liberation theology emerged in the mid-1960s as a theological response to the crisis of poverty and political oppression happening during that period. The nations of Central and South America had been struggling, especially since World War II, with a multi-factoral crisis: a neocolonial form of industrialization that widened the gap between rich and poor, growing unemployment in festering urban slums, aggravated by expanding population, growing inflation, and staggering national debt.

In the 1950s the approved international answer to these trends was "development." Advanced industrial countries, Western Europe and the United States, must provide aid through public and private sources to help "underdeveloped" countries achieve the buildup of capital for

industrialization. The assumption behind this approach was that the United States and Western Europe provided the models for the normative pattern of modernization and industrialization. Other countries of the "Third" or formerly colonized worlds of Latin America, Asia, and Africa could be judged by how far along the road they were moving toward realizing this same model.

In the 1960s some Latin American economists began to dissent from this model. They argued that Latin America was not suffering from "underdevelopment" but from mis-development. Latin Americans were not slumbering for four centuries while Yankees were hard at work pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Rather Latin American poverty is the underside of a process by which wealthy industrialized countries built up their capital base through the extraction of resources through the low-paid or slave labor of colonized regions. The gold and silver that financed European and North American capitalism was extracted from the mines of Mexico and Peru by slave labor, shipped by galleons to Spain, stolen by English pirates, and deposited in banks in Amsterdam and London to be used by merchants in these countries to finance trade and industry.

Beginning with the colonization of Central and Latin America in the sixteenth century with the gold mines, the slave trade, and the exchange of commodities such as sugar from Latin American plantations for manufactured goods from Europe, there began a history, continuing in new stages to the present, that shaped the relationship of industrialized and colonized regions of the world into patterns of exploitation and dependency. To put it succinctly, Latin America is poor because it was and is so rich: rich in metals, minerals, temperate climates, and fertile land. Its wealth has been extracted through the labor of slaves and low-paid workers by colonizing powers that used this wealth to finance the industrialization of Europe and North America, leaving Central and Latin America and the Caribbean stripped and depleted.[1]

To these critical economists of the 1960s and 1970s, it became apparent that more "development" coming from these same colonizing centers of power only increased the structural dependency of Latin America and the impoverishment of the majority of its people. The public and private agents of North American and European corporations and banks planning this type of industrialization were not concerned with an integral development to meet the needs of the masses of Latin American people. Rather they went about the business of using the resources and labor of Latin America cheaply to

make money for the wealthy of the North. Sociologists and econo-mists critical of this pattern of dependent "development" began to speak of "liberation."

By liberation they meant revolutionary changes in the political dependency of Latin American nations on the elites of the North. This meant nationalizing the ownership of the resources of Latin America, taking them from foreign ownership or control, and creating a new plan of integral development to meet the needs of the Latin American masses, starting with their basic need for affordable food and housing, health services and education, and better-paid jobs. This would be a development from the bottom up, not a colonizing development that enriched the North and a small Latin American elite. It was assumed that some form of democratic socialism, not American or European style capitalism, was needed to make this liberating change in the development of Latin America.

In the 1960s a model for this alternative style of development was the new revolutionary regime in Cuba. Cuba, many felt, was moving down the path of decolonization and socialism which other Latin American peoples should follow. The martyred Che Guevara was the embodiment of the romantic type of guerrilla fighter that would carry the Cuban revolution to other Latin American countries. This symbol, for some, was joined by a second, that of Camilo Tor-res, the martyred priest guerrilla of Colombia. When I visited Bogotá in 1970 it was common to see cars sporting the silhouettes of these two figures, Che and Camilo, as new heroes, even new Christs, for many Colombians.

The United States responded to these events with the Alliance for Progress. The goal of the Kennedy administration was to show that capitalist development could solve the problems of poverty better than the Cuban socialist way. But this was matched by efforts to invade Cuba and overthrow its new government, or, failing that, to choke it to death economically through international embargo. The more idealis-tic plans of the Alliance for Progress were pushed aside for a primary focus on counterinsurgency military aid. Police, military hardware, and the training in its use (including torture) shaped new military forces in Latin American societies whose purpose was primarily the repression of internal dissent.

Beginning in 1964 with the Brazilian coup, a new kind of military regime emerged in Latin America. This "national security state" might be described as a kind of colonial fascism, dependent on foreign aid

from neocolonial centers of power, which acts as a conduit for economic exploitation on behalf of the interests of these outside powers. Latin American national security states in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia in the 1960s–1980s dismantled the organs of civil society. Opposition parties, labor unions, student organizations, peasant unions, open universities, and a free press were repressed to create a totalitarian society, subjugated to the military junta ruling through the army and secret police. Many of the leaders of these national security states were graduates of the U.S.-sponsored School of the Americas and dependent on U.S. funding. The ideology of these national security states focused on prevention of "communist subversion," often seeing themselves as defending "Christian civilization." Both the ideology and the techniques of repression of dissent were taught at the School of the Americas. Vietnam served as the laboratory for methods of total warfare against insurgent domestic populations exported by the United States to Latin America.

As the new military juntas destroyed opposition civil society and created terrorist regimes, with secret police, torture chambers, hidden camps of political prisoners, and hit lists of enemies to be eliminated, the Catholic Church came to play an important new role. Increasingly it became the surrogate for civil society. As the only autonomous institution left, apart from the government, the Catholic Church was the only place where some protest could be mounted, meetings held, some semblance of independent communication maintained, even if only through handbills tacked to church doors or church-funded radio stations periodically jammed by the government.

Sermons by critical bishops, such as Helder Camera of Brazil or Oscar Romero of El Salvador, were passed hand to hand or eagerly listened to on the radio. Committees of Solidarity, such as the one formed in Chile after the U.S.-sponsored coup in 1973, both fed the poor and protested disappearances of activists and violations of civil rights. Bishops who were moderates became radicalized when their priests, religious, and lay catechists were tortured and killed. In 1976 an entire gathering of bishops in Riobamba, Ecuador, was arrested and imprisoned for three days. Thousands of nuns and priests were among the tens of thousands of disappeared persons or those whose bodies later showed up with torture marks to terrorize the population. A church which made even small gestures of solidarity with the poor found it quickly lost any invulnerability it had imagined it enjoyed and became a church of martyrs.

In the mid-1960s some theologians, most particularly Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru, began to formulate a liberation theology, rooted in the prophetic tradition of the Bible and contemporary social analysis, communicating this vision to progressive networks of pastoral leaders throughout Latin America. His classical formulation of liberation theology, entitled *Teología de Liberación: Perspectivas*, would appear in 1971.

In 1968 the newly organized Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) met for its first major gathering in Medellin, Colombia (after an initial organizational meeting in 1955). The attendance of bishops was small and there was little popular consultation in advance. The theologian advisers were heavily weighted toward those who were emerging as the theologians of liberation, including Gustavo Gutiérrez. Helder Camera of Brazil proved the leading influence among the bishops. The document that emerged committed the church to the cause of the poor, condemned the "international imperialism of money," named violence as the institutionalized violence of poverty and state repression, and pledged the help of the church to build a new economic order freed from dependency.

These themes gave legitimacy to the liberation perspective through the blessings of the Latin American hierarchy. The views of these liberationist theologians were quickly carried into a more radical practice by groups of young priests and pastoral leaders, such as the Golconda movement in Colombia and Christians for Socialism in Chile. Some bishops were astonished by the document of Medellin signed in their name. While an official statement of CELAM, many traditional Catholics saw it as the work of a radical leftist group. These more conservative leaders began to organize to take the leadership of CELAM out of the hands of the liberationists.

In 1972 Monsignor Lopez Trujillo of Bogotá, Colombia, was elected secretary for CELAM, claiming to represent the more "centrist" bishops. Lopez Trujillo began organizing the conservatives who opposed the liberation theologians and popular church. He began planning for the next CELAM meeting, to be held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1978, to effectively reverse the perspectives of Medellin. This effort had only partial success. Although liberation theologians were eliminated from shaping the preparatory document for Puebla and as delegates or advisers, there was a large turnout of liberation theologians for auxiliary meetings around the official gathering. A feminist group, Women for Dialogue, also came and held its meetings. Progressive

ideas found their way into the official meeting. As a result the final document reaffirmed most of the commitments of Medellin, but now with a broader consensus.

Increasing pressure, however, came from conservative forces in the church to marginalize liberation theologians. The Vatican also, under the pontificate of John Paul II (1980–2004) and the leadership of the head of the Holy Office for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), expressed disapproval and warnings against liberation theology.[2] John Paul II consistently appointed conservative bishops to replace former progressive ones. For example, with the retirement of Helder Camera in Recife, Brazil, he was succeeded by a highly conservative bishop who closed down the seminary that prepared priests in the diocese. This seminary trained the priests through immersion in the lives of the poor people in the region. The progressive faculty, including Ivone Gebara, lost their positions as teachers and were scattered. Leading theologians were hounded by the Vatican with prohibitions and silencing; Leonardo Boff, for example, was denounced particularly because of his books celebrating the popular church. Under this pressure Boff opted to resign from the priesthood and become a lay theological writer.[3]

From 1980 on, a certain maturing and consolidation of liberation theology took place, culminating in the magisterial collection of the major thinkers of liberation theology, *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de Liberación*, which was being edited by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría in El Salvador but, due to the assassination of Ellacuría in 1989, actually appeared in 1990. This collection can be said to represent the classic period of liberation theology. Although four women appear in its pages, Ana María Tepedino, Margarida Ribeiro Brandão, Ivone Gebara, and María Clara Bingemer, they are confined to the "feminine" topics of "Women and the Theology of Liberation" and "Mary." A more explicit feminist theology, as well as the voices of African-Latinos and indigenous people and the issue of ecology, are absent. Protestants, although a part of liberation theology from the 1960s, were not asked to contribute.[4]

The period of 1989–1991 saw crises and transition in Latin American liberation theology. Some of the major writers were dead (Ignacio Ellacuría) or marginalized from the church (Leonardo Boff), although pioneers such as Gustavo Gutiérrez continued to write. For many the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States, with its neoliberal hegemonic order, as the world's sole

superpower, was seen as the end of revolutionary options throughout the world. Liberation theology was claimed to be "dead," superseded by events in which revolutionary socialism was no longer a serious option. In the words of Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Great Britain, "there is no alternative" to the capitalist system. North American and European theological schools generally ceased to read Latin American theology, and its translation into English decreased greatly.

But this announcement of the demise of liberation theology is both parochial and questionable. With the violence, poverty, and oppression continuing and worsening in the world, the need for the liberating voice has not disappeared; rather liberation theology needs to be and has been restated for the new situation on a more global level.[5] At the same time, a whole generation of new voices began to appear in Latin American theology, from indigenous, Afro-Latin, and feminist perspectives. Latin American feminist and ecofeminist perspectives have continued to expand from 1990 to today (2008). Thus we should speak, rather, of different stages of liberation theology, one from 1968 to 1990, and a second stage from 1990 to today. In this essay, I will analyze two key Catholic writers from these two stages, Ignacio Ellacuría, who can be regarded as the culmination and most profound exponent of the "classic" stage of liberation theology, whose thought has hardly begun to be adequately appreciated, and Ivone Gebara, the most creative Latin American theologian writing from an ecofeminist perspective.

Ignacio Ellacuría

Ignacio Ellacuría was born in the Basque town of Portugalete, Bilbao, Spain, on November 9, 1930. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1947 at the age of sixteen and was sent to El Salvador in 1949. Ellacuría studied in El Salvador and in Ecuador. He also became an El Salvadorian citizen. He was ordained a priest in 1961 and studied with the famous Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner from 1958 to 1962. From 1962 he also studied philosophy with the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri and became his close friend and collaborator. In El Salvador, Ellacuría led the drive for the Jesuits to commit themselves to the promotion of justice as the defining characteristic of their mission. Appointed rector of the Jesuit-founded Central American University in 1979, he committed himself to shaping the university as an institution that supported transformative and liberating practice for the national society.

Under increasing threats from the right-wing government in the 1970s and 1980s Ellacuría had to leave El Salvador several times but continued to return and to commit himself to the work of negotiating a settlement to the civil war that raged in the country, a war heavily funded by the United States. The first priest to be assassinated by the government was Rutilio Grande in 1977. This assassination also transformed the newly elected archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero. Previously known as a conservative, Romero became a prophetic and outspoken voice for justice. He was assassinated in 1980. Ellacuría was deeply affected by his close friendship with Romero. From October 21 to November 13, 1989, Ellacuría traveled and lectured in Europe. Although many feared for his life, he decided to return to El Salvador in November, hoping to be able to play a positive role in negotiating an end to the civil war between the government and the insurgent FMLN (Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front). But instead the military leaders decided to kill him and other leading Jesuit intellectuals whom they saw as advisers to the insurrectionary forces.

In the early morning hours of November 16, 1989, the Atlacatl battalion was sent to the Jesuit residence at the university where they assassinated six resident Jesuits, including Ellacuría, and their housekeeper and her daughter. Ellacuría and other Jesuits were shot in the head in such a way as to spill their brains on the ground, thus intentionally signaling the desire of the military to destroy their role as promoters of critical knowledge for the country. The murders shocked the world and forced the United States to withdraw some of their aid and to press for token punishment of the perpetrators of the massacre. Peace accords ending the civil war were finally signed in January 1992 and the FMLN incorporated as a legal political party. Thus Ellacuría's murder hastened the end of the civil war, but not in the way he had hoped.[6]

Ellacuría was a philosopher of liberation, as well as a theologian of liberation, seeing his theology as deeply grounded in the Zubirian analysis of reality. Zubiri's philosophy is a radical critique of the Western intellectual traditions of idealism that separated intellect from sensation, turning knowledge into abstract logic and viewing reality as static "objects." For Zubiri and Ellacuría, sensation and intellect are united in one faculty, the sentient intellect. The human is always both experiencing reality through sensation and at the same time recognizing this reality as independent of oneself. This concept of the sentient intellect overcomes the false problem of Western epistemology

of bridging the gap between intellectual "ideas" and reality. Unlike animals, humans do not have a set of automatic responses to stimuli, but options for choice. This forms the basis of human freedom. Their choices also interact with reality and reshape it as new realities which are then passed on as the historical context for new human choices. Thus human sentient intellect is always historically located. It results from past human praxis (action shaping reality) that has already shaped reality and thus becomes the context for new praxis.

These choices in shaping reality are not random, but they have a purposeful direction, to improve human chances of survival. Since humans depend for their survival both on the animal and plant world and on an interdependent human community, action to improve chances of survival always happens in the context of community. Zubiri assumes a certain trajectory of expanding praxis to reshape reality that includes physical needs and also increasingly encompasses personal liberation. A gradual liberation of more developed human capacities occurs. Physical and biological needs are not left behind but are incorporated into more developed cultural forces. Human praxis thus becomes the driving force of increasingly transformed reality moving in the direction of enhanced freedom for a widening community.

Drawing on Zubiri, Ellacuría deduced from this view that an understanding of human historical praxis aims ultimately at the liberation of all humanity. The oppressed, marginalized, and impoverished humans play a key role of "signs of the times," as they indicate where humanity is in this progress toward liberation. Those who lack basic physical needs are those denied the basis for becoming fully human. It is the duty of those whose basic needs are met and who have the privilege of wider areas of freedom to dedicate themselves to those who are impoverished to create a society where more and more people are freed from basic wants and can become more fully human. The struggles of the oppressed for liberation and the solidarity of the more privileged in aiding their struggle are the leading edge of history's progress toward greater humanization of reality. This also saves the privileged from a false life of self-service at the expense of others.[7]

Ellacuría does not explain the contrary tendency of humanity to act to ensure their survival at the expense of and even through impoverishing or killing others. This negative tendency is assumed to be contrary to the authentic direction of human liberation, but it would take Ellacuría's more theological reflections, on sin and the Kingdom of Sin, to grapple with this question.

Thus the understanding of reality as historical provides the basis for his philosophy. Translated into his theology this means one cannot understand the basic terms of the Christian faith without situating these historically. This key to understanding Christian faith has been distorted and largely lost through the influence of Platonic idealism on Christian theology which systematically dehistoricized the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ, the cross and the resurrection, sin and salvation. To regain a true understanding of Christian faith, one must recover its historicity, its meaning both in history and as history (Ellacuría, 2001b:597–601). Thus for Ellacuría the critical question for understanding Jesus' death, and hence also the meaning of the cross and the resurrection, is not "why did he die, but *why did they kill him*." The question "why did he die" has lent itself to a Platonic abstraction in which Jesus' death is taken as a transaction between God and the sinful human, being apart from any historical context. The human, defined as sinful or alienated from God as a generic ahistorical state of "fallenness," is thus restored to a relation with God through Jesus' death which "pays for our sins." Thus the question about the meaning of Jesus' death is answered by saying, "He died to save us from our sins," without historical context or content.

The question "why did they kill him," propels us into an entirely different way of understanding this death in its historical context. Jesus did not simply "die" as a premature expression of human finitude or as a sacrificial transaction between God and fallen humans in general. Rather he was executed in an excruciatingly painful way by particular historical actors, namely, by the Roman governor of Palestine on behalf of its occupying empire, with the collaboration of Jewish religious leaders. "Why did they kill him?" Because Jesus as a historical person chose to live in a certain way, as a prophetic denouncer of the oppression of the poor and marginalized, and an announcer of the good news of liberation to these oppressed people. Thus Jesus was executed because his denunciation of injustice and annunciation of good news to the poor threatened the security of the power of those in control. As primary and secondary beneficiaries of Roman power, they enjoyed wealth and ease at the expense of others who were impoverished and oppressed by this same power. Moreover they executed him in a particular way, by hanging him on a cross to die publicly in an excruciating way, in order to terrorize and silence others who might wish to continue his liberating praxis. Thus only by rediscovering the historical context and meaning of his

life does one realize the meaning of his death on the cross (Ellacuría, 2001e:33–66).

Moreover for Ellacuría, the purpose of Jesus' mission was not to die or even less to "get himself killed." Jesus' mission is distorted and made incomprehensible when Christians speak of Christ as "coming to suffer and die," as though suffering and dying were the purpose of his life. Rather the purpose of Jesus' life mission is manifest in his own announcement in his home synagogue in Nazareth, that God "has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Good news to the poor means that their unjust oppression is to be overcome. The captives are to be released, the oppressed set free. But this good news to the poor depends on those who oppress and hold the poor captive also heeding and responding to the good news. The privileged must repent and choose to stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, thus creating a wider change in the conditions of unjust power and oppression.

For Ellacuría, wealth and poverty are not just accidents of nature, or tributes to the virtue of the wealthy who "work hard," and to the vice of the poor who are "lazy," as U.S. American ideology has it. On the contrary, wealth and poverty are dialectically interconnected. The poor are excessively impoverished, lacking basic necessities and living in misery, because a few have become excessively wealthy by exploiting them. Thus the system which both impoverishes the many and enriches the few must be changed as a whole; a new relation must be established which gives all their basic necessities and works to humanize all people (Ellacuría, 2001d:141–42).

Thus the crucified Christ represents not simply one who has died (as all finite beings die) but one who has been executed by those who refuse his message, by those who are determined to continue a system of unjust power and wealth that benefits themselves by impoverishing and oppressing the majority of others. This means that those who are impoverished and oppressed today are the continuation of the crucifixion of Christ. Their misery represents the continuation of the same will to refuse the message of repentance and liberation which crucified Christ and continues to crucify the masses of people today. The crucified poor of history are the "Servants of God," who testify by their misery to that same contrary will to God's liberating message which crucified Christ. God in Christ continues to call us to repent and to join in solidarity with the poor to complete the liberation of humanity (Ellacuría, 2001f:137–70).[8]

For Ellacuría this insistence that the poor are the continuation of the presence of the crucified Christ in our midst does not romanticize the poor or sanctify them as "saints." Rather it expresses the historical meaning of their misery, rooted in the same forces of evil that crucified Christ and which continue to crucify the poor today. The task of those who make a preferential option for the poor is not to idealize the suffering of the poor, but to end this suffering, to take the crucified down from the cross and to create a new human society where there are no more oppressors or oppressed.

For Ellacuría this new world of justice, the positive side of the announcement of the "good news to the poor," is the Kingdom of God, the utopian hope which appears as the ongoing edge of human praxis for justice. The Reign of God is the fulfillment of human history when the ongoing praxis of justice reaches its completion. It is a completion that transcends history and yet is always and only happening in and as history.[9] For Ellacuría there is no abstract ahistorical "salvation" that happens as a reconciliation of God and sinful humans, and that takes place in the "soul" removed from real historical choices and actions. Rather salvation means real decisions by real people to "repent" of unjust power or to transform passive acceptance of injustice into a real struggle to overcome evil.

This repentance has both personal and structural aspects. Personally repentance means choices to commit one's own life to justice against unjust social realities. Structurally it implies real practices to change systems that impoverish some to enrich others, and to create new social relations that more justly give the means of life to all. Although the Christian announcement of "good news to the poor" points to the endlessly expanding hopes for fuller realization, nevertheless, any particular actions to make society more just must be practical and efficacious. For Ellacuría it does no good to envision and announce a distant paradise, while doing nothing that actually improves life for the poor in real and efficacious ways today. Thus for Ellacuría the Kingdom of God is both a symbol for the completion of all hopes and a demand for practical steps for realizing some real hopes today.

The opposite of the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Sin. It too can be seen as both personal and structural. It is made up of a system of legal, social, and economic patterns that gives unjust wealth and power to the few by impoverishing the many. This system also created ideologies that justify this injustice (by, for example, claiming that

the poor are racially inferior and thus incapable of intelligent action). It continually reproduces these patterns, by conditioning people to accept them as normal, natural, and the will of God. It mobilizes various forms of power, ultimately violent power, to repress any dissent to this system. This was the situation in El Salvador in which the rich who benefited from an unjust society used the military to torture and murder all who questioned their power. Thus the Kingdom of Sin is perpetuated not only by means of socialization, but by continual personal decisions on the part of oppressors to ally themselves with it and to act to defend it, and by its victims when they passively accept it (Ellacuría, 2001c:455).

The Church of Christ, for Ellacuría, is not the Kingdom of God, but rather the community that carries the memory of the crucified Christ and that opts for the Kingdom of God by aligning itself with the crucified poor. The church is the community of the disciples or followers of Christ who continue in history his mission of announcing good news to the poor, the liberation of the captives, and denouncing the forces of injustice that perpetuate misery and oppression. In other words, they take up the risk of the cross; they risk the counterattack of those who wish to silence the prophets and to maintain the unjust system. For Ellacuría, this means that the church does not simply carry out an abstract and generalized discourse about sin and salvation. Rather it acts to denounce injustice and to encourage repentance and transformation in concrete situations. It stands in solidarity with the poor and awakens them to struggle for the creation of a more just society.

Thus the truth of the church is judged not by its theoretical discourse, but by its actions that shape history toward liberation. Only through such actions can it be said to be the "sacrament of salvation," the place where liberating action is happening. This of course does not mean that it is the only place where such action is happening, but rather that it is consciously aware of the theological implication of liberating actions and promotes such actions as its central mission (Ellacuría, 2001c:455).

But this also means that the church can become false to its own mission. It can turn its message into empty abstractions that lose the historical meaning of sin and salvation. It can ally itself with the powerful and turn the gospel into a justification of the unjust system as a representation of God's will, seeking to pacify the poor. It can become the "opium of the people." Thus the church becomes a tool of the Kingdom of Sin. Ellacuría concretely faces the troubling reality that

for much of its history, particularly as auxiliaries to the colonization of Latin America by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church has been a tool of oppression, not of liberation.

Nevertheless, Ellacuría is clear that the authentic nature and mission of the church is to be the place where the good news is both announced and acted upon. This means that the church must be in a process of continual repentance, to separate itself from its cooptation by the dominant powers of oppression and to become a liberating community of good news to the poor, even at the risk of the lives of its own leaders. This was the witness of the life and death of Bishop Oscar Romero, one who repented of his previous collaboration with an unjust society, who became a prophetic voice for the poor, and who gave his life in their service.

For North Americans this raises the question of violence and Ellacuría's support for the armed violence of the FMLN guerrillas. North American news media continued to claim after his death that he supported armed violence (Whitfield, 1994:221–22),[10] and, of course, the El Salvadorian elite did too. This is a falsification of Ellacuría's position on armed violence. It also reflects the assumption that violence is bad only if it comes from opposition forces that are seeking to change the system, but it is fine when military violence is used to support the dominant powers. That the United States was the chief funder of such state violence makes such a critique especially hypocritical. Ellacuría, like other liberation theologians, saw armed violence on behalf of changing a violent, unjust system as the recourse of last resort. In this they simply followed the traditional Catholic teaching on just war. Although praxis to create a more just society is basic to human life and the call of every Christian, one should seek to do this by legal nonviolent means, where possible. When a highly unjust society, however, suppresses all legal means for reform and resorts to oppressive violence to prevent needed changes, it may become necessary to resort to armed revolution to overthrow entrenched unjust power and to create a new political system for building a more just society (Ellacuría, 2001h:454–81). This, of course, is exactly what U.S. Americans did in their own revolution, which they justified in their Declaration of Independence.

But revolution in itself does not create a just society, and indeed always brings evils with it. Only when it can lessen existing violence and create the conditions for reestablishing a political system in which a more just society can be built, can it be justified. Ellacuría, far from

being an enthusiast for the armed violence of the civil war in El Salvador, expended the last years of his life seeking a negotiated peace between the government and the FMLN which would end the violence and allow a more just society to be built through legal participation of the forces for change. This finally happened with the peace treaty of 1992.

In some of the writings at the end of his life, Ellacuría sought to sketch the new society to which the poor countries of the world, such as El Salvador, should aspire. This should not be the sort of consumer society promoted by U.S. and European capitalism, a society which could only be enjoyed by the rich at the expense of the vast majority of humans who are thereby impoverished. The false ideal of human life promoted by capitalist affluence of the rich at the expense of the majority is one of individualism, lack of solidarity with others, ethnocentrism and racism, the idolatry of the nation-state, and the exploitation of others. The mission of the church is to convert humanity from this "old man" of capitalist sinfulness.

The new humanity to which Christianity and authentic humanity must aspire Ellacuría called a "civilization of poverty" (*civilización de pobreza*). By this Ellacuría did not mean a pauperization of humanity, but rather what more traditionally has been called "simple living." Economically this means societies in which the basic necessities are met for all members, for food, housing, health, education, and work with dignity. In this society the social should predominate over the political, building communitarian relations which overcome excessive inequalities. Such societies are neither that of capitalism individualist consumerism nor of Marxist collectivism, but forms of democratic socialism that build solidarity and mutual help. Politically these would be societies freed from all forms of international imperialism and dependency, and in control of their own resources.

These societies would also cultivate popular culture, and they would be both more contemplative and more communicative. The new humanity of such societies would be one that cultivated relations of love and solidarity with others, with special concern for those still left out or marginalized. While Ellacuría did not expect such societies to appear in perfected form in history, they should become the social ideal, the ideal toward which societies should aspire and seek to build by continual practical steps (Ellacuría, 2001g:264–89).[11] Far from being "obsolete," such hopes for an alternative society are ones that need to inspire us all the more in the twenty-first century.

Ivone Gebara

Ivone Gebara, a Brazilian feminist theologian, was born in 1944 in Sao Paulo to immigrant parents from Syria and Lebanon. Her parents entertained the typical hopes of immigrant parents for marriages to successful men of their own ethnic backgrounds for their three daughters. But Gebara was attracted to study and repelled by these social hopes of her parents. At the age of twenty-two, having graduated from the University of Sao Paulo in philosophy, Gebara decided to join the religious order of Notre Dame, Canoneses of St. Augustine. Gebara joined this order seeking liberation from the demands of her family and a place where she could cultivate her desires for study and for work for social justice. But she was also deeply affected by the strong opposition of her parents to this decision. Thus early she experienced her own desires for liberation set in conflict with those she loved (Gebara, 2005:41–70).

In the 1970s Gebara studied philosophy and religious studies at Louvain University in Belgium, receiving a Ph.D. She taught for sixteen years in the Theological Institute in Recife, Brazil, which prepared pastoral leaders through a liberation methodology that required immersion in the daily life of the poor. In the eighties Gebara began to read feminist theory and theology of Europe and North America, overcoming the claims of her male colleagues that feminist thought was irrelevant for Latin Americans. She increasingly realized that feminism did not simply add an additional oppressed subject to liberation theology, but challenged the whole paradigm of classical Christian theology based on hierarchical dualisms of mind over body, spirit over matter, identified with male over female. Her male colleagues, who had accepted her when she taught from male books and with a male approach to theology, became uncomfortable with her as she began to ask these radically new questions (Gebara, 2005:133–64; 2000b:78–81).

In 1990 when the progressive bishop, Helder Camera, who sponsored the Theological Institute in Recife, retired, the new conservative bishop closed the institute and fired its faculty. Gebara lost this regular employment, but also realized that her ability to work in this setting had come to an end. She took up residence in a slum neighborhood in Camaragible in northern Brazil, working with poor women and children. At the same time she also began to travel for lectures and short courses to the United States, Canada, and Europe. In 1994 she fell into a conflict with the Brazilian hierarchy and the Vatican, after

an interview was published in the popular magazine *VEJA* in which she supported the legalization of abortion based on her experience of the sufferings of poor women with many pregnancies that they could not afford. While not directly approving abortion, she suggested that it could be a lesser of evils in such hardship cases. The church, she believed, should be more tolerant of the needs of poor women in such cases. After numerous meetings with the president of the Brazilian conference of bishops, Dom Luciana Mendes de Almeida, declared that the case was closed, but the Vatican insisted that Gebara's writings should be reviewed for possible heterodoxy.

On June 3, 1995, Gebara was instructed to refrain from speaking, teaching, and writing for two years and to go to Europe for "reeducation" in Catholic teaching. She returned to her old university of Louvain where she did a second Ph.D. in theology, while beginning to write a book on the nature of evil from a woman's perspective (written originally in French as *Le mal au feminin*, 1999).[12] In 1997 Gebara began to work more closely with the ecofeminist network based in Chile, Conspirando, helping to organize several theological workshops on ecofeminist thought in Santiago, Chile, Recife, Brazil, and Washington, D.C. She continues to work closely with this group and to shape her own ecofeminist theological reflection in books and articles.

In an interview in 1993 Gebara traced the development of feminist theology in Latin America in the previous twenty years (1993:9–11). In the 1970s Latin American women, stimulated by the secular women's movement in Latin America and the translation of feminist theology from Europe and the United States, began to recognize that "we are oppressed as historical subjects. We discovered our oppression in the Bible, in theology, in our churches." The first stage of response to the feminist challenge was to search for positive female role models in the Bible: prophetesses and matriarchs, and female disciples of Jesus, such as Mary Magdalene.

The second stage of feminist theology turned to the "feminization of theological concepts. We began to discover the submerged feminine expressions for God in the Bible. We discovered God's maternal face in texts, such as Isaiah 49." This period also saw an expansion of women's roles in teaching and ministry as academics, catechists, and leaders of base Christian communities. Male liberation theologians began to include a few women in their conferences and publications to give the "women's perspective." For Gebara, both of these stages of feminist theology were still what she calls "patriarchal feminism."

Such feminism did not challenge the hierarchical paradigm of human-ity, the cosmos, and God, but simply added women to it. Women were thought of as having distinct, perhaps even superior, moral insights and ways of being, compared to men. So it was good to add the "femi-nine dimension" to theology and pastoral life.

Gebara sees herself and some others as pioneering a third and more radical stage in feminist theology. She sees herself, not simply as adding the women's perspective, but as dismantling the founda-tional patriarchal paradigm that has shaped the interpretation of all relationships, of humans to each other, to nature, and to God. All the hierarchical dualisms that have shaped cosmology, epistemology, and ethics need to be overcome. One should start from the plurality of human experiences, specifically women's experiences, rather than a fixed set of hierarchical dualisms that divide God and creation as spirit over matter, male over female.

Gebara sees all theologies, including feminist theologies, as aris-ing from distinct contexts and needing to own these contexts, speak-ing both within and yet not limited to their particularities. Theology serves a need to dismantle the false universalities of white male West-ern elites, and yet it also points from each of our particular contexts to what connects us all, as humans who are earth creatures and members of one cosmos. She speaks as a privileged Brazilian woman who is white, educated, and middle-class, but one who has chosen to identify with the poorest Brazilians of the Northeast who are mostly mixtures of blacks, whites, and indigenous.

Her commitment to this poor community reflects the liberation theology's preferential option for the poor, but now in a new era when much of the utopian confidence of the 1980s has been lost. Today one is often overwhelmed with the sheer pervasiveness of systemic and particular evils. By contrast, goodness often seems very occa-sional and fragile. Moved by these daily experiences of evil, Gebara even speaks of the "immanence and transcendence of evil" and won-ders if this is what the theologians traditionally called "original sin" (2000b:81–86).

The northeast of Brazil where Gebara has chosen to live and work is a region of violent contrasts of wealth and poverty shaped by cen-turies of colonialism and now by capitalism. There are the few with great power, while the majority are powerless; the few with vast land-holding and wealth, the many poor and landless. Gebara speaks of her context of doing theology as one of "noise and garbage," quite the

opposite of the realm of monastic or ivory tower solitude and quiet that has been the traditional place for Christians to cultivate spirituality and theological reflection.

The noise of her neighborhood is both the noise pollution of a dysfunctional modern industrialism, such as cars and trucks without mufflers, and the noisy responses of the poor who dwell in this area, the loud radios and quarreling voices of those living in crowded conditions. The garbage is the waste discarded by the poor who lack proper sanitation. To live one's spirituality and to do one's theology amidst noise and garbage is to do them in the midst of oppression and violence, but also in the midst of the vitality of the poor who manage to survive and even to celebrate in it and despite it (Gebara, 1994:109–18).

For Gebara, women are coming to theological voice at a unique time when history is irrupting in their lives and they are becoming aware of being historical agents. It is also a time when the historical systems of domination built by humans over millennia, both in the church and in society, with their religious and philosophical justifications, are coming apart and revealing themselves as unjust and destructive. Women theologians must dare to see through the successive layers of distortion that justify this oppressive system in our theologies and sciences and to reflect critically on our inherited symbols in the context of our real questions from our everyday experiences. Christian women must overcome the timidity and feelings of guilt in which they have been socialized by patriarchal culture. They must dare to approach these venerable theological constructs, with their claims to infallible authority, and to rethink them from the context of daily life, from "*lo cotidiano*" (2000b:106–7).[13]

For Gebara, daring to ask questions of the great theological dogmas, using women's daily experience, means a radical reinterpretation of such dogmas. We need to dare to ask, "what human experiences do these dogmas actually represent and encode?" In one way Gebara seems to follow the Feuerbachian view that theology is anthropology; that it is a human construct, a projection on the heavens of our human relations and hopes. But, for Gebara, these relations go beyond the human; they include our relations with nature, with plants and animals, air, water, and earth, and with the cosmos as a total context for all relations. It is the human experience of all these relations that is the basis of the construction of theology. There is no God "out there" revealing "his nature" and "his plan" to us. We ourselves, as the thinking part of the universe, are imagining and creating systems of interpretation.

It is not that there is no reality out there larger than ourselves. For Gebara, God is that which sustains all of life and is the source of our ever renewed hopes in the midst of disappointment. This is a reality, however, in and through life, not a spiritual "ego" outside of reality and contrary to the body. And it is always we as humans who are interpreting this reality which sustains our life and hope.[14]

We need to deconstruct our traditions when these have validated violent power of some over others and reconstruct them in ways that can be more mutually life-giving. Gebara has particularly focused on the Trinity in her work of deconstructing and reconstructing Christian symbols (1999:137–71).[15] For Gebara the Trinity is not a distant separate deity with three persons living outside the cosmos and controlling the cosmos from above. Rather the Trinity is a symbolic expression of the basic dynamic of life itself as a process of vital interrelational creativity. Life as interrelational creativity exists on every level of reality. As cosmos it reveals itself as the whole process of cosmic unfolding and interrelating of planets and galaxies. As earth it shows itself as the dynamic interrelational process of life unfolding in the biosphere.[16]

Each species ramifies into many differences, including human beings with their many races and cultures. We must overcome the tendencies to set up one kind of difference as the universal and best and make all the others inferior. Rather we need to celebrate all of this diversity of human plurality of race and culture, affirming their mutuality with each other in one human earth community. Interpersonal society and each person herself exists in a dynamic of creativity, plurality, and interdependency, of diversity and communion. This dynamic of life in vital interrelationality is the meaning of goodness and beauty. But, for Gebara, this also raises the question of evil. What are the roots of evil and how is it reproduced?

For Gebara, the nature of the life process is intrinsically limited and fragile. Life is reproduced in a process of both pain and joy, of birth and death and new birth (1995b:39–52; 71–88). Evil in the sense of tragedy is a natural part of life and inseparable from it. But humans are also threatened by this tragedy of finitude, these oppositions of diversity, life, and death. In their quest for survival there is an urge to try to secure life permanently against death, to secure power as control to ward off vulnerability and difference by subjugating the "other," making ourselves the dominant side of a relationship. Women, other races, other cultures, and the earth itself are then made into victims

of this urge to control and secure life by one group, who are then able to secure power and uniformity against difference, vulnerability, and death. Women particularly have been victimized because as birth-givers they are imagined to represent the vulnerability of the life process in its threatening power and difference from men.[17]

Out of this urge to control and secure life and power, powerful groups, particularly the elite males of those groups, have arisen to shape systems of domination by which they attempt to secure a monopoly of power over life for themselves. Thereby they reduce women, other racial and ethnic groups, and the earth to subjugation and exploitation. In this way the dynamic interrelationship of differences is distorted into extreme imbalances of power and powerlessness, domination and violation, wealth and poverty (1995b:146–56). We live at a time when this system of distortion has reached a crisis point, threatening to destroy planetary life itself. Such distorted relationships of power and subjugation are the meanings of evil in the sense of sin; i.e., unnatural and destructive evil that humans have constructed but cannot and should not accept as necessary and inevitable. Humans need to struggle to overcome this destructive evil, for the sake of both interhuman justice and the defense of life.

For Gebara, religion plays an ambiguous role in this construction of a system of evil, in the sense of sin. Most religions have justified this urge to control and dominate by the powerful. The idea of a powerful invulnerable patriarchal God reflects this desire of elite men to control life immortally and to escape death. The powerless, on the other hand, create countermyths of great Saviors who will defeat the oppressors by righteous violence and bring about a permanent state of bliss without death. Such messianic countermyths, including the utopias promoted by some spokesmen of liberation theology, tend to reproduce the system of violence.

The Jews produced messianic hopes to counteract the oppression they suffered from the great empires of the Mediterranean world, but they did so in a way that enshrined violence and revenge. Jesus, Gebara believes, was a different kind of prophetic figure who sought to break through this reproduction of the cycle of violence. While taking the side of the victims, he also called the privileged to join with the poor in a community of mutual service and celebration. The dominant system of both political power and religious privilege rejected his message and sought to silence him by killing him. His followers, however, also betrayed him by turning his vision of shared community

into a new warrior Savior myth upon whom a new system of imperial power could be built (Gebara, 1995b:53–70).

For Gebara, feminist theology should reject absolutes of all kinds. Feminist theologians should imagine neither a paradise of the beginning when there was no death or vulnerability, nor a paradise of the future when there will be no more death or vulnerability. We all need to withdraw from these projections and come to terms with the fragile and ambiguous nature of life always mixed with pain and death. Rather than seeking to flee to a future Reign of God freed from all evil, we need to learn to share with each other our fragile good and vulnerable joys and sorrows in a way that is truly mutual. This does not mean accepting the system of oppression as it is; we need to do what we can in our limited ways to dismantle the great systems of domination and exploitation, but not with the illusion that all pain and finitude will thereby disappear. Rather, to lessen unjust imbalances of power is at the same time to accept those limits of life which are always fraught with tragedy, as well as with joy and renewed hope.[18]

We must, as Gebara puts it, "take the side of the serpent" (of Genesis 2), refusing the orders of the patriarchal God that keeps us in a state of childish dependency. We can then recognize that the fragile fruit of the tree of life is indeed lovely and good for discernment. We can eat this fruit with relish, making it a part of our bodies and hearts. This is the real and possible redemption of life on earth. But it is real and possible only when we put aside the impossible redemptions of final conquest of all limits in a realm of immortal life untouched by sorrow, vulnerability, and finitude.

Gebara's theology, written in the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century, appears quite different in style and tone from that of Ignacio Ellacuría, written in the midst of the daily threats of state violence in the civil war of El Salvador in the 1980s. This difference is partly due to new situations in Latin America where poverty and violence are no less threatening, but experienced as more global and faceless. It is partly due to bringing in new dimensions of experience from women's perspectives and from the ecological crisis, both off the map for Ellacuría. Yet with all their differences there are many similarities between them. Ellacuría is not refuted, much less "superseded," by Gebara or Gebara judged by Ellacuría. Both are voices that need to be probed deeply and respectfully in the ongoing quest for a life-giving theology and community.

2

PROTESTANTISM

—Joerg Rieger

Liberation theology is misunderstood if it is seen mostly as a Roman Catholic phenomenon, invented by a select group of Latin American authors in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Crucial for the understanding of any liberation theology is that, unlike most other forms of theology, liberation theologies do not have their beginnings with great ideas developed in the academy or in the mind (or on the desk) of one or the other great theological thinker. Liberation theologies are linked to movements of liberation and to the theological questions that arise out of the struggles of these movements; key questions in these struggles concern how God and the communities of faith relate to the oppressed. Viewing liberation theology from a broader perspective that includes other religions and other Christian denominations will therefore lead to a more appropriate understanding of the phenomenon. In this chapter, we will look at Protestant contributions and developments.

Since liberation theology is related to various liberation movements, the conventional question that asks "who was first" is misleading. In fact, these different liberation theologies emerged at the same time and independently of each other. Even the term "liberation theology" was initially used without direct connection between the various liberation theologies—in other words, theologians did not copy this term from each other but came up with it in their own contexts without being aware that others had come up with the same term in different contexts. The first record of the term "liberation theology" in a publication in the United States can be found in an article published in

1970 by Frederick Herzog, a white Euro-American theologian rooted in the Protestant Reformed traditions and a member of the United Church of Christ. Herzog's work took shape initially in the context of the social tensions of the civil rights movement, focusing on political and economic forms of oppression (1970:515–24). African American liberation theology, resisting oppression along the lines of race, was in the making at the same time. James Cone, an African American theologian in the United States related to the African Methodist Episcopal tradition, hit upon the notion of liberation theology in his own context and began to use the term in his publications.[1] A book on liberation theology by Rosemary Radford Ruether, written in the United States from a feminist Roman Catholic perspective and adding more sustained attention to resisting oppression along the lines of gender in addition to matters of race and class, followed only a short time later.[2] The work of these theologians runs parallel to the work of the Latin American priest and Roman Catholic theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who is commonly but not entirely accurately acknowledged as the "father of liberation theology."[3]

These different strands of liberation theology encountered each other only a few years after their independent beginnings, and not without serious challenges and questions. At their first international meeting in the United States, Latin American theologians challenged feminist and African American theologians in the United States with neglecting matters of economics and class, feminist theologians challenged male liberation theologians with neglecting the important matters of gender, and African American theologians challenged everyone else with neglecting the issues of race.[4]

In sum, liberation theology developed in specific settings, independently but simultaneously, from the bottom up where theologians began to reflect on the suffering and hope of people in poverty, of ethnic minorities, of women, and others, in relation to traditional and newly developing images of God. And even though specific dates can be given, from a theological point of view there is not much use discussing who was "really first." These theologies were not written as accomplishments of individual scholars but in close encounters with severe suffering and pressure in many shapes and forms. If liberation theology did not develop out of one center, as a great idea or a unified theological school that made its way from the top down, it represents a new way of doing theology that is richer and more interesting than much of what otherwise goes on in the field.

The View from the Underside

Modern theology, especially in its Protestant forms, has generated a new openness for the context of theological reflection, beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather than thinking about God in Godself, modern theology self-consciously seeks to explore God in relation to humanity, to the world, to history, and to the major events of the time. Liberation theologies have taken up some of the insights of modern theology but they also differ from this approach since they pay attention not only to the dominant context (as does much of modern theology) but also to its "underside," i.e., the dark sides of the dominant context that are repressed and thus rendered invisible for the most part. When modern theology talks about the concerns of "modern man," for instance, it usually refers to the concerns of middle-class white male citizens of Europe or the United States.[5] The use of inclusive language, replacing the notion of "modern man" with "modern humanity" or other more inclusive references to humanity, does not substantially change this focus but covers it up. In contrast, liberation theologies investigate how God relates to the large parts of humanity on whose backs the success stories of the modern world are built but who are rarely acknowledged by those in power.

Here, new theological questions emerge. How does God relate to those parts of the world which are exploited and subdued? How does God relate not only to dominant history that is recorded in the history books but also to the histories of the excluded, the histories of minorities, of women, of workers, and of people living in poverty? Rather than searching for the correspondence between God and the often rehearsed achievements of modernity, an approach which has usually led to the sanctification of the status quo in one way or another, liberation theologies are concerned about the ruptures and breaks and the forms of sin manifested in them. Without addressing how God differs from the powers that be and without addressing the reality of sin, no real change will take place. Although in this context the most fundamental question is not whether liberation theologies are Protestant or Roman Catholic, and perhaps not even whether they are Christian or non-Christian, the different traditions and religions have contributed their own insights to liberation theology. Even though most of the authors discussed below do not parade their denominational identity as Protestants—often this information is not even given in their publications and the reader has to guess—several

key elements of Protestant Christianity can be observed in different shapes and forms. For instance, these authors share the basic insight of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century that reform is an ongoing process and can never be finished (*ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda est*). Protestant liberation theologians deal with the church and its tradition in a critical and self-critical fashion. This critique of the church often involves an emphasis on the sovereignty of God, who challenges not only the world but also the church. In this spirit, the view from the underside is tied to a new awareness of God as it develops in particular situations of oppression and suffering.

In Latin America, for instance, liberation theologies emerged in close encounters with the reality of widespread unemployment and poverty and with the systemic causes of economic oppression. Theologically, it was understood that those structures of economic injustice which maintain and even enlarge the gap between rich and poor are not just part of a social crisis but are part of a theological crisis as well because they separate us not only from our neighbors but also from God. Together with their Roman Catholic colleagues, Protestant liberation theologians like Rubem Alves in Brazil (a Presbyterian) and José Míguez Bonino in Argentina (a Methodist) came to realize in the late 1960s and early 1970s that large systemic structures of economic injustice cannot be corrected by well-meaning efforts of either charity or economic development; as Protestants, they later went on to develop specific insights into how the Protestant traditions had become part of these overarching problems, exploring how Protestantism might contribute to liberation.[6] More recently, Latin American liberation theologians have developed these initial concerns of Latin American liberation theology further, going beyond the critique of economic dependencies between economies in the North and South (according to which the wealthy economies make use of the poorer economies for their own gain), and pointing out that much of humanity is simply excluded from the gains that the global markets are creating for the rich. Economically, things have gotten worse, not better, for many people in Latin America, and so the task of liberation theology is far from being concluded.

In a completely different setting, African American theologians in the United States realized that long after slavery was abolished their people were still not free. Even well-meaning efforts to become color-blind are no longer an option in a situation where oppression is inextricably related to the color line; neglecting the differences of race

will only make things worse. In this situation, black theology drew, among other things, on the Christian religious traditions of the slaves, such as the spirituals and gospel music, which were tied in their own ways to Protestant expressions of the Christian faith.[7] The renewed struggle against racism continues in different forms all the way into the present, involving increasingly closer attention to resources from African American culture, as for instance in the work of Dwight N. Hopkins (an American Baptist).[8] The various forms of racism are also perceived as a theological problem since, as James Cone has pointed out early on, "Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation," and "any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ's message" (1986:vii).

Feminist theologians, liberation theologians in their own right, have reminded us of the ongoing discrepancy between the place of men and women in church and society. Theology is in crisis, they found, because it has not paid attention to God's walk with half of humanity. Well-meaning efforts to integrate women into the world created by men will not change this situation. One of the pioneers in the Protestant camp, Letty M. Russell (a Presbyterian), points out that for this reason feminist theologians take "the *via negativa* and describe the contradictions of our past and present social, political, economic, and ecclesial experiences." Out of this awareness of contradiction women "live out of a vision of God's intention for a mended creation" (1987:18). Womanist and *mujerista* theologians—women writing from the perspective of African American and Hispanic communities (some prefer the self-classification Latina feminist)—have subsequently developed feminist analysis further, adding the unsettling experiences of close encounters with issues of race and class, since minority women often suffer from various forms of oppression. Mirroring the demographic profile of those communities in the United States, womanist theologians such as Delores Williams (a Presbyterian) tend to be Protestant and the majority of Latina feminist and *mujerista* theologians are Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, there are a number of Protestant Latina feminist theologians as well, including Daisy L. Machado (Disciples of Christ) and Loida I. Martell-Otero (American Baptist).[9]

More recently, Hispanic theologians have zeroed in on issues of identity and culture as areas of oppression and liberation. In the United States, they point out, Hispanic Americans are often marginalized on grounds of different cultural practices and racial difference. The standard North American image of the melting pot leaves no room

for appreciating difference. In response, Hispanic Protestant theologians have stressed the validity of a diverse set of Hispanic experiences and cultures and have shown how these perspectives from the margins contribute to a broader understanding of Christianity, God, and the world, promoting community in diversity. "Reading the Bible in Spanish," a phrase coined by Justo González (a United Methodist), leads to a specific Hispanic Protestant way of engaging life and transforming the powers that be.[10]

African and Asian Protestant theologians, exploring issues that cannot be contained in typical Western perspectives, have broadened the spectrum of liberation theologies further. Choan-Seng Song, for example, a Presbyterian theologian born in Taiwan who is writing and teaching both in the United States and in Asia, has argued that theology is not complete unless it includes an account of God's Spirit at work in the long-suppressed stories of darkness, suffering, and hope told by the people of Asia. Merely translating traditional concepts into new situations without paying attention to God's presence with the common people—most of whom are not Christian in Asia—will no longer do. The liberating power of God will become manifest when the barriers between the sacred and the profane are transcended from the underside of Asian life.[11]

Obviously, Protestant Christian traditions are not monolithic; and when read from the underside, new perspectives on these traditions emerge and they take on new life. The various options of liberation theologies for the margins and the excluded demonstrate the ongoing development of Christian tradition.

God and the Option for the Excluded

All liberation theologies maintain deliberate options for people at the margins. Latin American liberation theologians, for instance, have made famous the idea of a "preferential option for the poor," an option that needs to be made not only by those who are not poor but also by the poor themselves. Unfortunately, it has often been overlooked that this and other preferential options are inextricably related to the theological heritage of the church. Thus, we need to take a closer look at the following questions: What is the basis of such options? What motivates theologians to go against the grain of church and society and opt for those who are commonly overlooked by the powers that be? And, does a preferential option for people at the margins comply

with our commonsense understanding of fairness? Does an option for people at the margins mean that liberation theologies have nothing to say for those who are not marginalized?

In response to the first set of questions it must be pointed out that all liberation theologians agree in their own ways that opting for the poor and excluded is based on particular understandings of the nature and work of God. To be sure, such options are not primarily based on political or ideological assumptions or on pragmatic assessments but on theological reflection. Here we are at the very heart of the various theologies of liberation. The point of departure of liberation theology is not primarily social ethics (like for instance the moral appeal not to forget those who are neglected) or general political or economic assumptions about the common good; the point of departure and the very heart of the enterprise is a new vision of God. While Roman Catholics and Protestants agree on this issue, the Protestant emphasis on the work of God (more so than on the church) seems to have led to an even more pronounced emphasis on the role of God.[12]

From a Latin American Roman Catholic perspective, Gustavo Gutiérrez has emphasized over and over again that liberation theology starts with the specific forms of God's love and God's grace manifest throughout the Bible. The preferential option for the poor is a theocentric option, centered on the theological conviction that God is at work in the liberation of the "least of these."[13]

Nevertheless, few liberation theologians have made the work of God more central to their theology than Frederick Herzog. Emphasizing that liberation theology starts with God's own walk with humanity, Herzog prefers to talk about "theopraxis," "Christopraxis," and "Spiritpraxis," rather than "orthopraxis" (right action), a term frequently used by Gutiérrez and others to express the practical concerns of liberation theology.[14] In this way Herzog addresses a specific problem with North American Protestantism where—on grounds of modern middle-class notions of agency and the self—it is often assumed that people can and should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Not debating that the term *orthopraxis* might be helpful in other contexts such as Latin America, Herzog never uses the term in his own North American Protestant setting since it would send the wrong message. God's work with the marginalized everywhere provides a model that is fundamentally different from the modern middle-class image of the self-made man: walking with God and with each other, people are enabled to overcome the typical self-centeredness of the powerful, to

build new relationships, and to develop resistance to the oppressive structures of empire.

James Cone's statements on the role of God are almost as strong as Herzog's. He maintains that the "sole reason" for the existence of black theology is "to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only *consistent with* the gospel but *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1970:3; italics in original). This close relation between God's work and the lives of the oppressed is supported by the biblical paradigm of the Exodus where God makes Godself known as the God of the oppressed, a pattern that is broadened in the New Testament by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which can be seen as a sign of God's commitment to all oppressed people.

Letty Russell points feminists to God's future action which is already present in the action of God through the people of Israel and through Jesus Christ. In this vision the marginalized have a special place. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, a Protestant (Presbyterian) feminist theologian of the second generation, has argued for what she calls the "theo/acentric character" of feminist theology.[15] Unlike modern theology, this theo/acentric emphasis is not interested in defending the existence of God. From a liberation perspective the question of the existence of God has always been of lesser interest than the question of who God is and what God is doing. The feminist experience of God, not unlike the experience of God in most liberation theologies, grows out of encounters with God in the tensions of life and in new encounters with God that include those who have been marginalized in society and church.

Womanist theologian Delores Williams describes the encounter with God in terms of the situation of black women who are facing "near-destruction situations." God is not an abstract category or an ultimate principle but the one who is with the people. God is simply the one who helps them "make a way out of what [they] thought was no way" (1993:108). The focus of womanist liberation theology is on God: unlike modern middle-class people, the persons who face "near-destruction situations" point away from themselves. Unlike private property owners, people in situations of severe pressure do not own the resources to overcome their problems; the power to make a difference comes to them from the outside, from Godself.

In agreement with other approaches to theology of liberation, Hispanic theology maintains that the fundamental theological question

is what God we affirm. Protestant Hispanic theology, strongly based on biblical images, affirms God's concern for those in need in its own ways. Justo González points out that "Scripture does not say that God can be found equally wherever we please to look." Hispanic theologians agree with other theologies of liberation that "ours is a God who, having known oppression, shares with the oppressed in their suffering" (1990:93, 95). Once again, the role of God is central in the process of liberation—and Protestant liberation theologians point to the many passages in the Bible where God is at work, particularly with those who live in situations where the pressure is greatest.

From an Asian perspective, Choan-Seng Song levels the charge that mainline theology has virtually forgotten that "God is a God full of surprises." Most liberation theologies would agree on this point. Immersed in the Asian context, Song and others have become aware that God is present in the midst of the struggles of the people, and that "theology begins with God's heartache on account of the world." Theology is distorted, therefore, when it tries to think about God in a vacuum or only in regard to God's glory. God needs to be seen first of all in confrontation with "the darkness that poses as a real threat to the birth, growth, and fruition of life" (1991:10, 56). The biblical image at the core of this vision is God's creation of the world as victory over darkness.

Another theologian who might be counted among the founding members of liberation theology merits to be added here: Vine Deloria, raised in the Episcopalian tradition and writing from the perspective of Native American religions, worries that "religion has become a comfortable ethic and comforting aesthetic for Westerners." On the basis of the Native American traditions, Deloria argues that God is different, claiming that "God is red." This God, a powerful reality which extends beyond the lives of Native Americans and reaches out to the world as a whole, is in touch with the realities which mainline America has repressed, such as nature, trees, animals, and birds, and the "voices and places of the land" (1994:284, 292). Deloria's vision adds an important impulse to the spectrum of liberation theologies since it reminds us of the stories of native America, and its focus extends beyond oppressed people to the land and the cosmos as a whole.

In light of this intense focus on God in Protestant liberation theologies, the problem with the second set of questions above becomes clearer and thus the response can be brief. In the encounter with God and those who suffer, abstract notions of fairness will no longer do. God is not a machine which distributes goods and services according

to predetermined input; rather, God establishes particular relationships with humanity. Even where humans hurt each other and push large groups of people into oblivion, as has happened many times in history, God does not abandon those who get hurt but draws them into special relationships.

At the same time, God's option for the poor, the marginalized, the hurt—the fact that God does not overlook those rendered invisible by the powers that be—does not mean that God does not care about the wealthy and the powerful who inflict pain often without being aware of it. But the relationship takes on different forms. God's care—not unlike parental care—also includes a challenge to those who destroy others (and therefore also themselves). Jesus' own ways of acting as portrayed in all four gospels mirror such challenges. In addition, since the powerful tend to defy relationship with people who are different, their own relationships with God are easily distorted. In this situation efforts to restore relationships with the marginalized might help those in power to find a way back into a more productive communion with God as well. Liberation theology thus challenges all of theology to examine whether it opens up the worth of other persons. Respect for God (as Other) is closely connected with respect for others.[16]

If reform, in the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, is an ongoing process, we need to realize that God's option for the margins and the excluded demands ongoing reflection. Postmodernity, to name only one example, is presenting us with new challenges. The pluralism and multiculturalism of a postmodern culture, for instance, while indeed creating some space for those who are different, paradoxically also tends to further render invisible those on the margins. The pluralist/multiculturalist assumption that society is made up of different groups which each have the liberty to pursue their own interests covers up the kinds of parasitic relationships whereby some groups exist at the expense of others. Likewise, contemporary efforts to support the less fortunate often end up using them for their own purposes and ultimately exploiting them. Even though powerful organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank now claim their own options for the poor, power hardly shifts to the poor; and control remains rooted firmly in the hands of the traditional leadership group. The contemporary task of liberation theology is to identify these power differentials and to address them in ways that lead to alternative distributions of power.[17]

Recent Developments

While specific emphases point to the Protestant heritage of the liberation theologians introduced so far, for the most part, liberation theologies have refused to enforce strict divisions according to denominational heritage. Since the problems addressed by liberation theologies are not limited to individual denominations, strong webs of solidarity have crossed denominational lines. In Latin America, for instance, both Protestants and Roman Catholics have collaborated in the work of liberation theology. In the United States, both Roman Catholics and Protestants have collaborated in black and Hispanic theologies; likewise, both Catholics and Protestants have collaborated in feminist theologies. Ecumenical collaboration—the kind of thing that has often been tedious and time-consuming for mainline theologies and churches—has come naturally and organically in many of these projects. This might well be taken as an encouraging sign that theology from below is in a position to lead us beyond the special interest formations of the colonial histories of the modern world that have often affected denominational interests as well.

Nevertheless, denominational identity remains part of the struggle—depending in part on the context of the struggling groups and their theological resources, and in part on the challenges to be addressed. One such challenge can be found in the contemporary manifestations of empire promoted by the administration of George W. Bush, as it self-consciously promotes what it considers to be Evangelical values. As a result, in the United States, Protestant theologians have been at the forefront of the critique of empire. Catherine Keller (United Methodist) has exposed the classical images of God's omnipotence that undergird the neoconservative notions of power; she suggests alternative images of God's power that display flexibility, vulnerability, and love.[18] In my own work, also from a United Methodist perspective, I investigate the connections of empire and Christology through the ages, concluding with a broader critique of the U.S. empire which includes the softer and more hidden forms of empire that predate the Bush administration and find expression in the more liberal (and neoliberal) forms that may be more characteristic of the "American way" in the long run.[19] The problems and pressures of empire are also addressed in current theological explorations of postcolonial theory. Kwok Pui-lan, an Episcopalian theologian from Hong Kong who teaches in the United States, has called attention to the mostly hidden

colonial heritage of modern theology as a whole; Kwok thus develops a project that seeks to decolonize Christianity and provides alternatives inspired by feminist traditions.[20]

A fresh understanding of power and its alternatives along the lines of postcolonial theory that takes into account the histories of colonialism and empire has contributed to increased theological production by indigenous voices. Native American Protestant theologians Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley (United Methodist), and George E. Tinker (Lutheran) have rewritten Christian theology from a Native American perspective that brings together the classical loci of theology (such as the doctrines of God, Jesus Christ, and salvation) with Native American faith expressions. In this way, they have provided an alternative to the still prevalent—albeit often in unreflected fashion—colonial approaches to theology.[21]

It bears repeating that the Protestant notion of a church that is always undergoing processes of reform is at the heart of Protestant liberation theologies. Even those churches that are more open to the concerns of liberation and that seek to incorporate the view from the underside and God's option for the margins are in need of ongoing reform and revision. That this challenge is seen at times even in the midst of the worlds of the oppressors is a powerful witness to the fact that liberation theologies should never be considered the special interest theologies of the oppressed and marginalized alone. Ulrich Duchrow, a German Lutheran theologian, has noted one of the key issues of Protestant liberation theology: oppression is not merely a social issue but an issue that is at the heart of the very faith of the church. The World Alliance of Presbyterian Churches has addressed the need for liberation as a matter of a *status confessionis*, i.e., a matter which bears directly on what the church believes and confesses.[22]

Context Is What Hurts

On the cover of one of his books, Choan-Seng Song is characterized as "the master of contextual theologies." In similar fashion, liberation theologies in general are often classified as "contextual theologies." From here it is only a small step to collate liberation theologies with modern liberal theology and modern attempts to adapt theological reflection to one's own personal setting, centering theological reflection around the personal interests of various individuals or groups. In this perspective, liberation theologies are seen as little more than

an ever expanding set of special interest theologies, at best relevant to specific groups of people, at worst just another outgrowth of the postmodern proliferation of pluralism and relativism. The language of "advocacy scholarship" has at times contributed to the confusion. Liberation theologies thus are seen as catering primarily to the interest of specific groups of different ethnic, gender, or class origins: African Americans, Hispanics, women, poor people, gays and lesbians, and those who feel the need to advocate for them, now each can have their very own theology. This view tends to give permission for the rest of theology to go on with business as usual: why not have theologies for middle-class white people, for suburban congregations, or for members of country clubs as well?

This sort of diversity, however, has little to do with the dynamics that created the theologies of liberation. Their themes were developed not in relation to the special and limited interests of self-contained groups but in connection to the kind of deep suffering and pain that cannot be limited to specific groups and that has nothing to do with special interest. While most strongly felt at the margins and the peripheries, the deep suffering and pain expressed in liberation theologies also affects the centers; once this is clear, liberation theologies can no longer be written off as special interest. Just the opposite: liberation theologies seek to understand the deep roots of the common predicaments in which both the marginalized and those in power share, without neglecting the obvious differences. Consequently, liberation theologies in their own ways embody Paul's well-known insight in 1 Corinthians 12:26 that if one member suffers, all suffer together with it. Unlike the various perspectives of privilege which feel they can afford to tend exclusively to their own context, the view from the underside of suffering always reflects the whole body. Ultimately suffering cannot be limited to one member alone. Liberation theologies thus search for the best interests of all, seeking the liberation of both oppressors and oppressed by paying attention to where the pain is greatest. If this is seen, the rest of theology can no longer continue with business as usual. All of theology needs to join efforts in listening to manifestations of the common pain.

Liberation theologies are therefore not special interest theologies but address the common good from new angles, which now include the underside of history and new visions of God. In this perspective the context of theology is not what is immediately obvious or closest to home; as I have stated elsewhere, context is that which hurts

(Rieger, 1998a:129–30). In taking another look at the underside of history, liberation theologies are able to notice certain aspects of reality that conventional contextual theologies (and of course those theologies that fail to address matters of context) will never see. This does not mean that conventional contextual theologies are completely unaware of suffering, pain, and structures of oppression. But they tend to see those structures as exceptions, anomalies, merely deviations from the normal course of things. Liberation theologies, on the other hand, understand that suffering, pain, and oppression are not merely accidental but point to a deeper truth about the dominant context itself. Conflicts and tensions do not appear out of nowhere but are produced by the powers that be, and as such point to their unconscious truth which must be constantly repressed in order to preserve the way things are (Rieger, 1998b:75–88).

The true nature of the contextual reality of the underside is not immediately self-evident, surprisingly not even to those who live there. It takes some effort to understand that reality, and to find out what is really going on. Gutiérrez has insisted with good reason that even the poor might make the option for the poor. Otherwise they too will miss the deeper implications of their own reality. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, liberation theologies need to add more layers to their current understanding of context in terms of the underside of history. What are the concerns of people on the underside now? What progress has been made in the last thirty years? What are the setbacks? What difference do globalization processes make? There is a certain degree of consensus among liberation theologians that economic challenges will have to be analyzed more closely in relation to all forms of oppression.[23]

Here a curious reversal takes place that has not yet reached the level of consciousness of mainline theology. Despite claims to universality, the approaches developed in the centers of theology shape up as special interest theologies if they pay no attention to the deeper malaise which affects us all, oppressors and oppressed alike. We need to realize that, rather than addressing the special interests of one group only, the suffering of people at the margins points to an important part of reality in which, even though often repressed and made invisible, we all participate. Liberation theologies are therefore not special interest theologies but pose a challenge to all of theology.

Implications

At this point the process of theological reflection changes profoundly. Theology as a whole benefits from listening more closely to voices on the underside. Theology is freed from its long-term captivity to the context of the modern middle class and from traditionalist appeals to the biblical and traditional texts of the church that forget about the suffering and pain of people on the underside. Liberation theologies serve as a reminder that theology cannot escape the pervasive narcissism of the modern and postmodern worlds without developing genuine respect for God, a project inextricably tied up with developing genuine respect for other persons as well.

Theology indeed begins with the relationship of God, humanity, and the world, as modern Protestant theology has taught us so well. But this relationship needs to be broadened so as to include those who are left out, those who fall through the cracks in a world that prides itself on moving closer together in global connectedness. Liberation theologies thus serve as an invitation to search for new encounters with God in places where theologians and church people hardly bother to look—Protestant liberation theologies face particular challenges in this regard, due to the history of modern Protestant theology. At a time when theology is becoming more and more a matter of life and death—the poor become poorer, the rich become richer, and thirty thousand children are dying every day from preventable causes—new relationships with God and with humanity need to be built, from the bottom up. Where is God? This question will only make a difference if it no longer avoids the reality of dying children.

3

HUMANISM

—Anthony B. Pinn

An African American Perspective

Black religious life and thought suggest two primary modalities of humanism as theology and practice.[1] I refer to them as theistic humanism and naturalistic humanism. The former involves a robust concern with human accountability and responsibility within the context of a deep belief in a divine reality. This theological anthropology and doctrine of God form a synergy resulting in Christology as the centerpiece of theology and religious praxis. The latter lacks concern with divine reality and limits its focus to the religious and theological significance of humanity. Rather than concern with Christology in significantly traditional ways, Christ provides only moral lessons and humanity is understood as the basis of reality within naturalistic humanism.

Black Churches and Theistic Humanism

A shadow theistic humanism lurks in the secret meetings of enslaved Africans—the hush arbor meetings during which enslaved Christians worked through their theological positions in spirituals and sermons, as opposed to the dominant presentation of the "gospel" message. Even prior to the creation of institutional forms, African American Christianity presented a humanistic understanding of the intersections between the transcendent and the immanent. The spirituals, the theological language of the proto-African American church, outlined this

connection by framing a robust anthropology through which and in connection to which divinity is presented. In this way humanity is recognized as a weighty reality, one through whose mark on the world God is seen and experienced. This is the significance of the *imago dei* as found in the religious songs of the enslaved. Most importantly, this framing of the spiritual's world, this cartography of human development within the spirituals, offers the best way to map the movement of God in the world—and the cipher for this is Jesus Christ. The biblical world and the contemporary moment are brought into harmony, time and space as related to religious meaning are collapsed. In a significant way, the presence of Christ—God and humanity in perfect harmony—marks the spirituals as theistic humanism: human struggle and existential movement as irrepressible statement of who God is and where God is found.

The African presence in North America was over a century old before this religious ethos would take sustained and somewhat "independent" institutional form with the development of black churches. Within these churches this theistic humanism took its most explicit and celebrated form through a combining of commitment to the reality of the divine and a sense of human progress and reason. This perspective lends one way to interpret the words of Robert Pope, who writes, "our religious creeds conform more nearly to the life and teaching of the Christ. The old idea," he continues, "that theology is stationary, while every other science is progressive is absurd and must go. As more light is turned on, this science becomes more comprehensive in its scope, more responsive to human need, and express more full the thought of God" (2000:133). Even more telling than Pope's words is the perspective of Norman Brown regarding doctrine of God. In an article in the *AME Church Review*, Brown says, "a people's God is no bigger than their needs, no higher than their aspirations" (2000:137). Doctrine of God is measured against anthropology. That is why Brown could write "the only God that will satisfy and that is practical is the God in you; and if you cannot find God in you, it is useless to search for him amid the stars" (138).

Prior to these statements by Pope and Brown, pronouncements in support of a type of Christian (or theistic) humanism can be found in statements by leaders such as Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—the oldest African American denomination in the United States. Turner, in his most polemical style, proclaimed the blending of transcendence and immanence with the

statement "God is a Negro!" By this Turner meant to counter white supremacist manipulations of doctrine of God by signifying them, turning them on their head. More importantly this intertwining of God and humanity also points to the continuing importance of humanity for a proper understanding of reality: God is real and present in the world; and humans are accountable for working and living in affirming ways. Human growth and development is vital, a religious truth, that works in conjunction with a deep and abiding confirmation of the reality of God. The Christ-Event is the primary example of how this blending of transcendence and immanence works. Hence, theistic humanism within nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century black churches amounted to a weighty and persistent Christology as the centerpiece of thought and the model of historic(al) action.

The Great Migration brought this concern with a humanized gospel and "earthy" Christology into relief by highlighting a debate regarding the proper orientation of black churches—"this-worldly" versus "otherworldly." The latter position has been, for the most part, downplayed within progressive churches since it tends to represent an embrace of transcendent concerns—salvation as nonhistorical development. The former orientation, however, understands the significance of God's movement in the world in terms of historically situated transformation—the increase in life options and greater possibilities for human existence.[2]

The former was also given both explicit and implicit attention during the civil rights movements, as black churches were called, through a social Christianity posture of certain leaders, to give an account of their commitment to human progress as the hallmark of God's concern and character. In a word, churches were challenged to live out a posture of theistic humanism that made consistent if not synonymous salvation and liberation—Christian activism and the presence of God in human history. With this posture churches, at their best, emphasized a synthesizing of God and history, similar to social gospel, in ways that point out the humanity of God.

This theistic humanism involved a sense of the collective, communal concern with transformation as opposed to the radical individualism of the "otherworldly" orientation. The efforts of figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., a student of the Boston University School of Personalism and a devoted member of the black church tradition, called for social transformation as the proper business of black churches. In less academic guise, activist Ella Baker expressed this perspective in

plain terms and laments what she perceives as a shifting theological and ethical terrain. "My grandfather," Baker writes, "had gone into the Baptist ministry, and that was part of the quote, unquote, Christian concept of sharing with others. I went to a school that went in for Christian training. Then, there were people who 'stood for something,' as I call it. Your relationship to human beings was more important than your relationship to the amount of money that you made" (Pinn, 2002:17–18).

This humanization of God's presence in the world takes an odd turn in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries through the megachurch phenomenon and the prosperity gospel. The early "this-worldly" orientation involved a commitment to the Christ event as a call for a theistic humanism devoted to both a devotion to God and a deep regard for the needs and responsibility of humanity. But the megachurch phenomenon (through the prosperity gospel) at its worst involves a disregard for the needs and responsibilities of humanity as the centerpiece of the Christ-Event. Highlighted instead is a superficial appeal to the economic and social conjuring of scripture for the benefit of individuals measured in terms of material acquisition and a sacrilizing of the "American Dream."[3] Even efforts at transformation often morph into bits of charity (e.g., "self-help" strategies based on slogans and pseudopsychology) as opposed to social gospel efforts to reimagine, reconstruct, the infrastructure of social existence.

Theistic humanism within the black church tradition is expressed beyond the rhetoric of civil rights through an appreciation for the physical presence of African Americans, for the beauty and value of black bodies. King, for example, highlighted this. While racial discrimination for centuries was marked by a disregard for black bodies as of less importance and value, King's work entailed a reenvisioning of these bodies in ways that show them as beautiful, as epistemologically and ontologically "weighty." This reworking of the aesthetic of black bodies—achieved by King in speeches and the "arrangement" of bodies in direct protest—rendered them visible and therefore demanding of public consideration. King invested public discourse and action with metaphysical significance and importance. But, at the same time, he rendered the implications of metaphysical truths deeply mundane and, in the process, he celebrated highly visible black bodies as markers of intimacy between the divine and the human—an assumption already in place with respect to white bodies. This process involved, among other theological things, a radicalized theological anthropology, one

that took seriously the ontological and existential damage done by the socioeconomic and cultural quarantining of black bodies. One gets a sense of this liberal and "black" theological articulation of public policy in King's articulation of the struggle. "Christians," according to King, "are bound to recognize any passionate concern for social justice. Such concern is basic in the Christian doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man [sic]." Furthermore, he continued, "Christians are also bound to recognize the ideal of a world unity in which all barriers of caste and color are abolished. Christianity repudiates racism" (1963:101).

The achievements marking the civil rights movement are built in part on King's rendering of a new cartography of public life, premised on the beauty/value of black bodies. Whereas poverty and other forms of discrimination marked black bodies as devoid of value, as unimportant, as disposable, as invisible with respect to the public arena of democratic engagement, King's civil rights work asserted the opposite: black bodies house a profound importance that must be recognized and embraced through public mechanism geared toward the fostering of "wholeness." What King, as representative of the black church at its best, attempted to achieve through civil rights praxis involved the widespread and liberal understanding of the Christ-Event through which humanity is invested with physical and spiritual (aesthetic) profoundness that must be recognized and honored through all venues of interaction and all areas of existence.

Black Theology as Reflection on Theistic Humanism

A similar concern with the impact and importance of the physical body marks black and womanist theologies. This theological presentation of the body is connected to and manifest through a preoccupation with Christ as exemplar of human integrity and divine will. What this offers in terms of a notion of liberation involves transformation of the existential circumstances of human life, complete with a hopefulness for the transcendence of human history through participation in the fullness of God.

Black theology and womanist theology, as traditionally done, represent a mode of "worldly" liberal theology, worldly in that they recognize the manner in which the historical progress of the human race has taken place at the expense of particular groups not within the circle of dominance—it is a recognition that human progress has

tended to produce a bloody trail from Europe through Africa and into the Americas; and, freedom of thought and belief, theological discourse within the context of modern life, must acknowledge, follow, and redeem this bloody trail. Yet, both maintain some of the same assumptions and presuppositions of North American liberal theology: there is a certainty with respect to the merit of the Christian faith, a confidence that at times can result in a type of religious chauvinism. Both black theology and womanist theology involve an assumption that the Christ-Event, while couched in human history and reason, by its very nature has an appeal that must cut across communities and nations to represent a broadband mode of transformation.[4] Another theological element shared by liberal theology and black and womanist theologies involves a commitment to the reality of God, but one that is processed through human experience, guided by the demands of the historical moment.

Black and womanist theologies represent a brand of Christian (or theistic) humanism in that they give weight to the doctrine of a humanized God understood through the Christ-Event. In this sense, God is infused in human history through Christ, and humans participate in this divinity to the extent they take on—in an ontological sense—God's concern (for those who suffer most).

James Cone and J. Deotist Roberts, perhaps two of the most recognizable names in black theology's first three decades, called for human activity and ingenuity as requirements for living out the Christian faith. Both suggested in strong terms that black theology is an extended Christology in that through the Christ-Event one gathers a sense of God's commitment to human progress as well as the manner in which this commitment is expressed in human history, in conjunction with human activity and struggle. From their perspective, however, this differs from the overoptimism of certain theological formations developed around the same time as black theology. For example, they are highly critical of the "Death-of-God" movement and other forms of theological discourse. J. Deotis Roberts has noted the manner in which such theological formulations are "for the suburbs, for the haves" (2003:37).[5]

While rejecting the sociocultural position of such theologies, black theology has maintained similar concern with human accountability and responsibility for the world—a mode of humanism but within the context of a continuing commitment to the divine as of continuing relevance. The deep disagreement with a turn to the human, if J. Deotis

Roberts is representative, is not situated in a fundamental rejection of a robust anthropology. Rather, it is a matter of this anthropology's failure to recognize the existential condition of African Americans. Regarding this, Robert writes: "affirmation of human manhood [*sic*], the movement from anxiety to responsibility, the awareness of human strength, and the like belong to the radical shifts in theological focus. But while these insights survey the general theological terrain, crucial aspects of the black experience are untouched" (2003:37). Perhaps this perspective is based on a similar conclusion reached by historian of religion Charles Long. He remarks that "Death of God" is probably a reference to a disillusionment, a recognition of the faulty nature of Western constructs and arrangements: "When, for example, Thomas J. J. Altizer speaks of the 'death of God,' is he not in fact trying to refer to the decline of the West, or the death and end of the American Dream? Why assign the category of death of God when you really mean something else?" (1986:137).

Roberts notes, again in a critique of the "Death of God" theology, "a Christian humanism rather than a 'Christian Atheism' would appear to be more to the point." This is because black theology's approach assumes a God present in the world, working through and with humanity to bring about liberation. Such a posture does not reduce the significance of humanity; rather it is heightened, Roberts would argue, through God's immanence. Put another way, the type of humanism Roberts approves entails synergy between divine presence in human history and human accountability for and activity toward liberation (2003:38, 49). Hence, black theologians such as Roberts call for a Christian humanism to the extent this position highlights ethics as central motivation for theological inquiry: the "moral attributes of God" not the existence of God (41–42). To the extent this understanding might involve the "death" of God, it is the God of oppression and white supremacy because "the white God is an idol created by racists, and we blacks must perform the iconoclastic task of smashing false images" (Cone, 1986:59). Cone is clear, however, that such a move does not entail reducing religion to ethics. Instead, ethics involves a response to contact with the deep of the religious quest.

The activity of God within the context of human life is the source of theological energy. It is this preoccupation with the presence of the divine within the context of human existence that frames black theology and black religion (in black churches) as encompassing theistic humanism: "How do we dare speak of God in a suffering world, a

world in which blacks are humiliated because they are black? This question, which occupies the central place in our theological perspective, forces us to say nothing about God that does not participate in the emancipation of black humanity" (Cone, 1986:60).

Black theology, particularly in the writings of Cone, affixes doctrine of God and theological anthropology in a rigid manner, through a process of correlation—to speak of one is to speak of the other: "We can know God only in relationship to the human race, or more particularly in God's liberating activity in behalf of oppressed humanity" (Cone, 1986:70). Even with this said, it remains understood that God is not captured, nor fully known through human experience. Historical reality only provides a glimpse of God, but one that affirms the importance of and integrity of human life: "transcendence refers to human purpose as defined by the infinite in the struggle for liberation" (77).

In this case, within this theistic humanist perspective, social transformation is the litmus test for the relevance of God. And the existential experience of African Americans is the hermeneutic through which truth claims are assessed—accepted or rejected as the ideological trappings of white supremacy. "We do not want to know," Cone argues, "how we can get along without God, but how we can survive in a world permeated with white racism" (63).

While there is little substantive theological difference between womanist theology and black theology that does not revolve around a relationship to sexism, the most clearly articulated depiction of theistic humanism in womanist thought is offered by Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams, and Kelly Brown Douglas.[6] In all three cases, these womanist scholars suggest human accountability and responsibility for liberation is not outweighed by God's presence and workings in human history. Rather, a connection exists between the two that makes it difficult to distinguish the work of God from the work of humanity—one is obliged to move in ways that promote health and well-being because this is both God's orientation and humanity's responsibility. Hence, what these scholars suggest is in keeping with the old saying: "God has no hands but your hands, no feet but your feet."

Naturalistic Humanism as Religious Orientation

Not all African Americans embrace theistic humanism as their orientation toward life and thought; and the signs of this alternate religious

framework—naturalistic humanism—run as deep as those of theistic humanism.

As some enslaved Africans sang spirituals celebrating the ontological and existential synergy between the divine and the human—best represented through the immanence of the divine in Christ—others signified this perspective and gave their full attention to humanity: theology qua anthropology in a foundational sense. This attention to humanity is expressed in the language of the blues in which metaphysical assertions are met with suspicion and immanence is of primary concern. "I used to ask God questions, then answer that question myself," as the blues tune goes.

Even the basic mode of communication between the transcendent realm and the immanent space known as human history is held suspect, and this is signified by giving priority to the demands and troubles of the existential condition of humanity: "Our father, who is in heaven, white man owe me eleven and pay me seven, they kingdom come, they will be done, and if I hadn't took that, I wouldn't had none." As these lines suggest, the blues provide a vocabulary and grammar of meaning that jettison traditional metaphysical formulations dependent on notions of the divine. In their place, these tunes advocate concern with the messy business of human interaction in the world.

While the blues often involve coding of the naturalistic humanism position, enslaved African Americans who embraced this humanistic posture were not always shy about their stance. This was certainly Bishop Alexander Payne's experience when confronting a runaway slave, who questioned the existence of God: "I asked him if he was a Christian; 'no, sir,' said he, 'white men treat us so bad in Mississippi that we can't be Christians.' . . . In a word, slavery tramples the laws of the living God under its unhallowed feet—weakens and destroys the influence which those laws are calculated to exert over the mind of man; and constrains the oppressed to blaspheme the name of the Almighty" (1839:115). Marked as it is with a triumphant sense of immanent experience as the judge of metaphysical claims, the runaway's rejection of theistic orientation of necessity involves reliance on human ingenuity and skills for the fulfillment of life.[7]

Similar sentiments to those expressed above are present in African American folktales. For instance, a chimney sweep named John Junior rejects the supposed comfort of the Christian faith and replaces it with intense devotion to human progress and achievement based strictly

on the work of human hands: "No, I ain't tendin' been' no Christian. That's the trouble with niggers now. They pray too damn much. Every time you look around you se some nigger on his knees and the white man figurin' at his desk. What in the world is they prayin' fo'? Tryin' to get to heaven? They is goin' to get there anyhow. There ain't no other Hell but this one down here. Look at me. I'm catchin' Hell right now" (Mason Brewer, 1968:268).

Naturalistic humanism in early African American communities is replaced during the twentieth century with a much firmer presentation of this perspective.[8] For instance, participation of African Americans in the Communist Party at times involved rejection of supernatural explanations for history, and reliance on human energy and immanence as the proper orientation point to this shift. Late twentieth-century political activities (i.e., civil rights activism) also housed this perspective. While members of the civil rights movement, as orchestrated by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., by and large embraced traditional theism or theistic humanism, members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party held a preference for the liberative possibilities of naturalistic humanism.[9]

The Harlem Renaissance also offered naturalistic humanism in various forms, but most notably in the writings of Richard Wright. The character Cross Damon from *The Outsider*, for example, limited his reach to the existential realities of a troubled and troubling world.[10] Such stories are not simply a presentation of fantastic perspectives. To the contrary, African American literary figures such as Richard Wright and James Weldon Johnson combine a personally naturalistic humanism with a certain thoughtfulness and balance. "My glance forward," Johnson wrote, "reaches no farther than this world. I admit that I throughout my life have lacked religiosity. I do not know if there is a personal God; I do not see how I can know; and I do not see how my knowing can matter. As far as I am able to peer into the inscrutable, I do not see that there is any evidence to refute those scientists and philosophers who hold that the universe is purposeless: that man, instead of being the special care of a Divine Providence, is dependent upon fortuity and his own wits for survival in the midst of blind and insensate forces."[11]

Albeit important, naturalistic humanism as presented in African American political rhetoric and literature involves a rather loose arrangement of perspectives, which do not hold the same communal weight as the black churches that house theistic humanism. Yet, this

loose configuration is only one of the styles of presentation for naturalistic humanism. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has for decades served as an institutional home for some African American naturalistic humanists because of its commitment to a nondoctrinal community and its resulting comfort with congregations of varying orientations. The relationship between African Americans and the UUA has involved significant rough patches, primarily revolving around issues of race relations.[12] Nonetheless, one reason African Americans remain in the UUA despite cultural difficulties revolves around the manner in which the appeal to social justice is expressed in terms of human accountability and responsibility. This, within humanistic congregations, means a move away from both implicit and explicit links to notions of the transcendent and biblical notions of divine intervention that undergird the sense of liberation found in most black churches. Furthermore, even divisions of the UUA that consider themselves Christian, for instance, maintain a sense of liberation that appeals because of its commitment to "the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations."[13] In addition, the presence of African Americans in significant leadership positions, including the presidency of the association, only serves to further enhance African American commitment to the naturalistic humanism expressed by certain segments of the UUA.[14]

Theological Reflection on Naturalistic Humanism

As black theology and womanist theology were developing, some African American scholars were moving away from a theistic humanism toward a naturalistic humanism.[15] The first explicit marker of this shift most likely involves William R. Jones's work in the early 1970s. In articles and in a book provocatively titled *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*, Jones critiqued theistic humanism's claims about God's concern for the oppressed that were made by black theologians without sound historical evidence for such assertions.

Jones suggested that black theology is ill equipped to offer African Americans strategies of liberation that actually work, whereas those based on assertions unsupported by evidence (e.g., God is concerned with eliminating racism) really do work well. Pushing away from troubling formations of doctrine of God, Jones urged those interested in maintaining notions of the divine as a metaphysical reality to consider humanocentric theism. As an alternate to "theocentric theism," as

traditionally argued in black theology and black churches, humano-centric theism assigns "an exalted status to [humanity], particularly to human freedom, but this status—and here we come to its theistic ground—is the consequence of God's will, and it conforms to [God's] ultimate purpose and plan for [humanity]" (1973:187). There are, how-ever, similarities between humanocentric theism and what black theo-logians have offered as the proper theological stance. Jones explicitly acknowledges this: " . . . it is significant to note that some of the essen-tial components of humanocentric theism are already present in most of the black theologies" (200).

More intriguing than Jones's call for humanocentric theism (as a stopgap of sorts) is his preferred orientation—secular humanism and its accompanying theological perspective, grounded in a healthy regard for existential context and human accountability. Unfortunately, while Jones notes a preference for this nontheistic approach, he does little over the course of his brilliant career to develop it with any detail. Others, however, have made an effort to extend Jones's deeply signifi-cant work through the outlining of a naturalistic humanist theology. To address the question most readers will ask—How does this qualify as theology without God?—it is understood here that theology as "God-Talk" is only one formulation of theology. Gordon Kaufman and his students, through their emphasis on theology as human and imagi-native construction, have opened the way for alternate definitions of the theological enterprise.[16] If, as Kaufman argues, theology is human work, composed of language and vocabulary that clumsily seeks to understand the transcendent—using terms such as "God" that do not capture this reality—perhaps it is reasonable to suggest that theology is human construct and it serves to create all we encounter. Kaufman assumes there is a metaphysical reality connected to the symbols we have created: There is a reality beyond and behind the symbol God. But perhaps, he contends, this is incorrect, a symptom of human self-deception. That is to say, perhaps there is nothing behind the concepts theology seeks to explain.

God has never been anything more than a symbol—an organizing framework for viewing and living life in relationship. Furthermore, this symbol has run its course and is no longer capable of doing the heavy lifting required for the contemporary world. The notion "god" is a matter of human need and desire. This is not a matter of God "dying," of God "dying" as a transcendent reality now known only in the historical world. Symbols do not die in this way; they lose their

function and are replaced—like any piece of intellectual machinery: Do verbs die, or do they fade away?

In this way, theology becomes a method for exploring the human quest for complex subjectivity, for meaning and purpose.[17] This perspective need not lead away from an interest in the questions and meanings of religion, but rather into a different posture towards those questions, one disinterested in the Gods of black (and womanist) theology and one more firmly and comfortably concerned with anthropology as the starting and ending point of religious questioning.

Naturalistic humanist theology is culturally situated, an immanent, this-worldly, calling forth of our human promise and pitfalls. It is a pointing-out of emptiness, of absence (of God's absence) but in ways that call for humans to fill the void as best they can. Yet it must be noted that this theology involves a still-small hopefulness that does not allow for a full embrace of Sartre's forlornness. Its despair is measured and shot through with what is perhaps an unreasonable feeling that even if we do not succeed in our efforts, as we probably will not, the effort is the reward.

There is a guiding principle not instituted by the divine, but rather based on a hard-to-hold feeling that life should be nurtured in its various forms. One may not be able to talk in terms of a universal ethic, but one can talk in vague terms about a desire for health and well-being, recognizing that what this means is not fully within our grasp and that we will most likely betray even this vague urge. African American humanism is not Sartre's humanism. Richard Wright is as close as we have come to that modality, and he made no claims to theology.

In place of God, naturalistic humanism's theological sensibilities center on concern for community as the ultimate orientation for life. This is not a localized community composed of like-minded and physically similar figures. Rather, it is recognition of the interconnectedness of all forms of life—an appreciation and connection to all life. The nurturing of this web of existence is the preoccupation of naturalistic humanism—providing both a theological anchor and a motivation for ethics. Christ, then, does not maintain the same role as linkage between the transcendent and the immanent. Jesus is merely an example of moral conduct that one might follow, but no more significant than other examples of moral outlook and vision. Liberation in this context is similar to that proposed within theistic humanism; both are concerned with a fullness of existence, the removal of oppressive socioeconomic, political, and cultural arrangements and structures,

but naturalistic humanism does not anchor this resolve in a concern for transcendence, a source for moral and ethical conduct and regulations extending outside human history.

The concern for community found within naturalistic humanism as I describe it, holds ramifications extending beyond the nation-state. That is to say, this brand of humanism is concerned with the integrity of life in ways that recognize the impact of globalization and hemispheric developments. It is not enough to simply safeguard the welfare of humanity within one's geographic location; a concern for community must involve attention to the interrelatedness of all life, to the synergies of existence that balance life as complex and multilayered. Naturalistic humanism seeks liberative possibilities that recognize the interconnected nature of existence, thereby embracing without its theistic connotations the notion of King's "beloved community." Hence, naturalistic humanism encourages a view of the world that takes in the web-like nature of oppression and seeks to promote healing and balance for all forms of life.

The thought Alice Walker gives to the creation of her characters might provide insights into how we might go about creating our liberative agendas. She writes, "I create characters who sometimes speak in the language of immediate ancestors, characters who are not passive but active in the discovery of what is vital and real in this world. Characters who explore what it would feel like not to be imprisoned by the hatred of women, the love of violence, and the destructiveness of greed taught to human beings as the 'religion' by which they must guide their lives" (Walker, 1997:4). If naturalistic humanism maintains some sense of optimism, it involves an appreciation of humanity's tenacity, humanity's potential to recognize and address multilayered modalities of oppression. In this regard, naturalistic humanism acknowledges the value of Alice Walker's sense of the integrity of life.

4

JUDAISM

—Marc H. Ellis

Where We Have Come From / Where We Have Arrived

I was born in 1952 and, like all Jews of my generation, the shadow of the Holocaust permeated everything. Or almost everything. In those early years of my life, the Holocaust was as yet unnamed; the mass murder of Jews was too close at hand. The enormity took time to absorb and become articulated. The very name *Holocaust* lay years ahead, the experience awaiting that horrific name. I was surrounded by Hebrew schoolteachers from Europe, but their experience was kept from us, spoken, if at all, only in whispers. Something terrible had happened to Jews and I knew this without the direct speech and visuals we have become accustomed to today. The film reels we did see in movie theaters, as trailers to the main event, were about the victorious Allies in World War II. The suffering of the war seemed even, in these new reels, to be immense. The victims, however, remained unnamed, shorn of their particularity. Jews there were—we all knew this—but the enormity was, quite correctly, kept from us.

America was already engaged in a new war, the cold war, and Europe, undergoing its own reconstruction, needed Germany, at least West Germany, to pull its weight in defense of freedom and democracy. Dwelling on the old war—over just a decade or so—was too dangerous. The air raid drills we took part in at school were needed because of the Soviet Union, not the dreaded but defeated Nazis. The Nazis were old hat and besides, we were in America, a country that

looked toward the future; we represented the ever-present dawn of freedom. In our minds Americans were victors, not victims. As Jews we are part of this new dawn; we did not want to be known or to see ourselves as victims.

All of this changed and rapidly, the late 1950s and early 1960s turning on the pivot of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, six days in June when the Holocaust was named and its twin Israel became the center of Jewish existence. Israel, of course, was already there, founded in 1948, just three years after the end of World War II. Like the Holocaust, Israel had not yet been named as central to Jewish existence; I, like most American Jews, knew Israel as a small pioneering state that we should support and of which we should be proud. The naming of the Holocaust was a political response to and for the suffering of the Jews of Europe, the ones who were forced to or had chosen to settle in Palestine during and after the war. The 1967 war came upon us like a wave, gathering momentum as it came closer to our shore. The reports of the modernizing media were more vivid and direct; the threat to the Jews of Israel through what we knew at the time to be hostile Arab countries became palpable. When the war began there was almost a sigh of relief, and the heightened tension now had a release point. Yet many also were filled with despair, the sense that Israel might lose the war, that there would then be another slaughter of Jews. Another Holocaust?[1]

The threat of another slaughter and the incredible lightning victory of Israel—the breathtaking capture of Jerusalem—ignited a heightened Jewish sensibility that is difficult to describe. I had always been proud to be a Jew; now there was a public pride that moved beyond the individual, a pride that was recognized by others as well. A public sense of the importance of being a Jew was inscribed in America and Europe especially, a *novum* in Jewish history, almost as if the Holocaust and Israel had brought Jews and the world to a new level of understanding and respect for Jews and Judaism. There, basking in victory—as if all Jews had taken part in the war—we could now articulate and name our suffering as having experienced a holocaust. In our newfound power it was safe to speak of the terror, the terror of terrors, without being victims now and without our expression leading to a new round of victimization.

Israel, then, could also be named as the response to the horror of the Holocaust; the twinning of memory and nation became a twinning in thought and discourse. Jews were on the offense as a compensation for the years, the millennia, of being underneath, beholden, dis-

criminated against, and murdered. Now in the light of day we could celebrate our Jewishness in the boldest manner, speaking of our suffering and empowerment without restraint. It was like a wave breaking through the dam of history; now we as Jews could enact our world-shaking drama outside the synagogue, on stage and screen, television news and drama, the daily newspapers commemorating our suffering and celebrating our new power. These were heady days to be a Jew. Yet even then there were rumblings, warnings that the glory of victory would somehow unravel, an unraveling unlike earlier times when the acceptance of Jews in society would suffer a reversal; it was acceptance followed by nightmare.

The warning first came within the naming of the Holocaust. Though named within Israel's victory, the discourse around the Holocaust was naturally somber. The visuals of the death camps were followed by dramatizations and narratives. Elie Wiesel's *Night*, his autobiography of the time spent in Auschwitz, became a constant companion to many Jews and in classrooms around the nation. First in the universities, then in the high schools, and sometimes even in junior high or elementary schools, the Holocaust began to be consumed by Jews and non-Jews alike. Questions about God and humanity were present throughout a new and ominous landscape of depictions of the Holocaust, produced by a generation of Jewish writers searching for words to evoke the horrors of an experience so outrageous and outlandish.[2]

I experienced this in its initial phase with one of these Holocaust commentators, Richard Rubenstein, whose 1966 book *After Auschwitz* helped frame the ensuing years of Holocaust discussion. Like Wiesel's *Night*, but in theological rather than experiential language, *After Auschwitz* confronts the ancient beliefs about the God of history, doubts the efficacy of the covenant, and is suspicious about the goodness of humanity. After all, in the middle of the twentieth century, in throughly modern and Christian Europe, the ancient animus against the Jews took on its most radical and deadly form.[3]

Whereas Christianity placed the Jews in a damning but ironically protecting eschatological reserve, the Nazis propounded the eschatology of annihilation. Christianity believed that the Jews were being punished for their sins of turning away from Jesus and God; one day even the Jews would see the light and at that moment the last days of creation would begin. Jesus would return as the Christ; the messianic reign would commence.

The Nazis believed none of that. There was no reason for Jews to exist; their very existence threatened the possibility that the Nazis could continue to reign on earth. The Nazi mission toward Jews was clear, and their plan of annihilating the Jews gained currency. Its implementation was indeed described in theological terms as the good that surpassed all the difficulties of the mission. The Nazis would be remembered first and foremost for accomplishing the mission of making the world free of Jews.

Where was God in the death camps? Where was humanity? What could we say of both God and humanity after Auschwitz? To some extent Wiesel and Rubenstein agreed on the answers to these questions: neither God nor humanity could be trusted with the Jews. Only Jews could take Jewish history to its depths and rebuild it. It was the obligation of all Jews, whatever their political or religious affiliations, to mourn the dead and rebuild Jewish life. At the center of that rebuilding was Israel, the state, which would lead to the rebuilding of the people Israel. They were together now, state and people, where they had been separate for too long, and tragically so.[4]

Could the Holocaust have happened if the state of Israel had existed? Historically the answer was theoretical but Jews could never afford the test of theory again. Israel the state was absolutely necessary so that no one would attempt such an assault on Jews ever again. This time any attempt would be limited by the knowledge that Jews had their own state and their own army. If, after this warning, an attempt was made, it would be beaten back. If the state of Israel was defeated it would go down fighting. Never again would Jews be weak and helpless; never again would Jews go down without a fight.

Rubenstein in particular sounded this note; it resonated with Jews around the world. Yet there was another note within the burgeoning commentaries on Jewish life after the Holocaust. As particular victims, Jews had the responsibility of self-protection and self-empowerment. Beyond self-interest, however, was a universal applicability of the need for protection and empowerment; never again should anything approaching genocide happen to any community or people. This was the reason for the subtext of reflections on the Holocaust. In light of Jewish suffering, the world should be on permanent guard against other political, military, and religious configurations that might lead to genocide.[5]

Over the years the emphasis on Jewish particularity in suffering and empowerment took hold. The secondary, more universal emphasis

remained, though in a weakened way. Jewish empowerment in Israel assumed a role of its own and soon, by the 1980s for sure, a defensive posture toward Israel, and thus toward the Holocaust, took center stage.

The reason for this was simple and continues today. The lightning victory of Israel in the 1967 war yielded territory: the eastern part of Jerusalem, immediately and unilaterally annexed by Israel days after the war's end; the Golan Heights bordering Syria; the West Bank; Gaza. All of these territories were heavily populated with Palestinians and soon that population was complemented by Jews and an array of settlements that, in the ensuing decades, have grown in number and population. Today Jews number around four hundred thousand in these territories; the settlements have thickened in number and territory and, of course, the supporting infrastructure of military, economy, and transportation has developed in extensive ways.

The occupation of these territories is now legendary in its breadth and the controversy it has engendered. Since 1967 there have been numerous uprisings among the Palestinians and perhaps predictable responses by an occupying army and settlement population. Thousands of Palestinians and Israelis have died in these clashes; more and more Palestinian land has been confiscated and turned into Jewish-only areas. The land that was supposed to be divided into two states, Israel in its pre-1967 borders and Palestine in eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, has been a war zone between Israel and Palestine and a constant geopolitical irritant on the international scene.

In short, the theological commentary on the Holocaust and its aftermath was born and has lived within a military struggle that continues to this day. The question of God and empowerment can be asked on the theoretical level; the lessons of the Holocaust fill volumes that are published more frequently today than decades ago. Still, the theoretical discussion has been tried through fire on both sides of the divide, in the Holocaust obviously, but also in the lost lives and dreams of Jews and Palestinians. The latest Palestinian uprisings that began in 2000 that featured, on the one hand, Israel's use of helicopter gunships in the occupied territories and, on the other, Palestinian suicide bombers within the pre-1967 borders of Israel, bring the theoretical to a practical reality. The question now, at least for Jews, is what to do now after the Holocaust and after Israel.[6]

The phrase *after the Holocaust* is now clearly understood. The Holocaust as a formative event in Jewish and world history has

changed our understanding in a variety of areas. It remains, and appropriately so, a permanent warning of what human beings will do to other human beings when they are defined outside of the protection of the state and the dominant religious and cultural sensibility. No people should ever be too strong or too weak, and thus they would avoid the temptation of aggression or submission. Intervention on behalf of the weaker party is mandatory before the situation escalates into genocide or Holocaust.

But what happens when the formerly weak, harassed, and murdered people gain power, expand that power, occupy another nation, settle on its land, and seek to destroy its capacity to organize and define itself as a political entity? Then what if all of this is done in the name of the victims of the Holocaust, in the name of self-defense, fulfilling what everyone agrees upon—never again?

Adding to the complexity, the new and expanding state is inhabited—through settlement—by a people who has suffered dispersion for millennia, has a battered but continuous, intact, and recognized religiosity, culture, and ethnicity. This people claims a biblical right to "return" to the land of their fathers. Having recently experienced horrendous, almost unimaginable suffering, this people is returning from the West, mostly Europe, to an area of the world trying to free itself of the malignancy of Western colonialism, the proponents of which are dispersing the indigenous people of the land and claiming land, cultural, and religious rights over them. This complexity is exacerbated by the internal structure of this "returning" people as they also carry an internationalism, an anticolonial sensibility, as well as a rigorously developed, highly original ethical compass that, while honed through a travail of suffering, actually was part of the birth of their religious and political journey—the prophetic.

The people who returned to the land were, in their origins, slaves; their very birth called forth a God of liberation who led them to leave the empire of Egypt behind and bid them to construct a community of justice and equality. This community was indeed in the land but carried a special series of warnings about the recreation of the structures of empire within their community and among those that preceded them in the land. The warnings represent another level of analysis that accompanies the lessons of the Holocaust. Diminished and placed in question, the biblical canon of ancient Israel continues to provide strength to contemporary Jews and haunts them as well. Could the return to a place of security and hope within the ancient birthplace of

the people Israel be thwarted by policies of injustice toward others in the land, the Palestinians, so that even a significant minority of the Jewish people must protest this homecoming as a fundamental violation of the entire Jewish ethical tradition?

The Challenge of Liberation *After*

Initially, my study with Rubenstein was completely oriented around the Holocaust and the questions he raised through and around the event. The possibility that the God of history was no longer believable or, out of ethical concerns, should be rejected, concerned me. Rubenstein's understanding that the Jewish covenant was irretrievably broken was somehow even more distressing. The continuity of Jewish life seemed in jeopardy. In the main, I read Wiesel through Rubenstein's eyes and, though fierce and bitter rivals, I resonated with Wiesel's style of lament. It yielded a feeling of attachment to a God and tradition that was efficacious in the past and somehow was still available or could be one day. While Rubenstein was direct and analytical, pursuing the logic of his understandings with a precise and unyielding rationality, Wiesel appealed to a world of hurt and pain for a solace that, while not immediately forthcoming, might one day be available—as it was in the past.

Their respective analyses of Israel followed the rhetorical patterns they established in their post-Holocaust understanding of God and the people. Rubenstein was hard and fast; Israel was a place of protection and power. While Wiesel did not disagree, his sense again was softer. Israel was a response to the Holocaust, a dream in light of the nightmare of the Holocaust, its power generated through the ages of Jewish history rather than sheer military might. At some point, perhaps soon, that might would be transformed into the messianic dream of peace, justice, and earth. Rubenstein demurred and railed against the mystical and the hope that history might turn a corner and become the peaceable Kingdom it had never been. Arming Israel was an obligation and necessary forever. If the Holocaust means anything, it is the rejection of this dream and the hope of rescue from the drama of history. For Rubenstein, Jews have one of two choices: either be on the victorious side of the cycle of violence and atrocity or be defeated by it.

The Palestinians played a peculiar place in both Rubenstein's and Wiesel's writings, a place defined mostly by their absence which, paradoxically, spoke volumes. For Rubenstein, the creation of Israel

and the dispersion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians out of their homes and locality could be considered by them an injustice. They could even protest and organize against their displacement. He understood and accepted this grievance. History and the Jewish need, however, overrode this injustice. After the Holocaust, moral concerns had to be peripheral to our needs. Our power was our need; its use required neither justification nor compromise. Moral questions only weakened our resolve. After the Holocaust, to be weak was to court defeat and another Holocaust.[7]

Wiesel took another tack. For the most part in Wiesel's work, Palestinians, as with Rubenstein, exist as a silent other. When mentioned, they are uncomprehending of ancient and recent Jewish history; if aware, they would accept Israel with open arms. Their lack of consciousness allows them to see Israel as a settler and conquering state, whereas Wiesel sees Jews as only in search of sanctuary and peace. The fighting between Israelis and Palestinians does not emerge from the Jewish search for power and Palestinian resistance to displacement and occupation, but rather is a fundamental misunderstanding that can be solved when Palestinians stop rejecting a state project that benefits all of humanity including the Palestinians. Despite the Holocaust and in contradiction to Rubenstein, Jews do not see the world as fundamentally divided between those who have and do not have power. Israel thus may stand as a moral force and Jews are innocent in their suffering and their empowerment. Israel represents a breaking of the cycle that Rubenstein sees as pivotal to world history. Why would Palestinians resist this?

So it went, the analytical and lyrical, in the 1960s and 1970s, with a distinctly filtered message from the Arab and Palestinian world that confronted Rubenstein and Wiesel. Most Jews were content there, not knowing exactly what to think about Israel and the Palestinians, but also knowing that a fractured support for Israel might spell its doom. Within Rubenstein's and Wiesel's compelling frameworks, the ethical had difficulty gaining traction. Power and dream, wrapped in the banner of Jewish survival and identity, left little room for considered thinking and ethical reflection on the prophetic tradition and how it might apply to Jewish life after the Holocaust. Rubenstein's and Wiesel's narratives, accepted at a deep, emotional, almost primal level by the Jewish people, had little room for the prophetic critique of Jewish power. In short, their narratives, the mainstream Jewish narrative, could not envision life after Israel. After Israel meant another Holocaust.

Does this sentiment still hold true? Beyond sentiment, is it true that an engagement with Israeli power should be avoided by non-Jew and Jew alike? The twenty-first century is well under way. Is the situation of Jews in America and Israel analogous to our plight in the years around Nazi rule? Does a critique of Israeli transgressions against the Palestinians in the twenty-first century threaten a retrogression so that the Nazis of old will once again flourish?

With the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and settling of Palestinian land, and the suppression of the Palestinian uprising in the 1980s, I, with other Jews, began to think through the Holocaust again and the lessons it bequeathed to Jews and the world. The emergency years after the Holocaust had passed; Jews in America and Israel were now empowered and secure. Indeed the entire Jewish world was flourishing in a substantial and unparalleled way.[8]

Despite the fact that our security was established, Holocaust commentary continued to expand, time and again molding the terrible terrain of Jewish suffering and Israel as a response to that suffering. Jewish innocence was trumpeted over and over again and anyone who opposed Israeli policies, even while supporting the state itself, could only be on the wrong side of the Jewish narrative. In fact, those who dissented from Israeli policies were increasingly labeled as anti-Semitic; if Jewish, the dissenters were called self-haters.

Clearly this applied to Palestinians who dissented from the way they were being treated. Their grievance could not simply be political, the way any group or people would resent and resist occupation. Resistance was raised to an eschatological dimension. So too Christians and Jews who increasingly found Palestinian complaints to be justified, in need of a hearing and even action on their behalf. Again, the drama was lifted beyond the political; the prophetic, even when moderate, was deemed as threatening another Holocaust. The narrative of the Holocaust would change if in fact Jews, in their empowerment, could actually be called to account. The fear was that anything beyond the Holocaust threatened the purity of Jewish innocence and our own claim to the exercise of power without accountability.

It was becoming clear, however, that accountability was the issue. Accountability was needed everywhere; the claim that somehow the Jewish situation was different, always different, sought to distance Jews from this universal standard. The argument had to be joined yet the difficulty was ever present, since the Jewish situation had been

and was, if not totally so, certainly somewhat different. As it turns out, that difference limited and directed criticism in a particular way; the peculiar situation of the Jews in history needed to be recognized and the trenchant critique of the very prophetic, which the Jews gave to the world, needed to be applied.

As with the Holocaust, a new language was needed to fit the particularity of Jewish history and the unique situation of contemporary Jews, poised as they were between Holocaust and Israel. In some ways Jews were living within an ancient history as it was being played out in the contemporary drama of Holocaust and Israel. That ancient history bequeathed the Exodus and the prophets, the very narrative of liberation that was gripping the Christian theological world at this time. The Exodus and the prophetic had applied to Christian theology, say in Latin America and among African Americans in the United States—the poor and disenfranchised. Did they still apply to Jews and the state of Israel *after*?

Within the decades since the 1967 war, I began noticing another transformation in the Jewish community. The political and cultural in America was becoming more and more conservative, taking on the label neoconservative. This transformation was startling, a drift in the Jewish world from a more liberal sensibility that I had grown up with; it would have a tremendous impact on American political life in the domestic and foreign policy realms. Was this neoconservatism also a product of the new centrality of the Holocaust and Israel to Jewish identity?

Neoconservatism makes sense within the Jewish journey from weakness to power but still, again with the inherited ethical tradition, the limits of such a drift could be qualified. The equation seemed to go like this: American power guarantees Israel's security; Jews are empowered in the United States; Jewish power here keeps the foreign policy of the United States focused on Israel as a strategic asset; the Jewish establishment has to reeducate mainstream Jews to this neoconservatism; so as to show some continuity with the Jewish ethical tradition, neoconservatism has to demonstrate how liberalism has abandoned this tradition, becoming radicalized even to the point of criticizing too harshly the economic, political, and military system that protects Jews in America and protects Israel—especially in a world that was increasingly hostile to Jewish interests, again, especially with regard to Israel.[9]

There *was* in fact increasing criticism of Israel across the board, and not only in the Arab world and Third World. Increasingly global

institutions like the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, as well as human rights organizations, were paying more and more attention to the plight of the Palestinians. The spell of the 1967 war was dissipating, yet the Israeli occupation and settlement of Palestinian territory continued apace. Secure within its own borders, Israel's reasons for occupation and its pretense that the occupation was only continuing because of Palestinian intransigence, could no longer be upheld. In the global arena, Israel felt a sense of isolation. In the end, on many issues, Israel was supported only by the United States. In return, America could count on Israel's vocal and often military support in areas of the world where it was difficult for the United States to deliver arms or training, sometimes because of divided public opinion or congressional mandates.

Thus mutual support turned into a symbiotic relationship until it was difficult for other countries to know where Israel started and America ended. Jewish neoconservatives began to ask whether Jewish criticism of American foreign policy—indeed criticism of America from any corner of the world—could be a form of self-hate and anti-Semitism. The label for this trend in the world was the new anti-Semitism, an anti-Semitism that moved individual and even collective prejudice against Jews to institutions that were critical of Jewish empowerment and the use of power by the United States.

In truth, the Jewish establishment was turning a major corner in Jewish history on a variety of fronts, not the least being the adoption of the model that Christianity had developed since it moved from a small persecuted and marginal group to inherit the keys of the earthly Kingdom—the empire Constantine ruled. In the fourth century and beyond, Constantinian Christianity pioneered the alliance of religion and the state, trading its criticism of power and its way of life that contravened the acceptable norms of its time, to become the normative faith and lifestyle of the empire. For the support of the state, Christianity was given a monopoly on religion and favors that allowed it to expand its reach. It was given carte blanche as long as it returned the favor to the state; thus the church had the freedom to monopolize religion, and the blessing of the church would be conferred upon matters properly within the purview of the state. In exchange, the Church would be silent on matters of the state.

Judaism was now doing the same thing; a Constantinian Judaism was forming that, on the one hand, demanded the freedom of Jewish identity and pursuit of Jewish interests and, on the other, promised an

intellectual and economic support of the American government as it pursued conservative domestic and foreign policy goals. Still, the liberal veneer continued to be present; how else to convince the Jewish community to follow a conservative lead?[10] The job of the Constantinian Jewish establishment was to convince the Jewish community that liberalism had lost its way; its radicalization left Jews in America and Israel especially exposed to political currents that were anti-Semitic. Involved here was the job of convincing Jewish intellectuals and ordinary Jews that their very well-being was being undermined by radicalized liberal agenda that sought to universalize Jewish particularity out of existence.

The other job was to convince these same Jews that those Jews who dissented from Constantinian Judaism were not really Jews at all. Or they were Jews, like others previously, who had not seen the Holocaust coming and were disarming the Jewish community in the present so that another threat like the Nazis could overrun the people Israel. Constantinian Jews, having learned the lessons of the Holocaust, were strong Jews. Jewish dissenters had missed those lessons, therefore repeating the same mistakes Jews had made before. They were leading the people astray and had to be disciplined, exposed, ridiculed.

Two transformations were taking place: first, an awakening to the fact that Israel and the Jewish community in America were no longer innocent and that a new post-Holocaust language of dissent was needed; second, that the Jewish community and Israel were moving toward a Constantinian Judaism, a way of being Jewish that made dissent among Jews and non-Jews even more difficult. The division in the Jewish community would widen even more in the coming years, emerging as a kind of civil war among Jews. Still by the mid-1980s, the various sides were already forming and the language of each was coming into its own.

It is within this context that a Jewish theology of liberation was born, the first article on that theme being published in 1984, and the first book on the subject, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation,* was published in 1987. By 1989 a second edition of the book was published with a postscript titled "The Palestinian Uprising and the Future of the Jewish People." In less than a decade the main themes of that theology were already set; their relevance increased over the years so that a third and expanded edition was published in 2004.[11]

A Jewish theology of liberation emerged within the context of the post-Holocaust world and the continuing conflict of Israel and the Pales-

tinians. But another context was the world of liberation theology itself, primarily a Christian and Third World theology with North America contributing African American, Latino/a, and feminist variations. In general the world of liberation theology was the theology of the poor, marginalized, and neglected sectors and peoples of the world—and thus most of the world—in search of respect, recognition, material sustenance, and justice. The have-nots were now speaking to the haves about exclusion, enslavement, and murder in history and the present. Christian liberation theologies argued for a confession from the exploiters and justice for the exploited, all placed in the Christian paradigm of liberation. However, since Christianity had often been an engine of oppression—for many of the peoples in need of liberation Christianity had been an agent of colonial and imperial oppressive language that articulated Christianity as liberating was desperately needed.

Such a language was found in the Exodus and the prophets of the Hebrew Bible; Jesus was liberated from the captivity of colonial Christianity by placing him in the line of the prophets. Thus liberation theologians explored the foreground of Jesus as a prophet rather than his lineage as proof of his messianic line. Of course as Christians the belief in Jesus as Messiah was affirmed. Still the distinction was crucial. The messianic Jesus, understood in a static and otherworldly way, was paved by Constantinian Christianity, the progenitor of Christendom. Liberation theology wanted to move beyond both forms of Christianity to a prophetic Christianity that served the poor and marginalized rather than the state and power.

A Jewish theology of liberation also appealed to the Hebrew Bible, this as its primary focus, but the confrontation was different. A Jewish theology of liberation confronted a history of violence and massacre against Jews that culminated in the mass murder of six million Jews during the middle of the twentieth century, in the middle of Christian Europe. On the one hand, Jews were and are suspicious of a revived Christianity in any form, Christians being the primary oppressors of Jews in history; on the other hand, Jews now live safely in America, which is primarily populated with Christians, but still as a distinct minority. On the other, within that situation of living among Christians whose attitudes toward Jews have changed substantially and for the good, the lives of Jews have undergone a massive transformation. Once pariahs, now Jews are prized and full citizens of America and Europe. At the same time, and for the first time in two thousand years, Jews have their own state and army.

So, liberated after the Holocaust and living peacefully and flourishing among their former enemies—but also using empowerment to secure their situation—Jews are faced with almost an opposite situation than most who practice liberation theology. Coming from a history of oppression and just recently emerging from the death camps—and now finally empowered—Jews are now oppressing others in Palestine, using their newfound power in America to solidify their status as important elites to be cultivated, and participating fully in the upper echelons of American society. In short, the liberation of Jews is shadowed by past suffering and the use of empowerment, as perhaps any group uses empowerment, to solidify elite status and keep others, including those in need of liberation, from disturbing or displacing Jews from that position.

The question, then, for Jews is not empowerment; what impoverished and marginalized community would turn its back on this opportunity? The challenge is liberation within empowerment. Has our arrival as Jews in America and Israel liberated us or is there a new enslavement to power itself? Having survived Constantinian Christianity, does it bode well for Jews to develop and embrace a Constantinian Judaism? Though the symbolic configuration of Constantinian Christianity and Constantinian Judaism may differ, is the practice of each faith in that similar form different? What does it mean to survive a religion and a state that uses that religion to justify exclusion and murder and then to adopt it, albeit with a different name and symbol structure? Being without power after the Holocaust may be risking physical suicide. Is the use of power against others a form of moral suicide?

But then, the history of marginalization and death cannot be swept aside easily. Nor can the world be trusted so quickly. Sometimes exaggerated and often used as polemical rhetoric, anti-Semitism is a reality. Are Jews caught between realpolitik and ethics? Is there a need to choose one over the other? Can both be chosen, navigating the world of power and ethics? Or does the choice of one preclude the other? The offer of solidarity to oppressed groups is taking a risk. Would they in power continue to honor Jews and, if need be, protect them?

Theologies of liberation from the Christian side trust in the power of God to, alongside their efforts, liberate them. In essence they believe in the liberating power of the Exodus God. The experience of the Holocaust makes this belief extremely difficult for Jews. Whether or not Christians on the margins should believe in this God is certainly

a question. After all, though Jesus may be with the poor and oppressed of the Third World, it seems that their worldly situation continues to deteriorate.

It seems that their very belief in a liberating God further cautions Jews against these movements of liberation and even the suggestion that such a God might return to Jewish consciousness. It may be that this fear is rooted in the critique that the prophets would bring against Jews in their empowerment—a constant refrain of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The God of liberation is suspect on a variety of fronts; God's absence during the Holocaust and God's critique of unjust power are two strikes against him in contemporary Jewish life. If Jews did follow God on the question of justice, would God protect Jews if we experienced another round of persecution, even at the hands of liberated Christians?

For Jews, the challenge of liberation *after* is complicated—by our history, our God, our power, and Christianity. Still, a Jewish theology of liberation cannot be silent. Its argument for justice for the Palestinians alongside Israel, its plea to recognize and work with the marginal of the world, the critique of Constantinian Christianity, even the suggestion of another look at God, struck the Jewish community like a tidal wave. On the one side were Constantinian Jews, those who opposed a Jewish theology of liberation as if it was a heresy with murderous possibilities, and on the other side were progressive Jews who embodied parts of the liberation message in their own lives.

In the end, however, and as the situation worsened, even progressive Jews could not bridge the divide to a Jewish theology of liberation. That was left to another group of Jews, Jews of Conscience, that emerged in the wake of a second Palestinian uprising that began in 2000. A few years later, the Wall inside and around the West Bank began to be built. For some this Wall was one of security and separation; for Jews of Conscience it is an apartheid or ghetto wall. Jewish history had come full circle.

Jews of Conscience: Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation for the Twenty-first Century

With all the twists and turns of Jewish history, the question remains for every generation. What does it mean to be faithful as a Jew in our time? Jews are empowered; a Constantinian Judaism is at hand. Progressive Jews have argued within the context of Holocaust and

empowerment for a more ethical Judaism in our time. Over the last decades they have opposed the expansion of Israel into Palestinian territories and have confronted the increasingly conservative politics of the mainstream Jewish community. Most recently they have endorsed the Geneva Accords that seek a compromise between Israeli expansionism and Palestinian rights to self-determination and nationhood and opposed the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the wake of September 11, progressive Jews have spoken forcefully against terrorism while at the same time asking difficult questions about conditions that create terrorism.

Still their critiques come from the perspective of power as they seek to negotiate the terrain of mainstream Judaism. Because of this their analyses have often been less than forthright. Too often they have been patronizing, invoking the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust as a necessity for Palestinians to understand and, to some extent, use to orient their lives and politics. Too, their new age sensibility and appeal to a politics of healing blunts the prophetic critique of injustice.

Over the years, especially with regard to criticism of Israel, progressive Jews have often blocked the critique that they later, under force of circumstance, adopted. In doing so, progressive Jews have actually held back the process of thought and action that may have made a difference in confronting Israeli power. Their timidity and fear has therefore been part of the displacement of the Palestinians. In 2000 this judgment became clear as the violence of Israeli policies in the West Bank in particular was met by violence on the Palestinian side. Many progressive Jews who opposed the violence of the Israeli military were also scandalized by Palestinian armed resistance. Suicide bombings galvanized a significant portion of Jewish progressives to conclude that Palestinians did not want to live in peace side-by-side with Israel. Thus they left the progressive Jewish community and joined forces with those who believed that only might and strict separation of Jews and Palestinians could work in the future. The memory of the Holocaust weighed in here; Jews had to be first concerned with our own safety and security and only after that could considerations of justice be permitted.[12]

This break within the progressive Jewish community raises the question of liberation for the future. Have Jews, even with concerns for justice, gone deeply enough into the history of the formation of the Jewish state in 1948? Were Jews innocent in the formation of Israel and do Palestinians need to affirm Jewish claims to the land because of

the Holocaust or because of the Bible? The expansion of Israel and the building of the Wall within the West Bank seem permanent, the Wall itself becoming the final borders of the expanded state. Are negotiations to take place within that context or do Jews need to argue for a force, whether moral, political, economic, or military, to push Israel back to the pre-1967 borders of Israel?

Critique from the Jewish ethical tradition has been ongoing for decades; it has been powerless to stop Israeli expansion. It has also been powerless to stop the neoconservative drift of Constantinian Judaism. What is the reason for this failure? Is the Jewish ethical tradition itself flawed or does it need to be abandoned in favor of some other moral impulse? Is the Constantinian Judaism of today the *real* Judaism while dissenters are new imposters? Or is the reverse true?

These questions themselves are deep and engaging, their answers elusive. Jews of Conscience at least try to approach them with vigor and honesty. At this point in Jewish history, everything is on the line. If in fact a new form of Judaism is developing, a Constantinian Judaism, will it be embraced by future generations of Jews? For those Jews who cannot embrace Constantinian Judaism, will their children identify themselves as Jews? The prophetic is the great gift to the world of the people Israel. If we cease to carry it, does the prophetic lose its foundation and therefore disappear? Or does the prophetic survive in other movements, including Christian theologies of liberation? Will Christian liberation theology preserve the prophetic and thus make it available to future generations of Jews?

Over time, as the legacy of the Holocaust and the Jewish prophetic tradition recede, can Judaism actually project itself to the world? Israel, Judaism, and Jews have always articulated Jewish identity within the concept of difference. Though this identity is still asserted even by the Constantinian Jewish establishment, time is ticking away and the historical markers of difference, especially in ethical critique and practice, are becoming more and more difficult to distinguish. Does the world have the right to take these claims at face value and demand this of Jews in reality? Or would this be considered anti-Jewish? Are Jews of Conscience reasserting this difference *after* the Holocaust and *after* Israel?

Indeed, Jews of Conscience do ask difficult questions about the Holocaust and Israel. Regarding the lessons of the Holocaust, they reaffirm the dual sensibility first surfaced by the original Holocaust theologians: never again to the Jewish people and never again to any

people. Yet they mean not just the Holocaust, because concern for suffering should not be limited to the ultimate horrors. Indeed the memory of the Holocaust has too often constrained Jewish action on behalf of others. Nor is the comparison of the suffering of others to the Holocaust the litmus test for Jewish participation in the struggle against violence and atrocity. Rather, the Holocaust behooves Jews and others to fight all injustice, wherever it is.

There are no free passes when it comes to these issues—even the heirs to the Holocaust event, perhaps especially these, must be on guard against practices that are unjust. Injustice in the name of the Holocaust, used as a banner of unaccountability while claiming innocence, denigrates the victims in whose names the community acts. Though comparisons of other events of suffering to the Holocaust diminish the enormity of the event, the use of the Holocaust to pursue unjust policies trivializes it. As Irving Greenberg wrote, "The victims ask us above all not to allow the creation of another matrix of values that might sustain another attempt at genocide" (Fleishner, 1977:29). For Jews of Conscience, they also ask that we do not use the memory of the victims to cause further suffering.

The Holocaust thus stands as formative but in an almost reverse relationship to the Holocaust commentaries that have become normative for the Jewish community. Thus Emil Fackenheim's 614th commandment, issued by him after the 1967 war, that the "authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another posthumous victory"—a commandment that counsels Jewish empowerment so as to survive and flourish after Hitler's demise—is countered by the 615th commandment: "Thou shalt not demean, denigrate or dislocate the Palestinian people" (Fackenheim, 1970:84).

A more positive way of placing both commandments in a constructive forward momentum is to command that both Jews and Palestinians embark on a relationship of trust, seeking justice and forgiveness so that after this difficult history both peoples can find their own individual destiny as well as their shared destiny. After all, as enemies, the victor and victim are locked in a mortal struggle that denies both the rhythms and pleasures of ordinary life. Is there another way? Could the sharing of Jerusalem—the broken middle of Israel and Palestine—propel both on a journey of revolutionary forgiveness? (Ellis, 2004a:271–85).

Jews of Conscience ask how this can happen when the *fait accompli* is the annexation of Jerusalem, the building of the Wall within the

West Bank, the projected unilateral declaration of borders that make a real Palestinian state impossible. Yet this question begs others, including a deeper understanding of and reflection about the very creation of the state of Israel. Here, even in these emergency years after the Holocaust, there is a reckoning. A Jewish state may indeed have been necessary; could it justify the displacement of seven to eight thousand Palestinians from their villages, towns, and cities?

Recently, Meron Benvenisti, the Israeli political commentator, historian, and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, described the displacement of the Palestinians in 1948 and after as an act of ethnic cleansing. That Jews have done such things does not distinguish us from many other peoples and nation-states—the "founding" of America is another of many examples; still it removes the sense of innocence that we sometimes wear as a badge of honor. Whatever one can say about the Jewish state, it was not created without horror, violence, and bloodshed. Jewish empowerment was not innocent.[13]

Today, long after those emergency years have come to an end, a possibility emerges to reconcile the violence, to confess it and begin again. Instead Israel has expanded steadily for decades, pushing more and more Palestinians aside, demolishing their homes, expropriating their land and, at the same time, placing Jewish settlements and settlers where Palestinians once were. Can this be explained or justified by the Holocaust? Or is this simply another example in history of those with more power taking the land of those with less power? Again, it is no worse than others but certainly not above critique; it is definitely not an example of innocence.

Raising these questions does not hinder the juggernaut of Israeli power. Nor does it seem to affect the American Constantinian establishment, but just the opposite. The policies of expropriation and expansion continue unabated, as does the defense of these policies. The labeling of Jewish and non-Jewish protestors as self-hating Jews and anti-Semites continues as well. The progressive Jewish establishment continues to seek dialogue with those who support and deflect criticism from these policies, often compromising their critique to seek converts from the powerful. Since this has not worked and also because it often softens the criticism to the point where culpability is more or less removed, should Jews of Conscience separate themselves from both groups? In essence, should Jews of Conscience abandon dialogue with mainstream and progressive Jews as a waste of time and effort, fearing cooptation as a price to win the coveted label of a good Jew?

The argument for justice within empowerment is difficult, especially in light of Jewish history. Still, even within this conundrum, the question of what it can mean to be Jewish while practicing injustice remains. The difficulty deepens: where are the resources to choose justice as a critique of our newfound power? Even if Jews of Conscience challenge the primary emphasis of Holocaust theology—never again to the Jewish people—and raise its corollary—never again to any people—to an equal status, the specifically theological questions stemming from the Holocaust cannot be ignored.

Christian liberation theology often asserts, perhaps too easily, that God is among the poor, for the poor, and working for their liberation. This emphasis on the Exodus paradigm is difficult if not impossible to assert in the face of recent Jewish history. Just the opposite, some Jews see the Exodus paradigm with reference to the emergence of the state of Israel; they see the Holocaust as a time of slavery, Israel as a time that responds to the cries of the people and liberates them. Holocaust theologians do not move overtly in this direction. To them, Israel is a human, not divine, response to Jewish weakness in the Holocaust. For the most part, Jews of Conscience also speak in human terms. The tradition speaks about ethics; Jews of Conscience embody this tradition. Still, their movement is against the grain of the community.

A typical and normal response to the Holocaust is self-empowerment without concern for the Other. Going against the grain in any community is difficult. With the stakes so high, specific resources seem to be needed to imitate and then sustain what amounts to a counterintuitive sensibility. This, with power arrayed against them, demands a similar array of resources for Jews of Conscience to have the courage for a sustained struggle against the powers that be.

The Prophetic With/out God

In a strange twist of fate, the people who gave God to the world are now without God. Or, perhaps more accurately stated, the people who gave God to the world have lost the ability to articulate God's presence. That loss is understandable: if God chose the people of Israel as God's people and promised to be with us, if God is indeed a God of history, where was God in the Holocaust? If God is the Lord of all history, where has God been in the suffering of all, then and now, in the Holocaust, but also in the genocides in the Americas after 1492, in the twentieth century after the Holocaust in Cambodia, Rwanda, and now

Darfur? Perhaps the loss of the ability to articulate a God of concern and justice should not be consigned to the Jews. Does this ongoing and unremitting history of suffering also chasten the bold claims of Christian theologies of liberation to name God an efficacious and liberating God?

Surely the naming of God is less important than action on behalf of justice. This is one of the lessons of the Holocaust. The very lack of action on behalf of Jews, coupled with the piety of the surrounding Christian culture, also implicate religion and its naming of God. One conclusion, drawn from the Jewish tradition and Christian theologies of liberation, is that the naming of a God that does nothing to motivate believers to sacrifice on behalf of justice represents idolatry. Thus today, those Christians who allow the Holocaust, perhaps even laid the groundwork for it through their demonizing of Jews, were worshiping a false God. But then, Jews who cannot speak of God may ask a corollary question: Is the God of history so prominent in the Hebrew Bible a failed God in light of the Holocaust, and perhaps also a false God? Christians, worshiping a false God of discrimination and anti-Semitism, laid the groundwork for the Holocaust. Were Jews who held fast to the true God who would rescue them from their enemies also worshiping a false God, an idol that consisted of wishful thinking and a misplaced hope?

Of course the biblical witness and the tradition that emerges from the Bible is complex with regard to God. Contemporary liberation thought is also complex. In the later work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example, especially his work on the biblical Job and the sixteenth-century church dissident Bartolomé de las Casas, he pursues difficult questions about God. While Gutiérrez, who witnesses the ongoing suffering of his own Latin America people, does not deny the God of the Bible, the earlier certainty of his own liberation theology regarding who God is and what God is doing is compromised. At least Gutiérrez concedes that the liberation that God promises is difficult to discern, is beyond our lifetimes and knowledge. We should hesitate to name that liberation, or God for that matter, in definitive terms, as if our own naming is *the* naming.[14]

In the end, Gutiérrez is humbled by suffering and by God. He is left, like Job, with his own voice and the voice of God—a disharmonious harmony, an inconsistent blending of assertion, denial, questioning, and power. Job engages in dialogue with God, with himself and friends, with the suffering that is and is not only among others, and

with the earth and the universe that Job understands and that which is beyond his understanding. Even Gutiérrez's humility before the naming of God is of a different order than that of Jews of Conscience who hardly enter even a nuanced theological conversation. Still it seems that for Jews of Conscience a covenantal reality remains. This is true in Holocaust theology as well, though again the differences are crucial: in both, the Jewish partner remains steadfast even if God is no longer present or named. For Holocaust theology, the Jewish partner continues on, dedicated primarily to the survival of the Jewish people, thus focusing almost exclusively on empowerment. Jews of Conscience continue on as well; their focus is the ethical and moral survival of the Jewish witness. Here the prophetic is upheld and highlighted, becoming the center of Jewish commitment. This is contrary to Holocaust theology where the prophetic is downplayed and, in extreme cases, banished. If it remains alive at all it is concentrated on other issues that do not impact Jewish life or, rather the only issues that can be addressed in a prophetic style that reinforce Jewish power or deflect criticism away from it.

But the catch is here. The Jewish prophetic, illustrated in the Bible and found within the framework of the covenant, is not primarily about the other nations, for prophets are called to specifically and almost exclusively address Israel. The prophetic is internal, reminding Israel of its slavery, its deliverance, and its mission to create a new kind of society unlike the Egyptian society they had been slaves within. The prophets arise within the land that Israel has been brought into because they are not living the promise they gave to God. That promise is contained within the covenant and so the violation of the covenant is in some ways a violation of God. Jews of Conscience carry on the covenant insofar as they hold the people Israel to the justice Israel is called to in the Hebrew Bible. They do this without knowing, acknowledging, naming, or believing in that God. The drama of Israel's covenant is the mission of Israel, not of the outside world. That mission is the creation of community in a world of empire; empires, even and especially when Israel aspires to empire, are condemned. They represent a return to the empire that enslaved Israel and, as importantly, to the gods of Egypt, false gods, no-gods, the same gods that Israel is tempted to worship.

Is it better to name a God that is no-god? Or is Israel called first to be atheist toward the no-gods of Egypt? In the biblical drama, the strength to turn away from the false gods of Egypt is found in the dis-

covery of Yahweh, the true God, the God of Israel, the God of history, the God of Israel's liberation. Could Jews of Conscience have internalized God to such an extent, that though they are unable to name or affirm God after the Holocaust, the memory of God's presence remains and the covenant, again unnamed, remains? That the force of the covenant may be even greater because of the questions that the Holocaust raises about God? That the impetus for Jews to pursue justice in its internal life is even stronger precisely because of Jewish suffering, the memory of God's justice, and God's absence in the Holocaust?

The 614th commandment of Holocaust theology is a covenantal act of defiance and affirmation. It is defiance of the Nazis and their kin, defiance of the God who was not there. The affirmation is the carrying forth of the Jewish drama despite the odds, human and divine. The 615th commandment of Jews of Conscience is also a covenantal act of defiance and affirmation: defiance of the Nazis and the absent God, but also a refusal to allow the world of violence and atrocity to skew the fundamentals of the Jewish ethical tradition. The affirmation is a redoubling of the Jewish witness in the world as a prophetic vocation despite and because of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. To cause suffering to others is to join the nations; it is to assimilate to the Constantinian formulations of the world, the cause of suffering to so many in history, including Jews.

The New Diaspora

In some ways Jews of Conscience have come to the end of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it. *After* the Holocaust and *after* Israel—and what Israel with the backing of the Jewish establishment has done and is doing to the Palestinians—the Jewish ethical tradition has been tried and has failed. Its failure is no more and no less than the failures of other traditions. Thus it is clear to Christian liberation theologians that the ethical center of Christianity was gutted as it assumed its Constantinian character. This is true for Islam in its various Constantinian incarnations as well. Constantinianism is a part of any and every religion; the joining of religion and state challenges the ethics of any and all traditions. After the Constantinian phase, there is little if anything left. Renewal is a possibility but it is then in the shadow of the previous Constantinianism, renewal thus forever defined by an initial failure. What is more, the elements of Constantinianism continue far into the future. Once embarked upon, Constantinianism defines the

norms of religiosity; what it means to be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim is always contested and dissenters are defined as on the margins.

Perhaps we have reached a point where the designations of Jew, Christian, and Muslim need further identifiers—Constantinian Jew; Christian, Muslim, or Jew; Christian or Muslim of Conscience. Is there also something beyond this descriptor? Perhaps these descriptors hide the fact that those Jews who practice Constantinian Judaism and those who embrace being a Jew of Conscience, for example, are actually practicing different religions. Analyzed from another perspective, Constantinian Jews, Christians, and Muslims are practicing the same religion, albeit with different symbol structures. Might this be true for Jews, Christians, and Muslims of Conscience, as they, too, practice the same religion with a different symbol structure?

Another layer of religiosity and practice needs to be explored here as well. Constantinian religiosity always sees its symbol structure and truth claims as intact, firm, and beyond dispute. Religious people of conscience know that their symbols and truth claims are in fragments, contested, compromised by power and chastened by suffering. The central question—perhaps the central religious question throughout history—is whether we as individuals and as communities move toward empire or toward community. Constantinianism moves toward empire and carries the certainty of empire; conscience moves toward community with the vulnerability and the constant search for a broader inclusion this entails. Thus the relationship between and among the various Constantinian establishments of our day is defined by various orthodoxies; the relationship between various communities of conscience is defined by action and compassion with those marginalized and the violated.

The very movement of conscience itself breaks down barriers, including the barriers of symbols and truth claims. It could be that new diaspora has been forming—perhaps is already formed but existing without articulation—that contains within it people of conscience from different religions and cultures. Jews of Conscience are there but they are not alone. Together with others of conscience, Jews carry their fragmented tradition into a new community. Since in this community no one overarching symbol structure or truth claim is recognized, Jews will be, along with others, carrying their own fragmented traditions with them.

Of course, Jews of Conscience, as Christians and Muslims of Conscience, are in exile from their own communities. They are also

together in a new community that is not entirely their own. In exile, then, they are entering a new diaspora, a diaspora that is their new home. It is where the expression of their deepest longings will be realized and tested. It is where their quest for liberation, so frustrated in their own original community, will again be expressed and tested.

5

ISLAM

—Irfan A. Omar

In the twentieth century, Western technology and scientific advancement were promoted to an unprecedented degree for the purpose of bringing about an equal distribution of its fruits. But in actuality, it was only an extension of the previous Western modes of hegemony and domination of the Third World (the "two-thirds world"). Scientific achievements of the West were being utilized, according to Herbert Marcuse, "to serve the interests of continued domination." Thus only "the modes of domination have changed: they have become increasingly technological, productive, and even beneficial" (1955:vii). When Marcuse wrote these words the economic globalization had not yet fully revealed its face, resulting in an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. In the twenty-first century this objective of "continued domination" by some Western entities has become manifest at all levels of human existence: environmental, economic, sociopolitical, and increasingly cultural.

At the same time, in the twenty-first century, it is futile to speak of the "West" (primarily understood in cultural terms) or even the "North" (understood in economic terms) as well as their opposites because these terms have lost a good deal of meaning. Today the West and North are found everywhere; they exist not only within their own historically claimed domains but also within the heart of their polar opposites, the "East" and the "South." The rapid dissemination of Western culture through the mass media and the concentration

of economic power through the globalized reach of the corporations have penetrated many other cultures, societies, and markets. These two have established themselves as a set of normative global cultural and economic patterns, demanding that all other systems must give way. Globalization has taken over.

It is pertinent to speak of liberation theology as a phenomenon that has manifested and reappropriated itself in many parts of the "two-thirds world" as a response to these systemic and structural processes. It is of particular importance to understand the different ideologies and movements that have provided a medium for such manifestations and reappropriations. Religion has played a key role in many such movements. While Latin American struggles were first framed in the context of Marxism and Christianity, the struggles in the Middle East and North Africa began in experimentation with westernization, secularism, socialism, and Arab nationalism, culminating in various forms of religious resurgence. Islam became the channel through which resistance and resurgence, revivalism and discontent were expressed. Islam undoubtedly remains one such powerful medium in the contemporary world. Today such struggles and challenges have lost all sense of geography and ethnic alliances. Today's liberation struggles cut across national boundaries, as well as political and sectarian divides, and are marked by conflicts which are both internal—among Muslim groups, as well as external—between Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

In the period after the cold war until the events of September 11, 2001, the Western political talking heads and some policy makers in both the legislative as well as the executive branches of government regarded Islam as the next "enemy" of the United States and the Western world. The earlier threat posed by the Soviet Union, which no longer existed, had been replaced by Islam. It was argued that Islam was a challenge not only to Western economic interests but also to its cultural interests, which are in the end one and the same. The alleged manifestations of these so-called challenges have been reported in many Western countries, such as France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom, for in these countries, due to incidents involving Muslims, the issue of cultural differences has been raised in racial and ethnic terms.[1] The story of Islam in the West continues to be written with earnest speed, and more so now than ever before. With Western/American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and the impending designs for Iran, the geopolitical focus on both Islam as a religious tradition and the Muslim societies continues to be a source of anxiety and unease

for many Muslims, especially those Muslims who are part of the West (even though they may not necessarily be located *in* the "West").

In a post-September 11 world, the situation has worsened for many Muslims as they increasingly come under suspicion for being who they are. The countless attacks on Islam and Muslims have put many on the defensive. But as modes of oppression change as well as increase, so do the forms of resistance. In recent years, Muslims in the United States in particular have become proactive in seeking to engage in dialogue across all levels of the social, religious, and political landscape. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue has caught on in many communities and better awareness of their political rights is being disseminated through civil rights and community organizations across North America. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges facing Muslims worldwide is to continue to engage in liberationist forms of struggle against bigotry both from within and without.

The Universality of the Theme of Liberation: A Broader View

The term *liberation theology* arose within the context of a Christian struggle that sought to revive the human-centered values within a highly ritualized and particular world of Christianity. Thus applying the term to discuss the same phenomenon in other religions is problematic at best. However, the crux of what liberation theology stands for—the search for and revival of the liberative principles that place human beings at the center of religious discourse, and the struggle associated with these—is part and parcel of all religious movements. Even as the Latin American liberation theology was taking roots, African and Asian countries witnessed their own forms of resistance movements—i.e., the struggles against the colonial domination of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus the phenomenon that liberation theology refers to has always been present in many societies and has often been expressed through religious symbols and activism. Even in their origins, the world's major religious traditions themselves arose out of a fundamental need for human liberation from whatever it was that displaced the people involved; be it spiritual decadence, economic greed, racial prejudice, cultural and political imperialism, lust for power, or simply the forces of the ego marshaled against the very core of human morality.

Historically, Islam also began as a liberationist movement in seventh-century Arabia where tribal customs had created a hierarchi-

cal social structure which systematically discriminated against people of other races and classes and even against those from other tribes. Slavery and patriarchy were the defining characteristics of that society in which Muhammad, the founder of Islam lived, and although a few women of power were able to assert their rights, a vast majority of women did not have any recourse to justice in a male-dominated power structure, living in a gendered hierarchy with fewer possibilities for exercising their individual freedoms. Similarly, as Prophet Muhammad's movement, based on the revelatory event, grew, its monotheistic message was determined by the ruling establishment of the city of Makkah to be a threat to their economic and social interests. The freedom to believe in and live according to an alternative worldview, other than the unjust system perpetrated by the hierarchy at the time, was not granted. Instead, Muhammad and his followers had to endure persecution and hardships on account of their peaceful movement which sought to establish a just and equitable society, and which ultimately stressed the notion of "struggle" (*jihad*) for freedom to practice one's faith. This struggle was carried out through nonviolent resistance to persecution: with patience, fortitude, and steadfastness, as the Qur'an demanded its followers to do.

In the first phase of Prophet Muhammad's ministry (610–622 C.E.), the struggle on behalf of Islam did not involve any violent response to persecution; once the level of persecution reached unbearable levels, however, and when the Prophet and many of his followers were forced to migrate out of their native city of Makkah and moved to Madinah, divine sanction was given to take up arms, and even then, only to defend their lives and their freedom to practice their religion. The paradigm of struggle and resistance to injustice established by Prophet Muhammad and his early followers was clearly a movement of liberation. Many other Islamic movements developed in later centuries have attempted to follow that prophetic paradigm, and together these have become important sources of inspiration for many contemporary Muslim liberation struggles.

Many twentieth-century Islamic movements had their roots in their experience of being the target of Western hegemonic adventures in the Muslim world in general, and the Middle East in particular. These experiences of course are built upon and sometimes draw succor from the memories of the previous three centuries of colonial and postcolonial enterprise. Increasingly though there have emerged a number of liberation movements, even "theologies" in a sense because they

do acknowledge the divine dispensation in how and what they set out to achieve. Thus one can speak of a Palestinian theology of liberation which began as a "nonviolent" intifada in the 1980s but has taken on various manifestations since then. One could also consider the liberation struggles of many communities living in African and Asian countries to cope with the realities of economic and cultural globalization. In more ways than one, globalization has uprooted traditional forms of social and economic structures and has quite successfully shaken indigenous moral and religious systems, often replacing them with the Hollywood version of the "good," the "bad," and the "ugly."

In addition, myriad smaller movements within Islam seek to liberate from within. These are the Muslim reformist movements working to alleviate the age-old tensions between the polarized views on a host of issues, from women's rightful place in Muslim societies and in the religious hierarchy, to theorizations of an appropriate political and economic configuration of a Muslim state. Many such movements and struggles are being carried out in all parts of the world from Afghanistan to the United States, from Denmark to South Africa. At the same time, there is an attempt to construct an overarching unified struggle that all Muslims are beginning to feel part of due to an incredible amount of Islamophobic activities which have emerged since the horrifying terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The level of prejudice and biased attacks against Islam and Muslims are now quite well known in public and are often tolerated at the highest levels of civil society in some Western countries. All Muslims face this common struggle regardless of their particularized situations.[2] In fact, this struggle goes beyond any specific religious, cultural, and ethnic divide; it poses a challenge to all concerned with basic human rights and freedoms.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss these and other various forms of Islamic/Muslim liberation theologies. Here I will limit myself to the discussion of the Islamic scriptural imperatives that speak to themes of liberation. I will focus on two contemporary attempts/theologies that sought to revive and reframe Islamic liberation themes from the perspective of religion. These themes are reflected in the work of Asghar Ali Engineer (India) and Ali Shari'ati (Iran). Showcasing these major initiatives will help to draw parallels between the Islamic and Christian liberation theologies and to highlight the parity that exists between their respective objectives and methods, their reliance on scriptural authority, and their focus on the concern for the masses.[3]

A Theology of Praxis

Theology is always about God and about us at the same time. But it is not solely metaphysical; in theology, human beings are talking about the divine. It is the human seeing oneself in relation to God, or the divine reality. God is at the center but this center is perceived from the perspective of a believer. This perspective, however, may have originated from and on the basis of revelation. Thus theology is a reflection upon pastoral work. It is a practice, a doing, so to speak.[4]

Understanding of religion may go beyond and indeed goes beyond any mainstream theology. There are always marginal theologies, including what has sometimes been referred to as "a people's version of theology," that flourish parallel to mainstream theology (Ferm, 1992:5). The latter theology almost always remains abstract and metaphysical, whereas the alternate or people's theologies often relate to the historical situation of the people and arise as a response to fundamental social and human needs. For any theology to be completely useful and satisfying it has to fulfill both these functions: the metaphysical as well as the existential.[5] As is evident from historical examples found in many religions, however, mainstream theologies have often neglected the prophetic and pastoral aspects of their challenge and thus have given rise to people's theologies. If theology remains metaphysical in all circumstances, then it simply becomes a tool in the hands of the privileged, implicitly supporting the status quo. On the other hand, people's theologies are not always liberative in the immediate sense, but they bring awareness of the needs of the masses who are often dispossessed to the point of having little or no voice in determining their destiny.

According to Asghar Ali Engineer (b. 1939), one of the pioneer theorists to address the notion of an Islamic liberation theology, Islam also has had its own marginal theologies that have taken a radical stance at many a point in the history of Islam.[6] He identifies Sufi theology as one that tends to be closer to the heart of the people, although in certain modes it is even more metaphysical than the mainstream theology. Not all manifestations of Sufism provide simple and straightforward answers to the problems and questions confronted by an average believer, especially with respect to the daily struggle for survival. In its devotional aspects, however, Sufism is closer to the heart of the people where there is less of a concern with "understanding" and a greater emphasis on praxis of spirituality.[7]

Since mainstream (orthodox) theologies are almost always rigid and legalistic, or to be more precise, rigidly "otherworldly," these marginal theologies help to complement the mainstream theologies. But often they are also in conflict regarding the emphasis; the former usually focuses upon the metaphysical and the latter on the present social and economic conditions. These two theologies can and must work closely in cases where these marginal theologies directly relate to or emerge from the original sources of the orthodox theology, that is, the scriptures. A truly liberative theology must evolve out of or at least be connected to what Cornel West calls "the core message" of the tradition. Thus a genuine Islamic theology of liberation must be grounded within the historical examples of the tradition. It must derive from the primary sources of the Islamic faith—the Qur'an and the Sunnah (traditions and the example) of Prophet Muhammad—and yet remain in conversation with the historical understandings of the core message and, more importantly, how this core message manifests itself in the daily lives of the people needing this theology.[8]

Islamic Appropriation of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is intended to historicize the struggles and meanings that are already present in the lives of the people. For many Latin American theologians, it was a kind of Marxism that did not undermine the authority of the metaphysical principles upheld by the Christian religious tradition. In other words, it is an attempt to strike a balance between the two opposing poles: "metaphysical destiny beyond historical process" and the "human freedom to shape temporal destiny." It is a praxis borne out of such an interaction (Engineer, 1990:1). The Boff brothers defined liberation theology as "an organization for the whole of society . . . no longer from a point of departure of the capital held in the hands of the few, but an organization of society based on everyone's labor, with everyone sharing, in the means and goods of production as well as in the means of power" (1984:8). Gustavo Gutiérrez's seminal work *A Theology of Liberation*, which appeared in 1973, was the first systematic presentation of the idea of liberation on the basis of religion. Before Gutiérrez, Paulo Freire, the author of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, introduced the idea of a liberationist theology through his interest in the social transformation of his people. Freire was primarily interested in promoting literacy among his people.

For Freire, promoting literacy meant equipping people with tools for liberating themselves from their immediate miseries (both economic and social) so that they could withstand the systems of oppression. He wanted to acknowledge that basic understanding and intelligence are already present in all human beings. What is left for them to attain are the "tools" of literacy in order to give an expression to their already existent intelligence. The fundamental understanding of the idea of resistance to oppression—which is perpetuated by power—is a necessary tool since resistance can dislocate power. Based on the belief that every individual is born with intelligence, liberation theologians began a process of empowerment by way of this struggle, whereby eventually people would become agents of their own liberation (Boff and Boff, 1984:28).

To this end, liberationist theologians argued, any theory that would provide a remedy to the eradication of poverty should be applied, be it Marxist or socialist. For them this would not change their basic understanding of God, or the purpose of religion. Instead it could only strengthen them by enabling them to express their will. Moreover, any language that would help express these concerns and help develop a pedagogy/theology may also be used. Thus the language that was used to express these forms of liberationist theology was Marxist and socialist, since these ideologies provided the liberation theorists with the social-scientific method as well as the terminology for an appropriate representation of the poor as the oppressed vis-à-vis the oppressor.

One way to construct a theology of liberation within the Christian context was by way of reflecting upon the time when Jesus lived and his social circumstances, highlighting his own poverty, and his association with and ministry among the poor. In that context one is also reminded of the three stages one goes through in order to effect a change: seeing the reality, taking sides, and acting upon it. Liberation theologians not only take sides with the poor, they also promote activism in order to realize the fruits of this ideological stance. In their view this is the only way to understand Jesus' mission since Jesus always took the side of the poor and the oppressed. Jesus also fought for the poor against the oppressors; he fought against hierarchy (Gutiérrez, 1984:19ff, 122–23). Thus for Gutiérrez, as a Christian one cannot afford to stay passive to injustice. Similarly, Enrique Dussel asks, in his classic work *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, "what does it mean to be Christian?" and answers in the following way: "Indeed,

in reality, one does not be a Christian but is always in the process of *becoming* a Christian." And this *becoming* is synonymous with the movement of liberation (1978:90; italics in original). Thus one might say our being religious is not a static thing; rather it is acting out in ways that liberate. In its classic mode, liberation theology seeks to focus on becoming economically independent and liberating oneself from poverty, because it identifies as its chief goal the "preferential option for the poor."

Similarly a Muslim too must understand one's religiosity as a process of becoming; it is a movement toward God in spiritual terms, but it is never dissociated from one's responsibility toward people. Who among those in need would require more attention than the poor and the destitute? The Qur'an asks this question; in fact the Qur'an instructs that a Muslim must always take the side of those who are weak and oppressed regardless of their religion and race. One of the five obligatory acts of worship is *zakat*, commonly translated as alms-giving. It symbolizes an act of purifying oneself (spiritually) by giving a specified portion of one's wealth to those in need. The Qur'an 9:60 (*Surat al-Tawbah* [Repentance]) states: "Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy . . . to free slaves and help those in debt, for God's cause, and for travellers in need. This ordained by God; God is all knowing and wise."[9]

For Boff, Gutiérrez, and many other liberation theologians, Marxist philosophy through its social analysis provided a desirable lens for seeing the Christian religious teachings as a remedy for the treatment of social inequality. Many Islamic theologians too sought inspiration from what some have called the "socialistic" tendencies of the original sources of the Islamic tradition which contain liberative elements within themselves. Ali Shari'ati (1933–1977), the Iranian intellectual and activist, was one such influential thinker in the twentieth century who spoke extensively *against* the Marxist vision and yet *in favor* of the socialistic impulses within the Islamic message. In fact, Shari'ati argued that throughout Islamic history from the time when Islam was still in its infancy, the ideals of the revelation of God and injunctions of Prophet Muhammad were still seen to have been focused upon the task of restoring justice, equality, and peace. Numerous Islamic revivalist movements of the last hundred years have attempted in one way or another to revert to this early idealistic outlook of the Islamic message.[10]

As with Latin American liberation theology, Islamic theology of liberation sees the historical, religious, and cultural contexts as seminal in providing the ground on which the liberative elements will develop. Thus there is a strong regional/local flavor to these elements. This local grounding is possible because of an important characteristic of liberation movements: they must be rooted in the people and their experiences and struggles, and their tenets are not handed on from the top down. Thus, as Thomas Schubeck, S.J. in his seminal work *Liberation Ethics* aptly notes, liberation theology reverses the order in which traditional theologies are framed. In liberation theology, dogma comes last and is in fact judged on the basis of the suffering of the oppressed, which is at the center. Dogma is viewed from the vantage point of the suffering rather than the other way around (1993:59). In fact classical dogmatic theologies have often served as an impediment to liberation rather than facilitating it. According to Engineer, "dogmas are the product of human urge for security rather than that of spiritual quest for inner certitude."[11] For religion to be an instrument of change, it must be framed within the discourse of liberation theology. Once a religion is defined through the principles of liberation, it can become a powerful medium of resistance to oppression of all kinds. Since liberation theology particularly concerns itself with the practical conditions experienced by the masses, it inevitably looks critically at the mere metaphysical theorization of ethical behavior and the abstraction and ambiguity of the notions of justice. Instead it advances itself from the bottom up, by looking at the reality on the ground and constructing a theoretical framework from there. In other words, it consists of a dialectical interaction between what is and what ought to be (Engineer, 1990:6).

Muslim liberation ethics demands that Islamic normative tradition be interpreted in light of its application to the sociopolitical and historical dimensions of life. In other words, if the charity prescribed in the Qur'an is not visible in the lives of Muslims in how they interact with others, it is of no use to be talking about that ideal; the more pressing issue is to see how that ideal manifests itself in one's daily life. The discussion of religious values and theological concepts must take into account the social context as well. Early Islamic theology was preoccupied with metaphysical aspects of human religious endeavor. Although the concepts of social justice and human freedom were part and parcel of the teachings of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, when it came to the sophisticated discussions of law and

theology, the jurists, the grammarians, and the philosophers became primarily concerned with ideological and abstract ideas. The social spirit of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's teachings became the subject of speculative analysis. The simple concerns for the human condition—spiritual and socioeconomic—gave way to complex discussions focusing on grand theories of law and philosophy. Take, for example, the notion of justice, which is central in the Qur'an but has often been reduced to a neat metaphysical discussion of the qualities of God. Classical theologians have often remained aloof from the sociopolitical and economic realities. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the Shi'a cleric and leader of the sociopolitical party, Hizbullah of Lebanon, is one of the many contemporary critics of metaphysical discussions of justice. He and other justice-oriented Islamic revivalists have argued that any conversation about justice must take into account the ground realities faced by the masses. From the belief that God is just, it does not necessarily follow that the rulers and the elites in a given society will be just. Unless some sense of self-determination is experienced by the masses, the struggle to achieve justice must remain a proactive one (Abu Rabi, 1996:232).

Early Islam as a Movement for Liberation

As one considers the primary sources of Islam, one is unmistakably drawn to the concern displayed for social justice which was the basis for the normative tradition in the beginning. Later the same concerns and values were manifested in a variety of movements in Islamic history that resemble the nature of liberation principles promoted today. Muslim theologians, even those not directly addressing the concerns of liberation, have argued that the beginning of Muhammad's career as a prophet was essentially a revolutionary attempt to transform the social conditions of his time. The Prophet came from among a poor, though noble, family. He challenged the rich and those who legitimized the status quo in that society. Therefore his struggle attained wide support from among the poor and the oppressed, including many slaves (Engineer, 1990:2ff.).

Engineer and others argue that the foundation upon which Islamic tradition rests contains liberative elements. The ideals which Islam puts forward as its primary objective are in their essence egalitarian. The earliest Islamic society was established on the basis of divine authority; all other worldly authorities were seen as subservient to that

divine authority. This divine authority, however, was represented, in the time of Muhammad, by the revelation given to Muhammad, which later formed the scripture, the Qur'an. In a sociological sense, since Muhammad was the recipient of the revelation, he, as a prophet and a messenger, was the authority. In theory, all human beings are equal and they were considered superior or inferior only in terms of their proximity to the divine. Here piety becomes a way to achieve full humanity, a means of attaining perfection. But piety is not a tangible or measurable entity, therefore no one person may claim to judge the other. Only God knows who is righteous and who is not; God is the final judge of all beings. Hence there is no justification for one human being's exploitation, subjugation, or oppression of another human being on the basis of claims of superiority in any respect.[12]

Further at the ontological level, Islam liberated human beings from the worship of manifest objects and nature spirits. It turned the focus of attention from the material to the immaterial/metaphysical. In doing so, Islam caused human beings to think freely and more creatively.[13] Islam also discarded the many rituals that had been part of various traditional religious systems at the time of its inception. Rituals that sacralized existence before were deemed unnecessary since existence itself is sacred. In this way, too, it forced the destruction of the status quo in the existing religious hierarchy.

Scriptural Basis for a Theology of Liberation: Justice in the Qur'an and the Normative Tradition

[God] sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice. . . .
(The Qur'an 57:25, Surat al-Hadid *[Iron])*

One of the main concerns of liberation theology is justice as it applies to both the society and the individual. In the Islamic view, justice is a key factor in constructing a society that comes close to the ideal. In the Qur'an, 7:29 (*Surat al-A'raf* [The Heights]), "Say, 'My Lord commands righteousness . . . Just as He first created you, so you will come back [to life] again.'" The command to be just comes along with the reminder of a time of accountability at the moment of resurrection on the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-akhir*). Similarly, the Qur'an 49:9 (*Surat al-Hujurat* [The Private Quarters]) reminds the believers, "God loves those who are even-handed [just]." Again, in Qur'an 5:8 (*Surat*

al-Ma'idah [The Feast]), justice is upheld as equal to being pious. "You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer awareness of God." Thus piety without consideration for others' rights is not real piety.

The concepts of *'adl* (justice) and *ihsan* (righteousness) are two very important concepts in the Qur'an. Being just implies in the Qur'anic sense being so in all spheres of life, especially in social dealings. Hoarding of wealth is considered a serious act of injustice toward the underprivileged and the disadvantaged. In this regard the Qur'an says: " . . . tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God's cause that they will have a grievous punishment" (The Qur'an 9:34, *Surat al-Tawbah* [Repentance]). Justice is primarily understood as economic justice since one's economic circumstances affect most other aspects of this worldly life. Justice also implies honesty in social dealings. With respect to the ethics of trade and business transactions, the Qur'an says, " . . .you may not exceed in the balance—weigh with justice—and do not fall short in the balance [or measure]" (55:8–10, *Surat al-Rahman* [The Lord of Mercy]). Justice here is understood comprehensively; it implicates one's affairs in all aspects of life— social, economic, and religious.

In the Islamic normative tradition, practical concern for the poor and the dispossessed is just as important as religious piety. Prophet Muhammad's message, when he began his ministry, was for everyone, but it appealed particularly to the poor and the oppressed. He spoke on behalf of those who were without power. He spoke against the establishment for the sake of justice. It was a revolutionary message sparked by the metaphysical force that called people to be just. After all, the core of each heavenly message had always been the establishment of an ethical society that implies justice as its very basis and operates on the principle of accountability.

Some Christian thinkers seem to propose that Christianity and Marxism share the same ideals while they differ on ideology and strategy as understood through the lens of liberation theology, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when Marxism was unduly valorized among some Latin American Christians.[14] Islam does not share much with Marxism, however, it contains some vital concerns for social justice— ideas that at least theoretically speaking are shared between the two. For example, in Ali Shari'ati's understanding of the Islamic message, the Qur'an often addresses its message to the masses (*al-nas*) which

indicates a concern for the welfare of the universal human community and not just for any select group. Thus the Qur'anic sociology, in his view, reflects a socialistic message (1979:64).

The Qur'an also speaks of the notion of *jihad* (spiritual and social struggle) in many different contexts. In one instance the Qur'an says that "those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God's way" are noble (4:95, *Surat al-Nisa'* [Women]). *Jihad* is not a struggle to promote one's own interest or for political gain; rather it must be taken up for promoting the cause of the oppressed and the weak. Again, the Qur'an commands: "Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children who cry out [for help]" (4:75, *Surat al-Nisa'* [Women]). Therefore, *jihad* is primarily to be "waged" to protect, safeguard, and secure the interests of the oppressed and the weak or to defend against aggression. Thus, the cause of justice is highlighted within the normative tradition.[15]

At the very beginning of Islamic history the first leader of the Muslim community after Prophet Muhammad was Abu Bakr. His words, as he addressed his people collectively, resonate the scriptural injunction mentioned in the Qur'an 4:75 cited above: "No doubt I have been made your ruler (wall) and though I am not better [than] you. If I render good (to you) help me, if I indulge in (something) bad, correct me . . . those of you who are weak are powerful unto me until I restore their right unto them with ease and those of you who are powerful are weak unto me until I snatch from them what (they unjustly claim) to be their right."[16] This is a good example of a leader who, inspired by the normative ideas of the tradition, leaves himself open to criticism, and who clearly sides with the poor in order to bring about an economic (and thus sociopolitical) equilibrium in society. Therefore, the theory or the normative principles introduced in the Qur'an met with the practice of those early Muslims who claimed to adopt them. The Islamic tradition emerged from those modest beginnings and these examples remain the foundation upon which Islam as a faith rests. The history of the early Islamic ethical principles and their social manifestations, although imperfect, point toward a strong basis for conceiving an Islamic paradigm for a theology of liberation. Any contextual analysis of Islamic history would reveal that normative Islam has been the source of inspiration for many theologies of liberation in the past and it continues to be so in the present.

Islam and the Challenge of Poverty

It may be said that liberation theology is a product of piety, the experience of poverty and political awareness. It is a product of piety because it authenticates the struggle of individuals who are either themselves victims of poverty or who empathize with such victims. Piety allows one to channel the hope for the betterment of humankind, and the practice of one's faith tradition to bring this about, to meaningfully engage with the problems faced by oneself and others.

The experience of political and social oppression, and in particular that of poverty, which is one of the worst forms of violence, is what first brought the voices of liberation to the forefront of a religious struggle for justice. The process of viewing the struggle for justice through the lens of religious teachings represented an awareness of greater possibilities for reenergizing and redefining such struggle in concrete and meaningful terms. The Islamic tradition places a strong emphasis on the marriage of piety and action (or political awareness). Piety is considered hollow without some level of involvement in the struggle for justice. The Islamic imperative for social justice is as important for faith as the one found in the Christian message: "It shall be those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and defend those who are wronged who will inherit the Kingdom of God" (Matt 25:34ff.).

Poverty is a condition in which people live in undersupplied resources. It is characterized by poor housing, premature aging, hunger, insufficient means of survival, and so on. This describes sheer bodily poverty or material deprivation. But since this poverty has consequences that dominate other spheres of human existence; it is an important indicator for evaluating the overall human condition. The issue of the impoverishment of the human being became one of the main concerns in the Latin American context in the face of extreme poverty. An entire discourse has been generated related to impoverishment.

Liberation theology developed out of looking at the poor. It ~~was~~ to imply that poverty is bad; it must be eradicated and eliminated. In Islamic mystical understanding, poverty is not necessarily a sign of misfortune; it implies that one has fewer reasons to be tested by God. The mainstream Islamic social teachings, however, call for establishing equitable economic systems under which the gap between the poor and rich must always be in the process of shrinking and not expanding.

The Qur'an speaks of the prophets as coming from among their own people, the masses. "It is He who raised a messenger, among the people who had no Scripture. . . ." (62:2 *Surat al-Jum'a* [Day of Congregation]). With the exception of David and Solomon, the prophets of the Qur'an are all said to be sent for the people, from among them, and they did not identify themselves with the rulers or the ruling classes. Thus Islam constantly assumes a struggle between the two main types of social groups: the rulers, who are called *mustakbirun*, or the arrogant, and the masses—the *mustad'afun*, that is the weakened and the oppressed. As Ferid Esack aptly notes, this "contrast" between the powerful and the oppressed masses appears in many parts of the Qur'an (7:136–37; 28:5). In fact, "the Qur'an makes a clear choice for the *mustad'afun* against the *mustakbirun* even though the former may not be Muslim" (1997:98). Thus according to the Qur'an, all prophets as liberators sided with the former. Islam, in standing up for the weak and the poor, restricts the accumulation of wealth by the few. Similarly a Muslim is enjoined by the Qur'an to reflect on the needs of the dispossessed in society. One of the obligatory five pillars in Islam is almsgiving (*zakat*). It is not voluntary but every Muslim of a certain economic status must give a portion of his/her wealth for the sake of the welfare of others. The Qur'an 51:19 (*Surat al-Dhariyat* [Scattering Winds]) speaks of "the rightful share of the beggar and the deprived" in the general wealth of the rich, implying that the right to wealth and property is not absolute, but rather subject to a reasonable distribution among all sections of society.

Echoing some of the early liberationist thinkers, left-leaning Muslim liberationists would argue that modern faces of poverty are the direct result of the imposition of the capitalist economic model, presented as the best mode for all. The capitalist system is considered unjust because exploitation, which is the essence of capitalism, is unjust. Marx and later Marxists have condemned and radically denounced capitalism, primarily in their critique of exploitation. Liberation theology also seeks to critique exploitation and, in doing so, it appropriates the language used by Marxists. Insofar as the issue of exploitation is concerned, the Islamic worldview agrees with the Marxist social analysis. Where the question of metaphysical materialism arises there is no agreement. Islam as an ideology of this world ultimately points to the reality beyond this world, and hence could not possibly be compatible with the Marxist worldview. Within a capitalist system, the laborer almost ceases to be human. A person exists as an "appendage of capi-

tal," as the ordinary instrument of labor, which has to be maintained and "begotten" (just like pigs in a piggery or dogs in a "puppy mill"); the laborer exists as a "beast of burden." Exploitation, in a capitalistic society, is thus a "process of divestiture," depriving workers of their potentialities as human beings and imposing upon them "degraded and almost servile conditions," converting them into "mercenaries and, of their means of labor, into capital" (Marx, 1973:322ff.). Insofar as the eradication of such exploitation is concerned, Islam may be said to inspire a similar passion for resistance against all forms of injustice. In an ideal Islamic society, it is arguably the most important task for those who seek to change or abolish the system that perpetuates the exploitation of the masses by the few. Needless to say that the lofty ideals proposed by Marxist social thought never really materialized, or ever benefited the masses in the way they were thought to have done. And while the theme of liberation forms the very foundation of the Islamic understanding of society in history, realities on the ground never seemed to have reflected the ideals adquately.

Islam as a Basis for Modern Liberation Movements

Despite the above, Islam has been the source of liberative struggles in the past and it continues to inspire movements and ideas in the present. One such movement was that of Ali Shari'ati.[17] In the twentieth century, postcolonial struggles for economic and political independence defined the challenges many Muslim societies faced. During the latter half of the twentieth century, Shari'ati and other Muslim theologians attempted to discover liberative elements within an Islamic historical framework. These elements could then be made to operate in fashioning a worldview which allows others to see the drive to liberation rooted within that framework. Ali Shari'ati reappropriates themes of liberation in Islamic terminology, just as Enrique Dussel and other Latin American theologians reappropriated them in Marxist terminology and the language of the Left. Incidentally, they both studied at the Sorbonne around the same time, and possibly studied under some common teachers including the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.[18]

Shari'ati was a theologian, a reformer, and a *mujaddid* ("renewer" of faith) in his own right. Thus he was aptly suited to use the Qur'an and other Islamic sources to formulate his brand of liberation theology. Shari'ati regarded the language of the Qur'an to be symbolic. He believed that multiple layers of meanings must be deduced from the

scriptures for the purpose of establishing equality and justice in society. Islam, says Ali Shari'ati, is a progressive ideology. Thus he posits his discourse within a foundational assertion that "Islam, very simply, is a philosophy of human liberation. Its first summons, 'Say, 'there is no god but God,' and prosper' propounds *tawhid* [oneness of God] as the necessary means to that end" (1980:73). And as a "philosophy of human liberation," it leads one to a state of self-awareness.

Among Islamic ideals, justice is one of the key principles. As discussed above, justice is central among all the themes arising out of the Qur'an. Thus in the modern period, Marxism did not reveal any profound truth by claiming the cause of justice, albeit economic justice. In Shari'ati's view, Marx's understanding of social analysis may be acceptable insofar as it does not stand upon his critique of religion or the divine.[19] Islamic progressivism is revealed in its fundamental notion of the unity of being (*tawhid*). This principle of unity reflects, more than it represents, the complete—that is, a meaningful and purposeful—harmony in which Islam situates God, humanity, and nature (1980:86). Shari'ati writes, "Marxism because it is founded on an absolutely materialistic worldview, is incapable of raising humanity in its essence, attributes or evolutionary state beyond the narrow confines of materiality; it ranks human being along with all other beings in the confines of an unconscious and purposeless nature" (87). Shari'ati's "dialectic of man," so to speak, attempts to view human existence in a balanced manner; the human being is both a material as well as a spiritual being.[20] Whereas the *ulama*—the religious leaders of Muslims— paid too much attention to the spiritual and the ritualistic side of the human effort, Marxist social analysis focused upon the economic realities and rejected the spiritual dimension of human beings altogether. Both have their reasons in history. *Ulama* perpetuate their stay in power by diverting the attention of the masses toward the reality beyond and enjoy in the here and now their empowering role in religious societies. The Marxist one-dimensional view, on the other hand, stems from its origins in an increasingly industrialized Europe, where modernity as its main propeller caused the separation between the domains of the scientific and the unscientific; in effect, between the mythical and the religious, between dogma and belief. Islam, through its basic worldview of *tawhid*, sees human beings as expressing this divine essence, with transcendental attributes and infinite potential of evolution, and hence situates humanity in a "living, meaningful, and infinite universe which extends far beyond the domain of the sciences" (Shari'ati, 1980:87).

The close affinity between Islam and the liberation elements are also seen in the fact that in the Islamic tradition, at least in the beginning, there was no distinction between the ideologue, the activist, and the worker. The class mentality developed later due to the influence of regional customs. The leader is at the same time also an activist and a worker. Early leaders of Muslim societies were humble in their lifestyle; in that they identified with the masses rather than the ruling elite. With the rise of hereditary rule in the Umayyad period this began to change (Shari'ati, 1980:105).

Islamic Revivalism: Toward a Praxis of Liberation

Arising within the last three decades, Islamic revivalism is seen as operating on the principles of liberation theology. One main reason given for such a view is that revivalist movements challenged and continue to challenge the prevailing political conditions and dominant worldview that sought to determine the destiny of the masses with regard to their economic, social, and cultural conditions. Revivalist ethics was built around the notion of self-determination, confronting and resisting Western political influence which has been present in the Muslim world throughout the postcolonial period. Their basic claim is to liberate people from the dependency upon the West.[21] In essence they are "ideological revolutions" in their own right and pose a diverse set of challenges in different contexts. As James Scott points out, "Wherever there is domination there is also resistance."[22] Just how this resistance has surfaced in various parts of the world and at various points in history is a matter of observation. The Islamic fundamentalism, or to be more appropriate, Islamic resurgence, has many faces of its own as well. As one party to the revolutionary spirit and postrevolutionary struggles, the student movement of Iran, "Mujahidin-i Khalq" had an extensive struggle against the status quo of the ruling upper classes in Iran. Their motto, according to their official publication *Mojahed*, is "Onwards towards the annihilation of exploitation and oppression of every kind and the realisation of the classless society in *Towhid*" (Engineer, 1990:64). Another example of a resistance movement is the "Black Power" movement of the sixties which may also be compared to the "Muslim Brotherhood" of Egypt. Both spoke of the return to the texts (the Word/Jesus) and called for the reinterpretation of these texts in light of the contingencies of the modern world. Insofar as they also believed in the application of their revivalist theories in their own

societies, they are also labeled as "fundamentalists" and/or "extremists" (Yadegari, 1986–1987:39).

Liberation theologians assert that Jesus came to liberate humanity not only from spiritual decadence but also from the bondage of material poverty and social injustice. Muslim revivalist movements also began as a struggle for social, political, and economic liberation. They sought liberation from oppression by the hands of the colonialists, as Muslim lands were colonized for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, the dominant perception was that the Muslim reformers simply wanted to defend the Islamic faith against its erosion in the wake of imperialism and cultural annihilation. Jamal al-Din Afghani, the first active Muslim reformer and revivalist (d. 1897), divided the world into two categories: the oppressor and the oppressed. This dichotomy exists in the worldview of many other thinkers and activists, most of whom are mainstream liberation theologians—for example, Hugo Assmann of Brazil, Enrique Dussel of Argentina, Allan Boesak of South Africa, and James Cone of the United States. They all speak of the oppressors and the oppressed (Yadegari, 1986–1987:39).

For liberation theorists, especially in the early developmental days of liberation theology, the language most suitable for its expression is filled with directly appropriated Marxist terminology. For the Islamic liberationists the language most viable was that of the early Islamic experience of struggle against injustice and religious persecution. Where the former used the Bible, the latter used the Qur'an. This use of these texts to justify the notions of justice and equality and to critique the present unjust social structure, characterizes both the Latin American theologies of liberation and the Islamic revivalist movements. Another common denominator between the two is their understanding of modernity. The fundamentalist/revivalist group opposes those aspects of modernity which it deems as an infringement upon Islamic cultural space—for example, some Western values and social mores, they argue, undermine their view of Islamic social ethics. In some ways this thinking differentiates itself from the liberation theologians' main resistance to modernity. The liberation theologians are primarily opposed to the modern means of economic production and distribution that perpetuates class society. The basic operative element in both movements is power.

To a large extent Islamic revivalism has been the answer to many modern challenges that emerged across the Muslim third world. These challenges are generally constituted by three main factors. Firstly, it

answers the challenge posed by nationalism; through the nation-state theory Muslim lands were carved up and divided into artificial nation-states by the colonial powers. Secondly, it responds to the challenge of liberalism, both political and economic; through modern means of production and distribution political control of these nation-states has been continuously perpetuated, hence economic globalization has arisen. Thirdly, and most importantly, it answers the challenge posed by a more recent process of cultural domination, that of cultural globalization—the Western cultural ethos now has a vast reach through the use of mass media and the Internet—which, in addition to, and with the help of the above two factors, also hastens the process of westernization. Therefore, some of the main premises of Islamic revivalism arose in response to the above challenges. Firstly, Islamic revivalism seeks to reactivate the Islamic reasoning for the social analysis of its own societies. Secondly, it proposes to reconstitute the political authority of Islam which has been made to disappear in the wake of colonial and postcolonial hegemonic enterprises. Thirdly, it maintains the need to revive the Qur'an and the *hadith* as the primary sources for the development of the Islamic theory of knowledge. These and other aspects of revivalist movements in Islam are understood as attempts to liberate people from the hegemony and domination of the masses by the few who directly or indirectly benefit from such domination. The issues are framed in the context of the notion of justice. Revivalist movements seek to transform their own societies, on the basis of fundamental values to which their respective societies adhere. They seek to challenge Western influences which often come in the garb of economic incentives and plans for development and increasingly manifest themselves in the form of social and cultural practices. The comparison between Islamic revivalism and liberation theology continues to be made, and it may be granted that they share some similar traits. But they are not one and the same. In the twenty-first century, both have been transformed and are being reshaped continuously by the fast pace of technology. The fact remains, however, that liberation theology can easily be read into the Islamic revivalist movements despite the shifting nature of some of the claims made by these movements.

Conclusion

Many contemporary Muslim thinkers have already attempted to develop a theoretical framework for their own brands of theologies

that strongly resonate with Christian liberation theologies. Those attempts are by no means exhaustive; in fact the struggle to define and understand various themes of liberation continues to be played out. In the post-September 11 era, Muslim liberation thinking has taken off into many different directions simultaneously. One of the major areas of struggle is intra-Muslim dialogue on the topic of what constitutes a "moderate" Islam. Western talking heads define it based on their understanding of secularized religion prevalent in many European countries; many Western Muslim thinkers argue for it in the form of a "civil Islam" that consciously seeks a change of posture in legal and social norms. Yet others, both in Western as well as in many Muslim countries, are trying to find a balance between the demands of an increasingly secularized and westernized world and the fundamentals of Islamic ethics. In the end, liberation from expressions of religious behavior that are intolerant and noninclusive is perhaps as necessary as liberation from the many kinds of fundamentalist secularism such as the one promoted in some French civil and political discourse.

Thus liberative principles can be based on both religious as well as extra-religious elements and can be expressed in religious as well as secular language. It is not imperative that all issues of contemporary reality be settled on the basis of religious principles. There is clearly a need to understand that not all values must be justified through religious texts and/or the prophetic tradition. It is essential that today we begin to acknowledge the "extra-religious values"—such as democratic model of polity—which do not go against the spirit of the overall teachings of Islam.[23]

These reformist trends, it is hoped, will continue to work through the Muslim intellectual and social landscape in the coming decade. As Muslim societies move ever closer to a greater understanding of the need to reinterpret their religious tradition in the light of our contemporary realities, there is yet hope that the liberative principles will become manifest in the real lives of people in many parts of the world, who continue to experience oppression at the hands of the few. Herein lies the challenge for all those who seek to uphold justice and freedom, peace and security, as basic human rights for all, to continue the struggle—the *jihad*, although nonviolently—yet with full determination and power, drawn from any creed, religious or secular, that gives them this power.

6

HINDUISM

—Anantanand Rambachan

General Features

Hinduism is an astoundingly diverse tradition as indicated by the name Hindu itself. Hindu is not the personal name of a founder nor is it descriptive of a central belief or practice. "Hindu" is the Iranian variation for the name of a river that Indo-Europeans referred to as the Sindhu, Greeks as the Indos, and British as the Indus. Those who lived on the territory drained by the Indus were derivatively called Hindus. They did not necessarily share a uniform religious culture and, today, the Hindu tradition reflects the astonishing variation in geography, language, and culture across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. It helps to think of Hinduism as a large, ancient, and extended family, recognizable through common features, but also reflecting the uniqueness of its individual members. Necessary generalizations will not be misleading if there is attentiveness to this fact of diversity.

Many of the common features of the Hindu tradition are derived from the scriptures known as the Vedas. The four Vedas (Rg, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva) are considered by orthodox Hindus as revelation and have a privileged authoritative status. Particular Hindu groups regard many other texts as revelation, but the Vedas enjoy an almost unanimous recognition as revealed knowledge. Each Veda may be broadly divided into two sections. The first section of each text provides information and rules for the performance of religious rituals. The last section of each text contains a series of dialogues, known as

the Upanishads, that are the most important sources of religious and philosophical thinking in Hinduism. Any Hindu tradition that seeks the stamp of orthodoxy tries to establish, through commentaries, that its interpretations are faithful to the Upanishads.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, the Hindu tradition is neither life-denying nor otherworldly. It does not uphold the attainment and enjoyment of material things as life's highest end, but has acknowledged their significance in the scheme of human existence. Wealth (*artha*) and pleasure (*kama*) rank among the four legitimate goals of life. While affirming these, Hinduism also reminds us of their transience and inability to fully satisfy us. Wealth and pleasure must be sought by being responsive to the demands of the third goal, referred to as *dharma. Dharma* derives its meaning from the fact that every human being is inseparably connected with and dependent on other human beings as well as nonhuman realities. The goal of *dharma* requires that we be attentive to the well-being of the whole, even as we are nourished and sustained by it. *Dharma* is violated when we obsessively and narrowly pursue private desires that destroy the harmony of the universe community on which our lives depend. Through *dharma*, we are mindful that the selfish and uncontrolled pursuit of wealth and pleasure lead to suffering and chaos. *Dharma* reminds us to incorporate the good of all in the intent and execution of our actions. Non-injury (*ahimsa*) is regarded as the highest expression of *dharma*.

While the Hindu tradition ascribes great value to the practice of *dharma*, it does not see this as the ultimate goal of human existence. Hinduism's highest and most valued goal is *moksha*. The Sanskrit term *moksha* means freedom; and if we keep in mind the diversity of Hinduism, it is not inaccurate to say that this freedom is primarily from ignorance (*avidya*). It is a common view in the Hindu tradition that ignorance of the true nature of the human self (*atman*) and the absolute (*brahman*) is the fundamental human problem and the underlying cause of suffering. Freedom or liberation cannot be obtained without right knowledge of reality.

For three of the great theologians and traditions of Hinduism, Shankara (Non-dualism—Advaita), Ramanuja (Qualified Non-dualism—Vishishtadvaita), and Madhva (Dualism—Dvaita), the self (*atman*) cannot be equated fully with the time-bound physical body or the ever-changing mind. In its essential nature, the self is eternal and infinite awareness. For Shankara, the self is ultimately identical with *brahman* (the Ultimate "One"); for Ramanuja, it is inseparably related

to *brahman* as part to whole; while, for Madhva, it is entirely different from but completely dependent on *brahman*.

Ignorant of the true nature of the self, one wrongly identifies it with the body and mind, imposes the limitations of these on the self, and becomes subject to insatiable greed and want. To obtain the objects of greed, one puts forth actions (*karma*) of various kinds. Greed-prompted actions generate results for which the performer of actions is responsible and which lead to subsequent rebirths in order to experience the consequences of these actions. All traditions of Hinduism adhere firmly to a belief in the doctrine of *karma* as a law of cause and effect that includes the moral dimensions of human life.

The belief in a cycle of multiple births and deaths, referred to as samsara, is intrinsically related to the doctrine of *karma*. The latter affirms that every volitional action produces a result that is determined by the nature of the action and the motive that underlies it. Since births have been multiple, it is readily conceivable that a storehouse of the effects of previous actions exists that cannot be exhausted in a single lifetime. Future births are thus necessitated for the purpose of experiencing the desirable and undesirable consequences of past and present lives and for the attainment of unfulfilled desires. In these future lives, the effects of new actions are added to the storehouse of *karma* and the cycle of samsara is perpetuated.

Moksha is consequent upon the right understanding of the nature of the self. While, as noted above, the self is understood differently within the tradition, *moksha*, in all cases, implies the recognition of the self as more than the psychophysical apparatus and as immortal and full. Such an understanding of the self's essential nature brings an end to the cycle of death, birth, and rebirth. For Shankara, liberation is possible while the individual is alive in the body. When one knows the self, one ceases to completely equate the self with the body and is free. For Ramanuja, on the other hand, the self can never recover its innate nature as long as it remains associated with the body. Freedom must await the death of the body. For all traditions of Hinduism, *moksha* implies freedom from suffering, greed, and mortality.

The Meaning of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, described by Deane William Ferm as "the major Christian theological achievement of the twentieth century," was inspired significantly by the deliberations of the Second Vatican Coun-

cil (1962–1965) and especially by its summons to eliminate economic inequalities (Ferm, 1992:1). Consistent with the prophetic tradition of Judaism, the distinguishing tenet of liberation theology is "a preferential option for the poor," expressed passionately in a religiously motivated commitment to liberate the oppressed from injustice and suffering. This commitment is articulated in a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of liberation/salvation that shifts the emphasis from postmortem existence to the quality of existence in this life. Liberation is no longer narrowly construed as emancipation from suffering in a future life. Its meaning is centered also on freedom from poverty, powerlessness, and injustice in this life and world.

In contrast to the traditional emphasis on the personal and individual nature of evil, liberation theologians call attention to evil as a social phenomenon. While recognizing the significance of personal choice and responsibility, the focus is upon "systemic evil," that is, the suffering that human beings inflict upon each other by unjust economic, social, and political systems. Liberation theologians call attention to the social character of human existence and to the ways in which injustice is embedded in the conventional structures of society. The apartheid system of South Africa, for example, was not merely an expression of personal racial prejudice. It was legitimized by law and biblical interpretation and embodied in social, economic, and political systems. This emphasis implies that genuine change will be achieved only through the transformation of such systems. The reform of individual lives will not, by itself, result in the comprehensive liberation from structural oppression. "Structural injustice," as Daniel Maguire puts it, "requires structural relief and a relativizing of private claims by setting them in their social context" (2005:57).

For the liberation theologian, spirituality and justice are inseparable. The practice of justice in human relationships is the highest expression of the religious life. The interior life of holiness and piety must find outward expression in a passion for justice. These two dimensions of authentic spirituality mutually nourish and are incomplete without each other. Without the concern for justice, personal piety becomes obsessively self-centered. At the same time, attentiveness to and cultivation of the interior spiritual life nourish and provide the motivation for the work of justice. Justice, it must be emphasized, cannot be equated with charity. The latter seeks to offer relief and care to those who are the victims of injustice. Justice seeks to change and transform the structures that cause suffering. "Charity means helping

the victims. Justice asks, 'Why are there so many victims?' and then seeks to change the causes of victimization, that is, the way the system is structured" (Borg, 2003:201). One of the distinguishing marks of liberation theology is that its commitment to economic, political, and social freedom is rooted in a religious worldview in which the understanding of what it means to be human is derived from a vision of the nature of God.

The Need for a Hindu Theology of Liberation

The question to be considered now is whether liberation theology, distinguished by "a preferential option for the poor," a focus on systemic evil, a passion for justice as the transformation of oppressive structures, and a commitment to a holistic liberation that is economic, political, social, and spiritual can find justification in a Hindu religious worldview. Liberation theology has received scant attention from contemporary Hindu commentators and thinkers and there is a clear need for the articulation of a comprehensive understanding of liberation rooted in the Hindu tradition.[1]

This task gains significance and urgency from the fact that in two significant examples of injustice and oppression, caste and gender, the argument and struggle for justice are, in the main, disconnected from the Hindu tradition.[2] In the case of caste oppression, many seek liberation, not through engagement with Hinduism, but by conversion to other religions or by the rejection of religion. It is instructive that the largest number of converts in India from Hindu traditions to Buddhism and Christianity come from the so-called untouchable castes, popularly referred to as the Dalits.[3] The most famous convert, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, felt hopeless about the possibility of social liberation through Hinduism, publicly renounced the tradition and, with almost three million followers, embraced Buddhism. He was convinced that caste injustice and oppression were intrinsic to Hinduism.

Today, around 15 percent of the population of India, consisting of approximately 115 million people, is labeled "untouchable" or members of the "Scheduled Castes" in the terminology of the Indian constitution. The same constitution also specifies that "the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth." Special laws, such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976, have been enacted to give meaning to the constitutional provisions. Despite such measures, however, the phenomenon

of untouchability persists in contemporary India and Hindus continue to define the meaning of Hindu identity over and against those who are deemed unequal and, for this reason, marginalized. The sharp distinctions between self and other, the boundaries of the pure and impure, are still drawn sharply in Indian villages, where the character of human and economic relationships are still governed by the hierarchies of caste and where reports of violence against persons of lower castes are common.

Although the conditions of life in Indian cities differ significantly from those obtained in rural areas, cities are not free from the travails of caste and untouchability. In urban areas, discrimination expresses itself in more subtle forms and in limited job choices that push untouchables into menial tasks. In a city like Hardwar, on the banks of the Ganges, physical segregation is evident in the fact that the upper-caste dwellings are closer to the pure water of the river, while the lower castes are relegated, depending on relative degree of purity, to locations farther away from the river (Lipner, 1994:116–17). Kancha Ilaiah has commented that the movement from rural to urban locations does not change the socioeconomic relations because of the pervasive character of caste. "We had hoped," writes Ilaiah, "that the decolonized Indian capital would make caste dysfunctional by giving us equal rights in politics, in economic institutions, cultural institutions, educational institutions and administrative institutions. But that has not happened. The migration from rural to urban centers has not changed our socioeconomic relations as caste discrimination has been built into every structure" (1996:68).

Hinduism, like other world religions that developed in patriarchal cultures, reflects assumptions about male gender supremacy that have been oppressive to Hindu women. Gender injustice manifests itself in the fact that a disproportionate percentage of the illiterate in India are women, in the practice of abortion of female fetuses because of a preference for male offspring, in the stigmatization of widows, and in the custom of dowry that depletes the economic resources of families into which girls are born and that makes them feel guilty for being women. The practice of dowry demeans women by signifying that the value of a woman is so low that she becomes acceptable to another only when her family is able to satisfy his greed for the latest gadgets of materialistic fancy (Rambachan, 2000:17–40). Gender liberation and justice require the overcoming of these oppressive structures of Hindu society. As in the case of caste oppression, however, voices

that articulate and ground the case for gender liberation in the Hindu worldview are rare.

Liberation and the Four Goals of Hindu Life

The American political scientist John Rawls, in his well-known work *The Law of Peoples*, contends that social stability and the proper exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms in any society require five provisions. These clearly equate with liberation theology's concern for human freedom from poverty, powerlessness, and injustice. Rawls's list includes the following:

1. A certain fair equality of opportunity, especially in education and training.
2. A decent distribution of income and wealth meeting the third condition of liberalism: all citizens must be assured the all-purpose means necessary for them to take intelligent and effective advantage of their basic freedoms.
3. Society as employer of the last resort through general or local government, or other social and economic policies.
4. Basic health care assured for all citizens.
5. Public financing of elections and ways of assuring the availability of public information on matters of policy (1999:49).

The construction of a Hindu theology of liberation may well begin with the four goals (*purusharthas*) that are identified traditionally as required for and as constituting a fulfilled human life.[4] Several coincide with Rawls's provisions. The four ends, already discussed briefly, are *artha* (wealth, power, success, social prestige), *kama* (pleasure), *dharma* (virtue, duty), and *moksha* (liberation). It is clear from the first goal that the Hindu tradition is not antimaterialistic. In the *Ramacaritamanasa*, a sixteenth-century Hindu vernacular poetic reworking of the story of Rama by Tulasidasa, a disciple asks his teacher, "What is the greatest human suffering?" "There is no suffering in the world as great as poverty," replies his teacher without hesitation (1991:784).[5] The Hindu tradition has never glorified involuntary poverty. Tulasidasa refers to his ideal society as *ramrajya* (the kingdom of Rama/ God) and imagines it to be one that is free from suffering occasioned by poverty. His vision is concrete and material as well as spiritual. "There was no premature death or suffering of any kind; everyone enjoyed beauty and health. No one was poor, sorrowful or in want; no

one was ignorant or devoid of auspicious marks" (705). The kingdom of Rama is free from oppression and violence caused by the clash of incompatible and antagonistic interests. Nature flourishes in harmony and abundance.

> Throughout all of Rama's kingdom, a rod was never seen except in the hands of ascetics; the word "difference" had ceased to exist except in relation to tune and measure in the dancers' groups, and the word "conquer" was heard only with reference to the mind. The trees in the forests bloomed and bore fruit throughout the year; the elephant and lion lived together as friends; birds and beasts of every kind were no longer hostile and lived in harmony with one another. (706)[6]

At the same time, the legitimizing of wealth as one of life's four goals is not meant to suggest a minimum level of subsistence bereft of pleasure and celebration. The Hindu tradition is not content with a human existence as a joyless struggle of survival in ascetic resignation. The goal of *kama* (pleasure) reminds us that happiness is the goal toward which all human beings aspire and that it is the normal way to be. This celebratory dimension of life is understood in Hinduism to find expression particularly in sense-enjoyment as well as the fine arts such as sculpture, music, and dance. All of these flourished with the blessings of Hinduism. Human prosperity that lacks joy has lost its reason for being.

The relationship between *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (pleasure) and Rawls's fivefold requirements can be more clearly delineated. Both require opportunities in education and training and access to health care (1 and 4). Wealth cannot be generated and life enjoyed without these. *Artha*, construed as power, requires measures that ensure access to information and that work to limit the control of power in the hands of the few on the basis of wealth and privilege (5 and 2).

The Four Goals and the Four Stages of Life

The significance and centrality of the four goals of human existence in the Hindu tradition may also be seen through the relationship between these goals and the four stages of life (*ashramas*). These are envisaged as a progressive ordering of human life for the purpose of realizing the four goals. The first is the student stage (*brahmacharya*), devoted to

study and acquiring professional skills. The second is the householder stage (*grhastya*), where the focus is on the goals of wealth, pleasure (through marriage and family satisfaction), and duty (*dharma*) through participation in community. The third is the stage of the forest-dweller (*vanaprasthya*), conceived as a semiretired stage devoted to contemplation and religious inquiry. For those so inclined, there is a fourth stage, renunciation (*sannyasa*), devoted to the pursuit of liberation (*moksha*) through a life of celibacy and voluntary poverty. Here again one may make the argument that the realization of this life scheme presupposes Rawls's requirements. Opportunity in education and training is necessary for the student stage, wealth for the householder stage, and retirement income for the stages of the forest-dweller and renunciant. Basic health care is needed for the attainment of the goals of all four stages. The scheme of four life-stages also assumes that the fulfillment of life's material needs neither excludes nor is incompatible with the pursuit of liberation (*moksha*). In the order of the stages, it may even be said to precede it.

The four central goals are referred to, in Sanskrit, as *purusharthas*, that is, "human ends." This emphasizes their universality as common ends necessary for the happiness of all human beings. These are not, in theory, limited in application by considerations such as gender or caste. It is meaningless, however, to define the good human life as progressing through four stages and including wealth, pleasure, virtue, and liberation, and not be concerned about those social, political, and economic structures that impede and deny persons the opportunities to achieve these ends. A hierarchical social system, like caste, limiting freedom of opportunity and choice, exemplifies such a contradiction. Traditionally, for example, the three upper castes (*brahmins, kshatriyas*, and *vaishyas*) are regarded as twice-born and alone entitled to study the sacred Vedic texts. This gave them privileged access to learning and literacy and denied such opportunities to others. Those who were excluded from the elite circles that studied and discussed sacred texts could not shape and influence the theologies that emerged. The theological traditions of Hinduism that center on the sacred texts thus remain a "theology from above," and fail to reflect the concerns and perspectives of the oppressed and excluded. Clearly, it is not enough to articulate common goals; systems that limit people's ability to achieve necessary goals must be identified and changed.

Dharma and Liberation

The third goal of Hindu life, *dharma*, can be creatively interpreted and employed to ensure equality of opportunity and social structures that are just and conducive to liberation from all expressions of oppression. *Dharma* is a rich and multifaceted concept. It is derived from the Sanskrit root, *dhr*, meaning "to support, to sustain," and is understood to include the corpus of values that make for social stability and well-being. The opposite of *dharma* is *adharma* and the latter is equated with chaos, disintegration, and suffering. *Dharma* emphasizes the social context in which all human goals are pursued. It reminds us that the unrestrained and heedless pursuit of individual or corporate wealth and pleasure causes suffering to others and social instability.

Dharma requires us to broaden our vision to incorporate the good of all. The attainment of wealth and pleasure by inflicting suffering on others, or by denying them the opportunities to freely attain these ends, is opposed to *dharma*. Attentiveness to *dharma* requires a consciousness of the ways in which individual and corporate choices and social structures impede human well-being.

The four goals of life proposed by Hinduism have the potential for universal applicability and their attainment should be a measure of the moral and just character of any community and its progress. In reality, however, these goals have been circumscribed by the boundaries of a hierarchical social system that privileged the worth of some human beings over others, limited their access to certain goals, and interpreted *dharma* as requiring order rather than justice. On the whole, *dharma* was primarily and narrowly identified with the rigid order of the caste system. In the interpretation of *dharma*, the emphasis was placed upon the faithful performance of duty as determined by one's birth-derived location in the caste. The maintenance of caste order and stability became the unquestioned overriding concern, rather than justice. This limited identification of *dharma* with caste (*varna dharma*) constricted and obscured its more radical and challenging implications for critiquing social structures and engendering compassionate concern and action for liberation from suffering.

At its heart, the goal of *dharma* is satisfied only through actions that are undertaken with attentiveness to the good of all beings and not to specific groups. *Dharma* derives from an understanding of the universe as an interdependent and interrelated whole. It emphasizes that existence and the realization of our human potential are possible only

in the context of this whole and the benefits derived from the generous giving of all constituents of reality. The meaning of *dharma* as duty, broadly conceived, and not conflated with caste requirements, requires a lifestyle that is deeply informed by a sense of obligation and generous self-giving for all that one receives. Although, as noted before, *dharma* has been explicated almost singularly with reference to caste obligations (*varna dharma*), the tradition recognized the necessity for universal ethical norms (*sadharana dharma*) binding on all human beings and governing their relationships. There are various lists offered in sacred texts and these include nonviolence, compassion, self-control, truthfulness, concern for the welfare of all beings, justice, forgiveness, and non-stealing. The Golden Rule of "not doing to others what one would not like done to one's self" is an effective summary of the meaning of *sadharana dharma* (Organ, 1970:215–21). Today, there is a need for an explication of the liberative meaning of these universal ethical norms and a rejection of *dharma* as implying the unequal rights and privileges of caste. *Dharma* must become synonymous with the common good and applied rigorously in the quest for justice.

The Common Good (*Lokasamgraha*) and Liberation

Despite its generally conservative attitude to caste, the *Bhagavadgita* (3:20) commends action that is motivated by *lokasamgraha* or concern for the well-being of the world. The wise person is urged to act for the common good with the same resolve and energy that an unwise person employs in the pursuit of personal desires (3:25).[7] *Lokasamgraha*, one must strongly argue, is not served if the basic goals of life (*artha, kama, dharma, moksha*) are not available for all, if persons are oppressed because of gender, and if they have no freedom and control over their lives. *Lokasamgraha* requires the empowerment of human beings to achieve life's goals; and discourse about it is meaningless without diligent inquiry into and a passion for overcoming human suffering occasioned by poverty, injustice, and oppression.

In a particularly beautiful and striking verse (3:13), the *Bhagavadgita* commends relationships that are characterized by reciprocity and generosity. "The good people who eat what is left from worship are freed from all sins, but those wicked people who cook food only for themselves eat sin." The source of Krishna's analogy is the *agnihotra* or fire ritual. In this ceremony, a special altar is constructed and, upon this altar, a fire is lit. Worshippers sit around this fire and make

offerings of clarified butter while repeating sacred verses. At the end of the worship, food, a portion of which would have been offered in the fire, is distributed among all those who participate. Food is received, but only after it is worshipfully offered. Giving precedes receiving. Krishna uses the image and example of the *agnihotra* to inculcate the value and necessity for reciprocal living, characterized by generosity with one's abilities and talents. Just as we make offerings into the fire, we offer to the world the gifts of our abilities and talents before receiving from the world that which we require for our own needs and prosperity. If we all selfishly appropriate from the world without generous self-giving, resources, both human and natural, will be depleted. Prosperity, in the words of *Bhagavadgita* 3:11, is the consequence of mutual caring and nourishing each other (*parasparam bhavayantah*). In some of the strongest language of the text (3:12) Krishna describes the person who appropriates the resources of the world without returning anything as a thief. Such thoughtless exploitation is unjust and results in suffering. It is the antithesis of dedication to the common good (*lokasamgraha*).

The Theological Challenges for a Hindu Theology of Liberation

Other fundamental questions remain to be addressed in the task of constructing a Hindu theology of liberation. Why should the liberation of human beings from poverty, powerlessness, and injustice concern us with urgency? Why should it be inseparable from our understanding of the meaning of the religious life? What is the value of the world and life within it? There are powerful theological strands in Hinduism that seem to devalue and negate the world and to promote indifference to life within it. Such theologies appear to make the concerns of liberation theology irrelevant. In affirming the truth of the ultimate (*brahman*), for example, some interpreters minimize the significance of the world by suggesting that the knowledge of *brahman* requires and results in the negation of the world. The world is likened to a sense-illusion, which we conjure, and then experience because of our ignorance. The most famous of these analogies equates the world with a snake that is mistakenly perceived in place of a rope. "The world," as T. M. P. Mahadevan puts it, "is but an illusory appearance in *Brahman*, even as the snake is in the rope" (1977:28). The implication here is that when the rope is properly known, the illusory snake will no longer exist. In addition, the disappearance of the snake is a condi-

tion for truly knowing the rope. Similarly, when *brahman* is known the world ceases to be, and *brahman* cannot be known as long as the world is experienced. After the reality of the world is denied, it is easy to deny meaning and value for its concerns.

> Just as things and events seen in a dream vanish altogether and become meaningless when one wakes up, so does the universe with all its contents disappear when one finds the Real Self. One then becomes perfectly awakened to what really exists, the Absolute. Compared with That, the universe is no more than a dream. So long as one sees in a dream, the dream objects are intensely real. So also is the universe with all its contents to one under the spell of avidya (ignorance). On awakening to Absolute Reality, however, *all these have no value, no meaning, no existence*. (Nirvedananda, 1979:172; italics mine)

When the reality of the world is denied in this manner, it is not consistent for one to be affected by events within it. To respond to the world is to grant reality to the world; it is to treat as real that which does not, in reality, exist. Interpretations like these provide justification for world-renunciation rather than world-affirmation, and have been most strongly and clearly articulated in the monastic and ascetic strands of Hinduism. Taken to their extremes, these interpretations make it difficult to take the world seriously. It is represented as beset with problems and one is advised to cultivate an attitude of disgust toward it and pray to be free from its clutches. The negativization of the world promotes indifference and a wish to escape life.

> Since, the process of the Births and Rebirths is so beset with troubles, therefore, one should cultivate a feeling of disgust. That is because it is found that wretched creatures are every moment of their life taken up by the pangs of births and deaths and are thrust into illimitable terrible darkness—like the unnavigable ocean, and having no hope of going out—therefore one should cultivate feelings of disgust towards this process of Birth and Rebirth—avoid it, shun it, praying that "may I never fall into this terrible metempsyclic ocean." (*Chandogyopanishad*, 5.10.8)

Is it possible to formulate an understanding of the world that affirms its value or must we be content with a devaluation of the world and the indifference to human existence and suffering? This is a significant

theological challenge for the tradition and especially for Advaita. I believe that alternative interpretations are possible and necessary.

Theological Resources for a Hindu Theology of Liberation

Unlike interpretations that seem anxious to disconnect the world from the ultimate (*brahman*), and to affirm the latter at the expense of the former, the Upanishads account for the world in *brahman* alone. In the Chandogya Upanishad, for example, Aruni explains the origination of the world from *brahman* alone and not from nonbeing.

> In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second. Now on this point some do say: "In the beginning this world was simply what is non-existent—one only, without a second. And from what is non-existent was born what is existent." But, son, how can that possibly be? How can what is existent be born from what is non-existent? On the contrary, son, in the beginning this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second. (*Upanishads*, 1996:6.2.1–2)

The Upanishads also emphasize that *brahman* is not lost or depleted after creation. *Brahman* remains limitless and non-dual after the emergence of the world. Without any diminution or loss of nature, *brahman* brings forth the world out of itself.

Affirming a relationship between *brahman* and the world, however, is not the same as fully equating the world with *brahman*. The fact that *brahman* is described as cause and the world as effect implies some difference. If there were no differences, the distinction would be meaningless. The relationship, in Advaita, may be understood as an asymmetrical one. The world partakes of the nature of *brahman*, but *brahman* does not partake of the nature of the world. At the same time, the world does not have an independent ontological identity to limit the absolute nature of *brahman* and the truth of non-duality is not compromised. The world does not have an existence of its own, whereas *brahman*'s existence is its own.

To argue that the world, as an effect, is ontologically non-different and dependent on *brahman*, does not deny its meaning and value. On the contrary, since *brahman* has ultimate value, the relationship enriches the value of the world. Too much energy has been

expended in Hinduism in establishing the so-called unreality of the world and too little on seeing the world as a celebrative expression of *brahman*'s fullness, an overflow of *brahman*'s limitlessness. Its value is derived from the fact that it partakes of the nature of *brahman*, even though, as a finite process, it can never fully express or limit *brahman*. Instead of focusing on interpretative strategies that seek to disconnect *brahman* from the world, and thus devalue it, the tradition should return to the meaning of those texts that emphasize the deliberation and intentionality of *brahman* before and during the process of creating. It seems contradictory for the Upanishads to proclaim *brahman* as the source of the world and then trivialize its significance. A world that is presented as bereft of value to its creator cannot have value for the created. If the world can be seen positively as the outcome of the intentional creativity of *brahman*, expressing and sharing the fullness of *brahman*, the world does not have to be rejected or negated. The purpose of human life is then to participate in the celebration of existence by knowing the One who has brought all things into being and whose fullness we share. Such an understanding offers us also a different way of thinking about the meaning of liberation (*moksha*).

In direct contrast to such interpretations of the meaning of liberation as dismissing and rejecting the world, authoritative Hindu texts characterize the liberated understanding as a way of seeing both *brahman* and the world. There is no suggestion that the world becomes nonexistent in the vision of the liberated. Typical of such texts are the following lines from the *Bhagavadgita* (13:28;18:20): "One who sees the great Lord existing equally in all beings, the imperishable in the perishable, truly sees. That knowledge by which one sees one imperishable being in all beings, indivisible in the divisible is the highest" (my translation). Texts such as this invite a way of seeing reality that does not require negation of the world, but a celebration of its relationship with *brahman*. Meaning and value are added to, not taken from the world, when its ontological unity with and inseparable existence from *brahman* is affirmed. The world exists both for the one who knows *brahman* and the one who does not know. The difference is that the knower of *brahman* understands the world to be ontologically non-different from *brahman*. The world is seen with new eyes. Liberation enriches and does not diminish the meaning of life in the world, and all its positive meanings need to be explored and celebrated. Liberation allows us to celebrate existence rather than wish for its negation.

The Unity of Existence and Liberation Theology

Prominent among these positive meanings of life is a deeper identity and affinity with all beings. This is the outcome of understanding *brahman* to be single source and ground of human selfhood. Isa Upanishad relates this knowledge of the unitive identity of *brahman* in all to freedom from hate, sorrow, and delusion: "One who sees all beings in the self alone and the self in all beings, feels no hate by virtue of that understanding. For the seer of oneness, who knows all beings to be the self, where is delusion and sorrow?" (6–7; my translation). Liberation, in other words, does not alienate, isolate, or separate one from the world and the community of beings, but awakens to life's unity in *brahman*. Although the Hindu tradition has not always pursued the implications of this understanding for life in the world, and has interpreted the meaning of liberation in generally passive ways, there is no reason why we must do so today.

In the *Bhagavadgita* the discussion on the identity of God in all is followed by a text (6:32) praising the liberated as one who owns the joy and suffering of the other as one's own. On two occasions (5:25; 12:4), the text employs the expression "delighting in the well-being of all (*sarvabhutahite ratah*)" to describe the attitude of the liberated in relation to others. Liberation is equated with an empathetic way of being. Seeing the suffering of another as one's own, however, becomes impotently meaningless if this insight does not motivate compassionate action. The Hindu tradition needs a more expansive understanding of suffering and liberation. We cannot ignore the suffering of human beings when they lack opportunities to attain the necessities for dignified and decent living or when suffering is inflicted through oppression and injustice based on gender, caste, or race. It is not acceptable to affirm teachings about life's unity while being indifferent to inequality and oppression at the social level. The tradition has not employed its insights to become a strong advocate for justice and has been rightly criticized for being indifferent to social inequalities (Fort, 1998:174).

While agreeing with such criticism, we must add that there are no insurmountable reasons for this indifference and many good ones that will justify compassionate concern and action. The vision of *brahman* in all beings is articulated in the Upanishads in the expectation that such a perspective enriches and enhances the meaning of being human and will be warmly embraced as a truth that enables us to overcome alienation and estrangement. It inspires us to see human beings as con-

stituting a single community and provides a philosophical basis for a compassionate and inclusive community where the worth and dignity of every human being is affirmed and where justice, at all levels, is sought. This could not occur, however, until the tradition positively asserts the value of the world and human existence within it and sees life as a celebrative expression of *brahman*'s fullness in which we are invited to participate through knowledge and loving action and justice consistent with the nature of *brahman*.

Although the Hindu scriptures, because of veneration for the liberated person, do not prescribe any obligatory actions, there is nothing inherent in the liberated state that makes actions for the well-being of others impossible. On the contrary, the understanding of the self and reality that is synonymous with the attainment of liberation provide a powerful justification and impetus for a life of compassion and social engagement. Freedom from *avidya* (generated desires) does not eradicate every form of motivation to engage in action. Liberation from self-centered desires frees one to dedicate one's energies to the service of others. This may be the point of *Bhagavadgita* (3:22–24) where Krishna uses himself as an example of a liberated being with no personal desires who engages in action for the benefit of others. He suggests (3:25) that the liberated person can bring the same energy and enthusiasm to working for others that the unliberated person brings to the quest for personal goals.

7

BUDDHISM

—Tavivat Puntarigvivat

The Thai Experience

Buddhism is often criticized as a religion mainly concerned with personal salvation and lacking a social ethic that leads to social liberation. Although it seems so, Buddhist teachings on personal conduct contain principles that could be reinterpreted and extended to a social ethical theory as well as praxis leading to social liberation, hence the so-called Buddhist liberation theology.[1] The experience of Thailand is a good framework in which to approach Buddhist liberation theology, offering an opportunity to examine sociopolitical issues under the global market economy at a structural level and from a Third World point of view. Buddhist monks in Thailand are part of a unified hierarchical *sangha* (community of monastics) which in turn is controlled by the government. Everyday Buddhist monks all over Thailand eat food given to them by Thai people, the majority of whom are poor and oppressed. This makes it possible to look at Buddhism from a sociopolitical perspective that aims at social justice, thereby adding a new dimension to the Buddhist hermeneutics for the poor. Greed is thereby seen not just in individual terms but also as a built-in mechanism of oppressive social structures. If greed is to be reduced or eliminated, therefore, personal self-restraint will not be enough; these social structures need to be changed as well. Many Buddhists seek liberation (Pali: *nibbāna*, Sanskrit: *nirvāna*) by practicing meditation, but do not pay sufficient attention to the way the society in which they

live is organized. I wish to offer a challenge to Buddhist ethical values by interpreting liberation as necessarily involving social as well as personal liberation.

Structural Poverty: From the Perspective of Thai Prostitution

Thailand has worldwide fame—or rather shame—for its well-established prostitution, and sex trade and trafficking industry. Many Western and Japanese male tourists come to Thailand simply for a "sex tour" (DaGrossa, 1989:1–7). Donald K. Swearer points out that Thailand has over a quarter of a million monks in thousands of monasteries throughout the land but has more prostitutes than monks (Swearer, 1986:23). A great number of young women in Thailand, desperate in their search for a better life, have been drawn into the sex industry.[2] In the past, many of them were tricked or even forced into prostitution by mafia gangs. Today they are pressured by structural poverty, consumerism, and sometimes a distorted idea of "filial piety." Although prostitution is illegal in Thailand, the government, because of the present inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic system, seems unable to help those unfortunate young women. Prostitution, of course, is against the teachings of the Buddha, but the Thai *sangha* (community of monks) hierarchy has said virtually nothing about this issue.

Under the present system, Thai farmers find it hard to sustain their families through agriculture. The harder they work, the deeper they find themselves in debt because of their dependency as tenant farmers. Both sons and daughters are driven to leave home in search of work, but it is easier for women than men to find a job because they can quickly become prostitutes, earning more money than factory workers.[3] This has led poor rural families to send their daughters to towns and cities for jobs to support their families and in many cases to sell their daughters into sex trade.

In the Thai local tradition, especially in the north, parents prefer the birth of a daughter to that of a son. While a son can help his parents in the rice field, a daughter can help in both household work and farming. After marriage, the daughter continues to serve her parents because a Thai couple traditionally establishes their family close to the woman's parents. Usually both a Thai son and daughter hold to the traditional values of filial piety, but a daughter is especially valued because she can do more for her parents. Unfortunately, this traditional Thai attitude fits in quite well with the exploitative structures

in which young rural women can find jobs in the urban areas, even if such exploitation exposes them to the threat of AIDS.[4] (The proportion of people in Thailand infected with HIV is among the highest in the world, although the government seems able to cope with the problem in the 2000s.) Prostitutes send more money back home than do male or female factory laborers. Their sins are forgiven and they are treated well in their villages.

Prostitution is basically a by-product of unjust economic and social structures and most obviously a complete form of gender oppression. Although the phenomenon is well-known in Thailand, few Thai people talk about it openly. Today Thai feminists and Buddhist social activists are beginning to speak up and defend the rights of their mothers, sisters, and daughters, reminding society that prostitution represents a distortion of traditional cultural values and is caused by modern structural poverty.[5] Prostitution and other economic, social, and political problems must become part of a new systematic code of Buddhist social ethics—the core of Buddhist liberation theology— which addresses the whole range of national issues, including human rights, drug abuse, economic exploitation, patriarchy, and environmental degradation.

Outsiders may argue that these young women could live a simple life at home in the country and could survive by working at their traditional tasks in the household and rice fields without having to resort to prostitution. Contemporary pressures, however, are extremely powerful. Development projects undertaken by the central government have brought roads, radio, television, and popular magazines to the villages, spreading the religion of consumerism, and people are no longer happy with former traditions (Sivaraksa, 1992:3–9). Traditional values are threatened by desperate poverty, the inability to possess land, and the exploitation from agribusiness. In addition, the new values increase the demand for consumer goods. Today most rural Thai families are torn apart by these two forces, and under these circumstances, it is hard for young men and women to stay home and be happy in rural areas. Today most rural villages, especially in the north and northeast, are populated only by those left behind, old people, and children.

Bhikkhuni and Prostitution: A Structural Solution

Prostitution is an obvious and systematic gender oppression, especially in the Third World, and particularly in Thailand. The grant of

women's religious rights—the revival of *Bhikkhuni Sangha*[6]—is seen as a structural solution for prostitution, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child neglect and abuses in Thailand.

The unequal opportunity and inefficiency in providing education by the Thai state to its people have resulted in a large number of uneducated and undereducated children in the countryside. There is, however, a custom of ordination for boys as *samanera* (novices) and for men as *bhikkhu* (monks) for their religious training and education. Using this ordination channel for education, parents in remote areas have been sending their sons to get ordained and educated at nearby temples. Those boys have become the majority of monks and novices around the country. They have gradually moved to a bigger temple closer to a town or a city for higher education and training. When these ordained young men complete their education, they frequently disrobe. According to social norms, they have been turned into educated adults who are usually well accepted in the society. For those who continue their ecclesiastical careers, they become educated monks guiding people spiritually. The *Bhikkhu Sangha* is, therefore, a necessary institution for less fortunate boys to have an education and a chance to be incorporated into the society.

The less fortunate girls in Thai society sadly do not have the same chance as do the boys. If these girls are lucky enough, they might receive support from some private organization, such as the Children's Foundation, for their education and professional training. But most of these girls are not that lucky. Many of them have become laborers in local and transnational factories, working extremely hard for extremely low wages. Pressured by poverty, distorted cultural value of "filial piety," gender oppression, and consumerism, many of them resort to prostitution or sex-related businesses or trafficking.

For those seemingly "lucky" girls who receive some kind of support from a monk or the male Buddhist religious organization, they often meet with sexual abuse from the male in authority. The urgent question now is how these girls from the countryside can receive an education and training safely and securely without being the victims of sexual abuse or sexploitation. In a way, the revival of the *Bhikkhuni* institution would be a solution. The *Bhikkhuni Sangha* could provide the chance for those less fortunate girls to be ordained and educated in temples of *bhikkhuni*, which has proven quite successful in Sri Lanka for girls, and parallels the way boys have been educated and trained in the temples of *bhikkhu*.

The revival of the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* would elevate women's religious status to a level equal with that of men. On one hand, women of faith could study *dhamma* (the teachings of the Buddha) directly from female teachers without having to gather around the monks, who are occasionally committing sexual abuses and sex scandals. On the other hand, women could become preceptors (*pavattini*) who have the right to ordain *samaneri* (female novices) or other *bhikkhuni*. According to tradition, women who have kept ten novice precepts for two years can be fully ordained as *bhikkhuni* by first accepting ordination vows from a female preceptor (*pavattini*) and then by receiving ordination vows from a male preceptor (*upachaya*) in the presence of at least five *bhikkhu* and five *bhikkhuni*.

The *Bhikkhuni* institution would alleviate the problems of prostitution and child abuse. When those less fortunate girls and women have access to a better life via ordination, the chance that they would resort to prostitution or be subjected to child abuse would be greatly reduced. They could obtain an education and training in the *bhikkhuni* monasteries and become educated adults. If they so wished, they could disrobe and have a family. This is allowed in the Thai Buddhist tradition. If they continued to be *bhikkhuni*, they could become spiritual leaders of their communities.

The sexual misconduct and abuse present in the Thai Buddhist religious institution may be viewed individualistically as a crime caused by the greed, delusion, or hatred of an individual monk. But from a structural perspective, the lack of a religious institution for women themselves—the *Bhikkhuni Sangha*—is the root cause of the problem. When women are refused their right of having their own proper religious institution, they need to rely on the male religious institution for their spiritual life or their chance in the society. The completion of the Four Buddhist Sangha, namely, *bhikkhu* (monks), *bhikkhuni* (nuns), *upasaka* (laymen), and *upasika* (laywomen), is needed in the modern time no less than in the time of the Buddha.

By the support of Sri Lankan and Western *bhikkhuni* and *pavattini* (preceptors), there are now at least five *bhikkhuni* and twenty *samaneri* in Thailand, and the number is growing. This Buddhist feminist movement, which is gaining more and more support both locally and internationally, has become part of a Buddhist liberation theology, not only in Thailand but also in Southeast Asia as a whole.

Buddhist-Based Communities in Thailand

In the past, before the modernization of Thailand under capitalism, the Buddhist monastery was the center of village life and Buddhist monks were its cultural leaders. The Buddhist *sangha* provided villagers not only with Buddhist teachings, culture, and rituals, but also education, medical care, and occupational advice. In such a community, the spirit of sharing and cooperation prevailed and villagers shared a common local Buddhist culture. This Thai rural social structure, however, with the Buddhist *sangha* at its center, has collapsed under the impact of economic dependence, social dislocation, and cultural transformation.

What is needed in Thailand today is a revitalization of Buddhist values fostered in so-called Buddhist-based communities.[7] With leadership from well-educated or well-informed Buddhist *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni*, or laity, such communities will seek to promote the enduring values of Thai culture, which are ultimately rooted in a religious worldview. Cultural identity would be fostered through the adaptation of such values, and a Buddhist social ethics would become the guidelines for action, leading to a Buddhist liberation theology. The economic model of such Buddhist-based communities would be self-sufficiency rather than market dependency. Buddhist teachings, as well as the increased self-respect and self-confidence of such a society, would reduce the impact of consumerism, which in recent years has been exacerbated by the omnipresence of advertising—on television, on the radio, in popular magazines, as well as in the cyber world. A renewal of cultural values, along with practical advice from well-informed professionals, would help rural Thais regain economic independence and improve their physical well-being.

Buddhist-based communities would offer a more participatory democratic model for society. By regaining cultural and economic independence, the rural sector of Thai society can take a more active role in promoting Thai democracy. Once relative economic self-sufficiency, political decentralization, and local cultural independence are established, rural villages would be able to solve many local problems in a new way. The task of rebuilding a healthy rural society belongs to all Thais, with a pivotal role undoubtedly to be played by Thai Buddhist *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, who should be widely respected, demographically representing the rural people and residing throughout the country.

It will be useful to look more closely at different types of Buddhist-based communities in contemporary Thailand. Some of them were active at a certain period of time and no longer exist, but paved the way for later communities, while others have been active in creating new opportunities and possibilities to strengthen local communities with Buddhist values. Some of them are centered around individual activist monks, while others are organized more as networks of people. Some of them have been solving the overall socioeconomic problems of their communities, while others have emphasized specific issues such as protecting rain forests and the environment and building Buddhist temple-based health care systems.

Buddhist-Based Communities of the Past

Phrakhru Sakorn's Community

Before Phrakhru Sakorn Sangvorakit came to Wat Yokkrabat at Ban Phrao in Samutsakorn, most people who lived there were impoverished illiterate farmers. The area was often flooded with sea water which destroyed the paddies and left the people with no means of subsistence. Realizing that poverty could not be eradicated unless new crops were introduced, since salt water was ruining the rice fields, Phrakhru Sakorn suggested planting coconut trees, following the example of a nearby province (Sivaraksa, 1992:50).

Once the people of Yokkrabat started growing coconuts, he advised them not to sell the harvest, because middlemen kept the price of coconuts low. With assistance from three nearby universities that were interested in the development and promotion of community projects, the people of Yokkrabat began selling their coconut sugar all over the country. In addition to advocating the cultivation of coconut plantations, Phrakhru Sakorn led the villagers to grow vegetables and fruits and encouraged the growing of palm trees for building materials and the planting of herbs to be used for traditional medicine. Fish raising was also advised. Under his guidance, within a few years the people's livelihood improved significantly (Phongphit, 1988:48).

Phrakhru Sakorn believed that a community's basic philosophy should be self-reliance and spirituality. He urged Yokkrabat residents to first determine what they need in their family before selling the surplus to earn money and buy things they could not produce by themselves. In this way, villagers depended less on the market. This

principle of self-reliance also underlaid the community's credit union project; members were encouraged to borrow money for integrated family farming rather than for large enterprises in cash crops. Since Phrakhru Sakorn was convinced that there could be no true development unless it was based on spirituality, in addition to the projects in economic development, he taught the villagers Dhamma—the teachings of the Buddha—and meditation (Phongphit, 1988:51–52).

Phrakhru Sakorn trained the younger generation of monks and novices for leadership and encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their own local communities. Although he "disrobed" some twenty years ago, he has continued to support the community.[8] The self-reliance and ethical values he has inculcated have made Yokkrabat an exemplary Buddhist-based community in Thailand.

Phra Prachak's Community

In 1991, when Thailand was under a military dictatorship, the Thai military threatened Phra Prachak Khuttacitto, a Buddhist monk who was campaigning to preserve a large rain forest, Pah[9] Dongyai, in Buriram from further destruction. He was arrested and thrown in jail. It was the first time in the history of Thai Buddhism that a monk in robes was jailed by the authorities.[10] Although Phra Prachak was later released, he had to defend himself in court and was left in a position in which he could hardly resume his work.

In 1992, during the civilian government of Chuan Leekpai, the deputy Interior Minister went to see Phra Prachak at Dhammachitra Buddhist Center in Buriram and promised him and the villagers that the government would cooperate in protecting the remaining forest in the area. He asked Phra Prachak to leave the forest but promised to build thirty cottages for monks, along with a hall, a water tank, and a road in an area of forty acres outside the forest. He promised Phra Prachak that the Forest Department would send fifteen laborers to help him look after the forest, working twenty days a month for eight months during the initial stage of the project (Phanthasen, 1994:36–37).

This promise was not really kept. A hall was built, but only through the personal effort of Phra Prachak and with financial backing from the people. Phra Prachak asked the Forestry Department to send tools, a car, and a communication radio to help in the task of protecting the forest, but to no avail. Without such equipment, the fifteen assistants could do little to stop the felling of trees and protect the forest. After the

first eight months, the Forestry Department reduced the laborers' work schedules to only fifteen days a month for the next six months, and then stopped the project. Meanwhile the forest-destroying gangs intensified their operations and the cutting of trees has sharply increased. In other words, under the supposed cooperation between Phra Prachak and the Forestry Department, the forest has been increasingly destroyed. The government even publicized this situation to convince the public that monks and villagers lacked the capacity to protect the forest.

Many attempts were made to discredit Phra Prachak and to erode his support. A rumor was circulated that he was paid a good sum of money by the government, which caused many people to stop making donations for his work. Government officials gave money to some villagers and not to others, with the intention of causing misunderstandings among them.[11] The villagers finally divided into three groups. The first, the majority, turned their attention to new plots of land provided by the government. The second group accepted patronage from the influential people who were behind the illegal loggers and withdrew support from Phra Prachak. The third and smallest group continued to support his forest conservation efforts, since they realized that if the forest was completely destroyed, villagers would find it extremely difficult to survive, and the area would face serious problems of drought and water shortage.

Although Phra Prachak's campaign was held back by government authorities, his campaign represents a grassroots Buddhist liberation theological struggle in response to environmental problems. Under Thailand's military dictatorship, the government openly used its authority to destroy the forest for its own benefit. This prompted people to organize and protest. Today, under an elected civilian government, the process is more subtle yet equally destructive, since the bureaucracy remains unchanged and influential people use covert tactics to invade the rain forest (Phanthasen, 1994:38–39). Through his campaign against environmental degradation, Phra Prachak has helped awaken the ecological conscience of Thai people at the national level.

Thamkaenchan Community

In 1985 a group of people interested in Buddhism and concerned about social and ecological problems came to live together on twelve acres along the Kwai river in a partially destroyed forest at Thamkaenchan valley.[12] They helped develop the area, which is in the central province of Kanchanaburi. They built a number of buildings and boathouses,

grew vegetables, and planted trees for reforestation. They were committed to the creation of a self-sustaining Buddhist-based community by engaging in natural farming and raising cows, goats, and other farm animals. They planted part of the land with herbal plants for the purpose of making traditional herbal medicines. They tried to preserve forest trees and wild animals and were careful to prevent forest fires. Buddhist meditation retreats were held in the community from time to time. The community also produced paintings as well as books on Buddhism and spirituality.

In 1992 the Riverside School, a school for children from poor families, was established. Paiboon Teepakorn, the leader of the community, was convinced that the right form of education is an important factor in altering the way people think and in creating a new direction for society. Besides being taught the formal curriculum, the students were given occupational training in animal husbandry, organic farming, local handicrafts, and some technical skills, as well as training in Buddhist ethics and local culture. After their training, the students were supposed to return to their villages and help their own communities. After visiting the Thamkaenchan community in December 1992, James Halloran, an Irish Catholic priest, reported:

> The Buddhist spirituality of the members gives them a tremendous regard for creation. Consequently they are deeply reverent towards the natural vegetation of the place, yet have separated a space for some organic gardening . . . You could say that the environment is a major issue for the community . . . There is also a concern with genuine education, reflected by the fact that they are helping a group of needy boys who are not just imbibing school subjects, but a wonderful set of values too. They are courteous, high-minded, and deeply involved with the chores of the community. (1992:7–8)

In a way, Thamkaenchan represents a Buddhist *ashrama*, hoping to help rural people struggle for a more just society under an exploitative system.

Buddhist-Based Communities at Present

Santi Asoke Communities

The Santi Asoke communities were established by Samana Bodhi-raksa[13] within the Thai social environment in search of the original

purity of Buddhism and in response to the influence of Western consumerism which has devalued Buddhist ethics among Thai people. Judging from his perspective, most monks within the Thai Sangha (community of monks) are far below the level of purity of *sila* (morality) set by the Buddha. Bodhiraksa criticizes the lax behavior, superstitions, and consumerism of most monks and the self-indulgence, corruption, and violence of Thai society. To alleviate Thai society from the domination of transnational capitalism and the influence of Western consumerism, Bodhiraksa set up the network of Santi Asoke communities in the central and northeastern parts of Thailand by putting Buddhist economics and "sustainable economy" theory into practice at the community level.

Bodhiraksa, whose original name was Monkol Rakphong, was ordained in 1970 at the age of thirty-six in the Thammayut tradition[14] at Wat Asokaram in the central province of Samut Prakan. He observed a strict *vinaya* (discipline) by being vegetarian, eating only one meal a day, wearing no shoes, and living a simple life. Being ascetic and pious, he gained a great deal of support and followers among serious Buddhists who helped set up the Santi Asoke movement. Bodhiraksa puts the Thai Buddhist reformist rationality, such as the teachings of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, into practice on the institutional and organizational levels by announcing independence from the Thai Sangha Hierarchy (*Maha-thera-samakama*) in 1975, which makes his movement radical within the Thai Sangha.

There are at least nine communities in the Santi Asoke network. These communities hold the same principle and philosophy, but each community has its own characteristics due to the different environments and circumstances. For example, Sisa Asoke community in Sisaket province is well-known for its unique local *Isaan* cultural products. Rachathani Asoke community in Ubon Rachathani is famous for its fresh vegetation because it is located by the river Moon. Pathom Asoke community in Nakhon Pathom is prominent in herbal products because many herbs grow in the province. Lacking agricultural area, the Santi Asoke community in Bangkok has excellent communication and trade, and has become the trade center for the community network. *Bun* (merit) and mutual support, not profit, are the main concern of the activities at Santi Asoke. Being outside of the Thai Sangha Hierarchy, Santi Asoke is one of the most rapidly expanding Buddhist movements in Thailand.

The statistics in 2006 reveal that there are 134 monastics—including 104 monks, 3 novices, and 27 female monks (*sikhamatu*)—in the Santi Asoke movement. In all the communities combined, there are eighteen hundred residents, eight hundred students, nine thousand active supporters, and tens of thousands of members at the vegetarian clubs within the network.[15] According to the Santi Asoke philosophy, *sila* or ethical purity has central importance on the path toward enlightenment whereas a self-sustained economy is crucial for the economic survival of the community and the country within the context of contemporary transnational capitalism. Bodhiraksa and the Santi Asoke movement represent the ethical dimension—both personal and social—of contemporary Thai Buddhism.

Phra Khamkhian's Community

Phra Khamkhian Suvanno's community at Tahmafaiwan in northeastern Chaiyabhum is another exemplary Buddhist-based community centered around a charismatic leader. Through Khamkhian's leadership, the Tahmafaiwan community has significantly improved life in nearby villages, both physically and spiritually. It has become a grassroots movement, struggling to achieve a relatively self-sustaining local economy and self-determined local polity, while constantly working to alleviate environmental problems.

Khamkhian, a forest monk and meditation teacher, has campaigned to help poor people in the northeastern rural areas where he has established "rice banks" and "buffalo banks," which function as independent local cooperatives where poor people can borrow the necessities for agriculture, such as grain and water buffaloes. If necessary, they can borrow rice for their own consumption. When they produce a surplus of rice, they deposit it in the rice bank. When a borrowed buffalo gives birth, half of the young buffaloes belong to the farmer and the other half belong to the buffalo bank.

Khamkhian believes that the villagers' constant battle with poverty and hunger results from their being caught up in the mainstream, greed-motivated economy. He encourages the villagers to be self-sufficient by raising their own vegetables, digging family fishponds, and growing fruit trees, instead of producing and selling a single crop like tapioca or eucalyptus and buying food from outside the village. Near his forest monastery, he gave a plot of land to one family to try organic vegetable gardening without the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides, and the experiment was successful. To broaden the villagers' perspectives, he

has urged them to go on study trips to other northeastern villages that have been successful in this kind of integrated farming.

Khamkhian has managed to preserve about 250 acres of lush, green forests atop the mountain against encroachment. It now provides the only greenery visible amid vast tapioca fields that stretch as far as the eye can see. He plans to send monks to stay deep in the forest, so that villagers will not dare damage the sanctified area, which has been declared a forest monastery (Ekachai, 1991:65–69). Khamkhian has also led the villagers' fight against local authorities who have supported illegal logging, a struggle which has gained some degree of self-determination for the community in regards to local polity. By attacking consumerism with a renewed affirmation of Buddhist social and ethical values, he has helped the Tahmafaiwan community win some measure of local cultural independence. Although he is stricken with cancer and his health was deteriorating in late 2006, he has inspired a number of younger monks to follow in his footsteps to build a more just society in rural Thailand.

Buddha-Kasetra Communities

The Buddha-Kasetra[16] communities consist of a group of Buddhist-based communities in northern Thailand organized under common leadership. They established a number of schools to care for orphans, juvenile delinquents, and economically deprived children in the north and northeast of Thailand. Their goal is to build strong Buddhist-based communities in rural Thailand in order to fight poverty, consumerism, and the structural exploitation created by a centralized bureaucratic government.[17]

The first Buddha-Kasetra school, established at Maelamong in the northern province of Maehongsorn, began its self-supporting program by growing their own rice and vegetables, producing organic fertilizers, and raising cows to produce milk for the school children as well as to supply milk at a cheap price to the local communities. They also initiated some small commercial projects, such as running a bakery, making traditional foods and desserts, weaving and sewing clothes, and producing bricks and concrete posts for construction.

All the teachers and school children, in addition to school work, participated in occupational training and manual labor. One project involved establishing a public health center within the community to care for the health of the local people. The Buddha-Kasetra school achieved self-sufficiency in most aspects of its work. Three more

Buddha-Kasetra schools were founded—at Nongho in Chiangmai, at Khunyuam in Maehongsorn, and at Nonmuang in Korat—and the number of school children and teachers keeps growing.

The Buddha-Kasetra communities are especially concerned with the issue of the exploitation of women and children. These communities have campaigned to protect women's and children's rights and to alert people to the problems of prostitution and child abuse in northern Thailand. At the Buddha-Kasetra school at Nongho, the school for female students, girls and young women from poor, marginal family backgrounds are admitted to the school for education and occupational training as well as instruction in Buddhist ethics. The school employs six teachers, all female except the principal, Phasakorn Kandej, and eighty-six female students range in age from thirteen to eighteen. If these students were not admitted to the school, it is likely that most of them would have resorted to prostitution.

The Buddha-Kasetra Foundation was founded in Chiangmai in 1989, with Phra Chaiyot as coordinator of all its schools and activities. The foundation has its own printing press, publishing a monthly newspaper, as well as a number of books on Buddhism and social issues. The foundation has been trying to alleviate the causes of social ills by working with the poor and the unfortunate in a Buddhist-based community context, as well as by training young men and women to be leaders of their own communities in rural Thailand. Although the number is still limited, Buddhist-based communities like Buddha-Kasetra are important in their own right and serve as examples of a new vision of a more humane, cooperative, and service-oriented way of life.

Ban Pak Community

The Ban Pak community is located in the northeastern region of Thailand, which makes up one-third of the land mass of Thailand, and is known collectively as *Isaan*. This term describes the local people, culture, and language, which are influenced by the Lao and Khmer traditions. In addition to having unique cultural influences, *Isaan*, which is largely rural, is also the poorest region of Thailand. This region, where 34 percent of the country's total population lives, also bears twice the average national burden of poverty as a consequence of its harsh climate, reliance on rain-fed agriculture, and soil degradation (Lyttleton, 1994:139). Though it is the northern region of Thailand, not the northeastern region, which has been hit hardest by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, prevention and care in northeastern Thailand is com-

plicated by poverty and the subsequent out-migration of its youth and constraints on life opportunities and resources.

Located on land belonging to a forest temple, the Ban Pak opened on September 29, 1996, with the support of the temple, the government sector (mainly through the Ministry of Public Health), subdistrict-level organizations, private organizations, and a committee of local village headmen. Luang-pu Somchai, the abbot of the forest temple, served as project chairman. Between 1996 and 1999, the Ban Pak housed over two hundred PLWHA.[18] The Ban Pak statistics claim that 70 percent of these PLWHA have returned home after experiencing alleviation of symptoms, 20 percent have died at the Ban Pak, and the remaining 10 percent continue to live at the Ban Pak.[19]

After visiting the Ban Pak community in September 1999, Laura Hollinger reported:

> The Ban Pak roster listed 24 people. Of this total, 13 were male, 8 were female, and 3 were male children. Eleven were residents of the province in which the Ban Pak was located while the rest were from nearby provinces of northeastern Thailand. The population of the Ban Pak fluctuates as residents die or occasionally return home and new people arrive requesting shelter. Changes occur so often, that it is difficult to keep track if one is not present at the Ban Pak on a daily basis. During the three month study period, roughly five deaths occurred, one couple returned home, two children were sent out to live with family members or adoptive parents, one child was placed in the care of a PLWHA couple at the Ban Pak who were unrelated to him (one month later this child was returned to his family when they failed to supply baby formula as promised), a few people came and stayed for a short period and then returned home, while several other new residents came and were still present. (2000:46–47)

A budget of 270,000 Baht was provided by the government in 1999, but it was unclear whether this money was earmarked specifically for education and training programs or could be used for the costs of caring for the residents. Consequently, the Ban Pak no longer has sufficient funding to support its operational budget and therefore, beginning in 1999, the abbot has provided the operational budget by using a portion of the donations made to the temple. Food is also provided by the temple and by occasional donations from families of PLWHA and private organizations, while basic medications are available at Ban Pak through the support of the district hospital.

In light of the enormous psychosocial consequences of HIV/AIDS to the residents of Ban Pak, care of the heart and mind (*jitjai*), encompassing counseling and spiritual nurturing, is the primary goal of Ban Pak. It is important that Ban Pak also provides care for the physical needs of its residents, and it does so through the use of herbal medicines, access to medical care, and nutritious food. Care of the heart and mind (*jitjai*) is accomplished through emotional encouragement and meditation practices at Ban Pak. By addressing the needs of the heart and mind, Ban Pak is realizing a holistic mission, which is essential for those suffering from a physically incurable disease, especially in the context of a Second World country where advances in medical treatment are not equitably available.

The use of Buddhist teachings and practices serves as an essential medium for emotional and mental support at Ban Pak. Three main practices are utilized: chanting (*suatmon*), respecting the Buddha and monks (*wai pra*), and meditation (*samadhi*). Chanting and meditation are credited with improving the condition of the heart and mind (*jitjai*) and achieving a peaceful, anxiety-free state of mind. The visiting monks and residents all emphasize that Buddhist practices keep them from worrying too much, which was considered to be very important as worrying has negative effects on physical health. The Dhamma, or teachings of the Buddha, are also used to inspire the residents to do good deeds and to prepare their hearts for death. Spiritual care encompasses Buddhist principles and practices, which offer explanatory models for suffering, death, and dying, and calming the hearts and minds of the patients and caregivers.

In addition to the physical care and emotional/mental care provided at Ban Pak, another important element of their program which emphasizes comprehensive care for PLWHA is their outreach to families, the surrounding communities, and Thai society at large via education about HIV/AIDS prevention and care and acceptance for persons living with AIDS. The PLWHA residents view participation in workshops to educate students, village leaders, and community members about HIV/AIDS as a positive outlet for making meaning of their suffering and being useful to society, doing good deeds, and thereby affirming their value, rights, and ability to work. Education programs also provide a means for linking Ban Pak residents to the outside society so that they may attest that they are a part of society rather than an ostracized, alienated group.

Overview of Buddhist-Based Communities

Since the unusual drought and water shortage of 1994, more country people have migrated to the towns and cities, adding to the overpopulation and congested traffic problems in Bangkok and other smaller cities. In particular, the forest fire at Huey Khakhaeng in Uthaithani, a national park and habitat for many endangered species and a world heritage site, destroyed some 25,000 acres of rain forest in 1994 and another 125,000 acres in 1998, which worsened Thailand's drought and water shortage. Despite the legal prohibition against teak logging and the selfless forest conservation work of individual monks like Phra Prachak and Phra Khamkhian, the remaining forests have been further destroyed, in particular in 1998 at the Salawin national park in Maehongsorn. Those involved in this destruction of the forest included influential politicians and officials, military and police officers, as well as officials from the Forestry Department itself. The floods throughout Thailand in the 1990s and the 2000s, which were partly due to inadequate forests to absorb water from the monsoons, damaged hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural farmland, increasing the poverty of upcountry farmers. Not surprisingly, young women and girls continue to take up prostitution, despite the threat of AIDS, and the number of people infected with HIV has been increasing.

Thailand today faces systemic structural problems, as shown by the economic crisis of late 1997, which has continued throughout the 2000s. Although the country is presently administered by a civilian government, the political and bureaucratic patronage system has remained unchanged and constitutes a major obstacle to the decentralization of power and to significant social and economic reforms. Despite these circumstances, the Thai Buddhist sangha remains silent and inactive, largely due to its own bureaucratic administration and its individualistic approach to the problems. Most monks maintain that if all individuals were ethical, problems would be solved naturally. While there is an element of truth to this approach, it naively ignores the impact of modern economic, political, and social structures on the everyday lives of individuals.

The contemporary Buddhist-based communities in Thailand, as grassroots movements, are going in the right direction, as is the movement of Buddhist women as *bhikkhuni*, whose aim is to empower women, teach *dhamma*, and alleviate the suffering of women and children. The Buddhist-based community approaches

are still limited attempts at structural reform as most of them are concerned with the micro-level of solving the immediate needs or the day-to-day problems of their communities. Macro-level perspectives and praxis, therefore, are needed at the local, national, as well as transnational levels in order to construct a more serious Buddhist social ethics leading to Buddhist liberation theology. The *Bhikkhuni* movement, unlike the Buddhist-based communities, has a macro-philosophical approach based in Buddhist philosophy and feminist liberation theory and is networking quite well internationally, yet it faces obstacles at the local and national levels due to male hegemony and institutionalized sexism in the Thai Buddhist clergy and community-at-large. Buddhist liberation theology is, therefore, the hope of Thai Buddhists to cope with contemporary problems at a structural level in Thai society. Of course, Thailand also has persons of other faiths such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, each of which has its own liberation theology.

Buddhist Liberation Theology: A Structural Analysis

Historically Buddhism arose in India at the time when the Aryan civilization flourished. Whereas the main concern of the founders of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam was politically oriented, the main concern of religious leaders and philosophers of Buddhism during the time of the founder was not political liberation due to the social conditions at the time, but rather personal liberation from human psychological suffering arising from the physical cycle of birth, old age, sickness, and death. Although the Buddha also taught social ethics concerning the social, economic, and political well-being of people, the main theme in Buddhism was personal liberation from psychological suffering. Today, as social and political conditions have changed tremendously, Buddhism needs a structural vision and a new emphasis on social liberation, hence the need for a Buddhist liberation theology.

Before the country became modernized, Siam—the original name of Thailand—was a traditional society whose values were articulated in terms of Buddhism. The name was changed to Thailand in 1939 as a step toward westernization or modernization.[20] Although Siamese people, measured by modern economic standards, were poorer in terms of material wealth and public health, members of older generations report that they used to be generally happier and more humane than Thai people nowadays. The contrast between yesterday's Siam

and today's Thailand, however, developed over time as a consequence of basic economic and social changes and as a by-product of the government's efforts to modernize the country. This modernization has shattered the self-sufficient economy of local communities and centralized the polity of the provinces. Ultimately, this process has tied the country economically to the global market economy under transnational capitalism and politically to the new international order. These economic and structural changes have had a great impact on all social and cultural aspects of Thai society and consequently have affected the social values and well-being of Thai people.

In response to rapid social changes in Thailand, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906–1993), a leading Thai Buddhist thinker, has interpreted Buddhism not only from a religious point of view but also from a sociopolitical perspective. After devoting most of his life to reforming Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhadasa found it necessary to address sociopolitical issues from a Buddhist perspective. In the 1960s, he articulated his sociopolitical position in terms of dhammocracy (*dhamma-thipatai*): the social and political order should follow the law of Dhamma—the teachings of the Buddha. Later on in the atmosphere of the student-led revolution in Thailand from 1973 to 1976, Buddhadasa presented his unique theory of dhammic socialism (*dhammika sangkhom-niyom*).

Buddhadasa based his theory of dhammic socialism on nature. To him, nature represents the state of balance for the survival and well-being of human beings, animals, plants, and the ecology of the world. In the state of nature, every being produces according to its capacity and consumes according to its needs; no being, whatever form it has, hoards surplus for its own sake. Buddhadasa calls this balanced state of nature socialistic. Problems arise, however, when human beings begin to hoard a surplus for the sake of their own profit; this leaves others facing scarcity and poverty. According to Buddhadasa, human beings can and should produce a surplus, but the surplus should be distributed for the well-being of everyone, and Buddhism provides the ethical tools for this fair distribution.

Philosophically, dhammic socialism is based on this principle: none of us should take more than we really need. We should share whatever extra we have with those who have less. Social problems are fundamentally a result of greed. In other words, greed is at the heart of scarcity and poverty. Buddhadasa's individualistic approach to social and economic problems, solved by the personal practice of

self-restraint (*sila*, "precepts," and *vinaya*, "discipline") and giving (*dana*), reflects, in many respects, his Theravada Buddhist worldview. Within the modern economic situation, however, he did not take into sufficient account the issue of scarcity and poverty at the structural level caused by the global market economy. Perhaps this was not as clear to him at that time as it is to us today.

If the life of Thai people in the past was "better" than it is today, this mainly resulted from the self-sufficiency of their local economies and the decentralization of political power, and hence the integrity of local culture and social values. Buddhist liberation theology must do more than advocate mindfulness and the ideal of simplicity. To construct a healthier Buddhist society requires a change of the economic structure into one of more local self-sufficiency, and the political structure into one of more local decentralization, with local moral and cultural values adapted to a contemporary context. Only then can a Buddhist social ethics take root in society as it did in the historical past. The Buddhist spirit of loving-kindness, compassion, sharing, and cooperation will then prevail, at both the personal and the structural levels.

If we consider Buddhist liberation theology in contemporary Thai society from a more structural perspective, we are forced to recognize that greed, hatred, and delusion,[21] which Buddhism identifies as the root of all harmful things, currently prevail. A systematic and structural greed can be found in the present economic system, in which millions of traditional farmers have been uprooted from their farmlands by tenancy and agribusiness, causing massive dislocation, unemployment, and poverty. Centralized political power and an economic system of dependency have caused structural hatred to arise as elites grow richer while the vast majority of people are driven into greater poverty. A structural delusion comes from the expanding influence of commercial advertising in the mass media, leading people to discard their cultural values and embrace consumerism.

In order to overcome greed, hatred, and delusion, a person needs to change not only his or her personal conduct or lifestyle but also the system that creates structural greed, hatred, and delusion. Buddhist ethics, such as the Five Precepts (*sila*), need to address this structural change more vigorously. For example, the first precept is to refrain from killing and harming living beings; when applying this to a poor country like Thailand, it becomes clear that the military budget, which comprises a large portion of the GNP, should be reduced. The violation

of human rights, including political or economic assassinations, the torture of prisoners, and child abuse, has to be halted. There must be an end to the slaughter of wild animals, especially endangered species. The rain forests that shelter wild animals need to be recovered and preserved. It should be clear that the moral precept forbidding killing would be made more meaningful by implementing these measures.

The second of the Five Precepts is to refrain from stealing. If we look at the situation in Thailand, we will see that a more just social structure is needed in order to prevent politicians, the military, police, civil servants, and businessmen from engaging in corruption and systematically stealing from the common people. Furthermore, destruction of the rain forests and degradation of the environment and the world's ecology are stealing the future of our children and grandchildren. The third precept is to refrain from sexual misconduct. Prostitution is a systematic violation of this rule, a problem Buddhists need to take more seriously. At the basic structural level, among other things, a substantial improvement in economic well-being in rural areas, as well as the enforcement of laws punishing those profiting from the business of prostitution, are needed to reduce pressure on rural young women in order to halt their resorting to or being sold into prostitution. Thailand is the hub of sex trade trafficking and sexploitation for the region of southeast Asia.

The fourth of the Five Precepts is to refrain from false speech. Buddhists need to advocate truthfulness, even when this means challenging the status quo and a corrupt system that often violates this demand. Political and bureaucratic reforms, laws guaranteeing a free press, multiple political parties, and grassroots participation in democracy are required to establish and maintain this precept at a structural level. The fifth precept, to refrain from intoxication, is systematically violated by the widespread alcohol and drug trade. The use of alcohol widespread throughout the villages and in the urban areas leads to domestic violence and the plundering of hard-earned, meager wages needed to support families' basic survival needs. The smuggling of drugs through and from Thailand has contributed to the worldwide drug problem, and this must be stopped. If a Buddhist liberation theology is to have any significant meaning for our contemporary society, Buddhists must reexamine the Five Precepts not just on a personal level but also at the structural level.

Toward A Buddhist Liberation Theology

The mind is not an independent entity; human beings also have bodies. Where the body is, the mind is. They are mutually dependent. Without the mind, the body is no different from other nonliving things; without the body, the mind cannot exist. Physical activities affect the development and quality of the mind. At the same time, the quality of the mind also affects the well-being of the physical body.

We are not born in a vacuum but in a society and a culture. We grow up and live not in an abstraction but in a particular social and cultural environment. Our life is affected by the quality of food, health care, and our physical and emotional environment, as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political environment. We do not live alone but in a network of complex social relationships. These truisms bear repeating because many Buddhists believe that they can automatically overcome sociopolitical problems through inner liberation from psychological suffering. Such a conception of Buddhism lacks a structural perspective from which to address social, economic, and political problems of the modern world.

Such an individualistic attitude might work for a hermit who renounces the world, but most Buddhists are not hermits. Most Buddhists live in a complex, interconnected world. Indeed, today even a hermit cannot avoid this complex nexus. The Thai Buddhist *sangha* has been controlled by the government since the nineteenth century. Buddhist monks all over Thailand eat their daily food given to them by Thai people, the majority of whom are poor and oppressed. Their sons become poorly paid laborers in construction and factories, and their daughters are exploited laborers, or even become prostitutes. Under such circumstances, how can Buddhists avoid their social responsibility? In the light of these sociopolitical issues and the underlying structures of contemporary life, Buddhist liberation theology needs to be integrated so as to include social as well as personal liberation.

From the perspective of Buddhist liberation theory, the solution of Thailand's structural problems is threefold. First, Buddhist-based communities all over Thailand need to be linked, forming a grassroots movement to combat social injustice and environmental destruction. Their more self-sustaining economies and decentralized polity can serve as models for a better society. Second, Buddhist intellectuals and social workers at all levels should learn more from the oppressed. The former Thaksin government's popular policies, such as "village loans"

and "socialized health care," should be worked out together with the poor to obtain a genuine structural solution to meet their needs. Thailand's broad-based reforms can occur by: listening to the poor, helping raise people's consciousness in regards to structural problems, organizing all those conscious of existing structural injustices—the underprivileged, the middle class, the intellectuals, and the affluent—to work together for meaningful change.

Third, a more just society could be obtained on the national level by pushing for political reforms advocated by the Buddhist thinkers such as Praves Wasi.[22] A new constitution, which includes a reformed democratic process with structural check-and-balance of power—including elections, government administration, parliament, and a judicial system—takes the first step toward positive sociopolitical change. The 1997 Reformed Constitution (which ended with the 2006 coup) should be used as a basis, with modifications to prevent abuse of power, for the drafting of the nation's new constitution to be promulgated in 2007. The Thai bureaucracy, one of the biggest obstacles to social and political reforms, needs restructuring in order to become more efficient and decentralized. All those who advocate Buddhist liberation theology must continue to work for political, economic, and social reforms, and structural changes at the national level, as well as changes in the laws to cope with transnational capitalist invasion. By supporting the grassroots movements of Buddhist-based communities, Buddhist women's empowerment movements, and a broad-based consciousness-raising process, we can help build a healthier and more just society which can keep transnational capitalist invasion at the minimum.

As a major world religion, Buddhism deals with the issues of human suffering and liberation from it. There are three main types of human suffering: physical suffering, psychological suffering, and sociopolitical suffering. Buddhism provides a unique treatment for the problem of inner human suffering through meditation. So, liberation (*nibbāna* or *nirvāna*) in Buddhism is basically liberation from psychological suffering. As Leonard Swidler puts it, Buddhism uses the language "from below" or "from within," whereas religions with God-centered orientations like Christianity use the language "from above" or "from without."[23] From this perspective, Buddhist language and concepts are closer to those of modern critical thinkers, which emphasize an internal locus of control rather than an external locus of control. Or as Antony Fernando puts it, the way the Buddha dealt

with his disciples is similar to the way a psychotherapist deals with his/her patients in a clinic,[24] as a psychotherapist works to strengthen a patient's inner locus of control.

Buddhism seems to lack a precise theory and praxis to address the concrete issues of contemporary sociopolitical suffering and its liberation. Traditional Buddhism provides guidelines for personal moral conduct such as self-restraint, patience, zeal, compassion, generosity, and mindfulness, but these moral concepts need to be reinterpreted in a modern context and integrated into a social ethical theory. Buddhadasa's theory of dhammic socialism tends to be too utopian and abstract. Although his theory addresses the issue of "surplus" in a manner similar to Karl Marx's "surplus value," it still needs interpretation and clarification as a social praxis. A comprehensive perspective on sociopolitical suffering and liberation from the existing exploitative system of global capitalism will manifest itself via a consciousness-raising process in regards to sociopolitical suffering and its structure and the emergence of Buddhist-based communities struggling for social justice in solidarity with women, the poor, and the oppressed. These are steps, in the Thai experience, toward a Buddhist liberation theology.

8

ZEN BUDDHISM

—Ruben L. F. Habito

In Zen monasteries and meditation centers all over the world, practitioners chant "The Four Vows of the Bodhisattva" in different languages, an English version of which goes as follows:

> Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to liberate them.
> Delusive passions are inexhaustible. I vow to eradicate them.
> Gates to the Dharma are innumerable. I vow to learn them.
> The awakened Way is unsurpassable. I vow to embody it.

Bodhisattva, a term derived from Sanskrit which is now part of Buddhist vocabulary in English, is "a being on the path of enlightenment."[1] Each practitioner who embarks on this path of meditative practice as laid out in the Zen tradition is invited to open one's eyes to the fact that this Bodhisattva is no other than one's very own true self. And as a practitioner awakens to this reality of being a Bodhisattva, he or she also comes to realize that to liberate all beings is to liberate one's own self, and vice versa. Two key questions arise in this regard. First, what is meant by liberating one's own self? Second, what is involved in living out this vow to liberate all beings?

This essay focuses on Zen Buddhist perspectives on the liberation of all beings (another article in this volume by Tavivat Puntarigvivat addresses the question of liberation in the entire Buddhist tradition). The first part will describe the contours of the Zen path as it arises out of the family of Buddhist traditions (Habito, 2005:108–30). The

second part will focus on the first of the Bodhisattva vows "to liberate all beings," examining its implications, reflecting on issues surrounding this vision of liberation, as well as obstacles to its realization. The third part will cite examples of Zen practitioners engaged in liberative praxis toward socioecological transformation. The concluding section will offer reflections on a possible contribution of Zen Buddhism toward forging a vision and praxis of integral liberation.

What is Zen Buddhism?

The term "Zen" is a Japanese rendering of a Chinese character, *Ch'an* (pronounced *Son* in Korean, *Thien* in Vietnamese) which in turn derives from a Sanskrit word, *dhyana*. This latter term refers to an advanced stage of meditation, practiced and described in great detail in religious texts of the Hindu tradition, and carried over into and given renewed emphasis and significance in Buddhism.

Meditation is a fundamental form of spiritual practice cultivated in the Buddhist tradition as a whole, since its inception in India and transmission to neighboring Asian countries. The term "Buddha" derives from a Sanskrit term which means "one who is awakened." Followers of the Awakened One describe the life of awakening as comprised of three pillars, namely, *sila* (disciplined life), *samadhi* (concentration, or a single-minded state of awareness), and *prajna* (discerning wisdom). The single-minded state of awareness referred to as the second pillar is a fruit of meditative practice. In this mode of awareness one sees things in a way that overcomes the dichotomy between the perceiver (subject) and the perceived (object). Meditation manuals written in India and Sri Lanka describe various states of absorption (*dhyana*) that lead to this state of awareness, paving the way for discerning and liberative wisdom (*prajna*).

Historically, what we refer to as Zen (*Ch'an*) Buddhism originated in China from around the sixth or seventh century or later. This school placed central emphasis on the practice of seated meditation, over and above doctrinal or ritual aspects of Buddhism. This is not to say that doctrinal, ritual, or other aspects were entirely neglected, but simply to mark the point which proponents of the school themselves highlighted.[2] Beginning around the early centuries of the common (Western) era, with the translation of various scriptural texts and commentaries into Chinese, as well as the importation and adaptation of doctrines, rituals, and devotional practices, Buddhism came to be gradually

assimilated into Chinese culture and society. The period between the sixth and the eleventh centuries saw the establishment and subsequent flowering of different Buddhist schools of thought and forms of popular devotion in China.

Around the tenth or eleventh century, advocates of Zen/Chan sought to distinguish their school from other forms of Buddhism, and offered systematized formulations of its basic principles. They also sought to legitimize their school and establish its superiority over others through a reconstruction of its past, tracing its origins back to the Buddha Shakyamuni himself, in a direct line of transmission through Indian and subsequently Chinese ancestors.[3] A pivotal figure in this reconstructed view of Zen/Chan is Bodhidharma, who is said to have arrived in China around the sixth century from the southern parts of India, and is regarded as the twenty-eighth ancestor in the line of transmission from Shakyamuni Buddha. The traditions regarding Bodhidharma have attained legendary proportions, making it difficult to sift through and distinguish historiography and hagiography (Dumoulin, 2005:85–106). A four-line verse attributed to Bodhidharma, but most likely composed around the tenth or eleventh century, conveys the characteristic marks of this school.

> A special transmission outside of Scriptures
> Not relying on words or letters
> Pointing directly to the human mind
> Seeing into one's nature, becoming awakened.

Special Transmission Outside of Scriptures

Advocates of Zen/Chan claimed a direct transmission of the liberative truth of Awakening from the Buddha Shakyamuni himself, independent of the many scriptural sources available at the time. This transmission was said to have been given to the disciple Mahakashyapa, then handed down to Ananda, and on to Bodhidharma, regarded as the twenty-eighth ancestor. The latter is said to have traveled from India to China around the sixth century, handing on the transmission to the Chinese ancestors.

> Once in ancient times, when the World Honored One was at Mt. Grdhakuta to give a sermon, he held up a flower and showed it to the assemblage. At this, they all remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa broke into a smile. The World Honored One said, "I have

the eye treasury of the True Dharma, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters, being specially transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this." (*Gateless Gate*, No. 6)[4]

Mahakashyapa is then said to have transmitted this to the next ancestor, Ananda, as depicted in the following anecdote: "Ananda asked Kashyapa in all earnestness, 'The world-Honored One transmitted the brocade robe to you. What else did he transmit to you?' Kashyapa called, 'Ananda!' Ananda replied, 'Yes, Master.' Kashyapa said, 'Knock down the flagpole at the gate' " (*Gateless Gate*, No. 22).

After Ananda, a successive line of Indian ancestors are listed as handing down this transmission in linear fashion, until Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth in the series. With his arrival in China, Bodhidharma then confers the transmission to a Chinese disciple, named Hui-ko, depicted in the following story:

Bodhidarma sat facing the wall. The second patriarch, standing in the snow, cut off his arm and said, "Your disciple's mind is not yet at peace. I beg you, Master, give it rest." Bodhidharma said, "Bring your mind to me I will put it to rest." The patriarch said, "I have searched for the mind but have never been able to find it." Bodhidharma said, "I have finished putting it to rest for you." (*Gateless Gate*, No. 43)

The above anecdotes, along with several thousand other, are taken up as teaching devices called *koan* (*kung-an* in Chinese), whereby the Teacher, in a one-to-one encounter, examines the extent of experience and understanding of a student practitioner, guiding the latter toward further deepening of this experience and understanding through continued meditative practice and repeated encounters with the Teacher. After years and years of such practice and with this kind of intimate guidance, a practitioner who is deemed to have attained sufficient experience and ripe understanding of the world of awakening may in turn be named a Teacher, with the authorization to hand down the transmission to one's own students when the time arrives.

No Reliance on Words or Letters

The "content" of the transmission from Shakyamuni to Mahakashyapa and down the line through Bodhidharma and the list of Chinese,

Korean, and Japanese ancestors, is emphasized to be of a nature that is beyond verbal description or conceptual formulation. The Zen tradition likens words and letters to "a finger pointing to the moon," noting that verbal and conceptual formulations can never adequately capture what "it" is all about. This dictum that Zen does not rely on words or letters also is a way of affirming that at its core, Zen is not about doctrinal propositions or religious teaching. Rather, it is emphasized, Zen is about seeing and experiencing "things as they really are." Only through such a way of experiencing things as they really are can a human being be liberated from one's delusions and misapprehensions, which in turn are the causes of desires and attachments that lead to pain and suffering.

An illustration that can be cited in this regard is the difference, for example, between a picture of a loaf of bread, and the loaf itself. Gazing at the picture may make one aware of one's rumbling stomach, whet one's appetite, and draw out the juices making a person want to go and eat. But it goes without saying that only the actual loaf will serve to satisfy one's hunger and give true nourishment. In this way, verbal formulations and ideas about liberation, about the truth, about ultimate reality, can never satisfy a person's spiritual hunger as such; only a veritable experiential encounter can serve to liberate one from delusions about truth and ultimate reality.

This dictum also affirms that Zen is not about adhering to doctrine, or to a belief system (including Buddhism!), but rather is to be construed as an invitation to a living experience, with a systematic and rigorous set of prescriptive guidelines toward its realization and its follow-up for the rest of one's life. Conversely, people with different belief systems may enter into the practice of Zen and be led to such an experience, as long as the belief system a practitioner may adhere to is not one that expressly militates against the Zen experience as such. Many practitioners are precisely led to reexamine the belief system with which they started and to understand its implications in a new or different light, a point that will be addressed more fully below.

Directly Pointing to the Human Mind

The emphasis on experience noted above, with the corollary point that Zen is not about adhering to doctrinal statements or to belief systems (and thereby can be practiced by individuals with differing doctrinal positions or belief systems, as long as they are not contradictory to

what the Zen experience implies), is reiterated in this dictum that is the third mark of Zen. In tandem with the practice of seated meditation, a vital feature of Zen practice is the one-to-one encounter with an authorized Teacher (that is, sanctioned by one who in turn has been duly authorized as Teacher) who himself or herself has gone through the path of meditative practice over many years (twenty or thirty years as a minimum) and has come to embody the Zen experience and perspective on the world in one's own life. One who is on the path of Zen under the guidance of a Teacher goes repeatedly into this formalized one-to-one encounter (called *dokusan* in Japanese, literally, "going alone") in order to bare one's heart and soul, to present one's state of mind to the Teacher. The Teacher then gives verbal or nonverbal pointers and guidelines each time, to enable the practitioner to go deeper into one's meditative practice, or to clear away certain mental or psychological or other obstacles that are in the way of a liberative experience on the part of the practitioner. It is in these encounters that a masterful Teacher uses the proverbial "finger" to point to the moon of enlightenment, based on the particular state of mind or psychological situation of the individual practitioner. That to which this "finger" points, is said to be no other than the practitioner's own mind, which, from another perspective, is also referred to as no-mind.

The anecdote cited above describing the encounter between Bodhidharma and the first Chinese disciple Hui-ko (known also as the Second Ancestor in China) illustrates this way of "directly pointing to the human mind" that is no-mind. Incidentally, the following koans are also part of the training program for practitioners.

> Ta-mei asked Ma-tsu in all earnestness, "What is Buddha?"
> Ma-tsu replied, "This very mind is Buddha." (*Gateless Gate*, No. 30)

> A monk asked Ma-tsu in all earnestness, "What is Buddha?"
> Ma-tsu replied, "Not mind, not Buddha." (*Gateless Gate*, No. 33)

One immediately notices a glaring contradiction, at least in the conceptual implications involved. The same Zen Master (Ma-tsu, 709–788) is asked, in one instance by a disciple who later became one of his successors (Ta-mei, 752–839), at another instance by an unidentified monk, "What is Buddha?" The responses given are diametrically opposite, and one might tend to think that the Master was thereby not really sure, or that he changed his mind, or that he made light of the question and did not balk at giving contradictory answers.

Given that every encounter between a Zen Teacher and a practitioner is taken as a momentous occasion, wherein questions of life and death, ultimate reality and truth, liberation from suffering, and such vital issues are taken up, we must rule out that the Master was being whimsical and simply made light of the question. The question is, after all, an inquiry about the most sublime reality and the central issue, the matter of prime importance in the shared understanding of this tradition: What is Buddha, that is, what is it to be an awakened one?

A corollary point in the shared understanding of those who practice in the Zen tradition is that "all sentient beings are endowed with Buddha nature," that is, all have the capacity to be an awakened one. So, asking the question "What is Buddha?" is the same as asking "What is my true nature?" or "What is that which constitutes my true self?" In this regard, a similar conceptual contradiction is noted in the following exchanges between Chao-chou (778–897) and two practitioner/monks, recorded as separate encounters.

> A monk asked Chao-chou in all earnestness, "Does a dog have
>   Buddha nature?"
> Chao-chou replied, "No!" (*Gateless Gate*, No. 1)

And then again,

> A monk asked Chao-chou in all earnestness, "Does a dog have
>   Buddha nature?"
> Chao-chou replied, "Yes!" (*Entangling Vines*, No. 49)[5]

Once again we have a Master contradicting himself. Repeated instances of such blatant conceptual contradictions, of course, cannot escape the notice of those practicing in this tradition. These instances are cited, not as logical inconsistencies and therefore as proving the unreliability and lack of viability of this tradition, but precisely as examples of the first three marks of Zen, namely, that it is about a special transmission outside of Scriptures, not relying on words or letters, and pointing directly to the human mind. These reveal an attitude of inner freedom with regard to the use of verbal expressions and can be construed as different fingers pointing to a resplendent moon of awakening experience. It is the experience of opening one's eyes and seeing this moon that liberates a practitioner from a mode of thinking characterized as dualistic and delusive. All this pointing is meant to invite the practitioner to "see things as they truly are." And what is seen?

Seeing One's True Nature, Being Awakened

What is "seen" in this direct experiential encounter is no other than one's own true nature, that is, one's "Buddha nature." This does not refer to some underlying entity that exists (or does not exist), as already noted above. Rather, what is referred to here is a living experience of being awakened. So, to put it simply, "seeing one's true nature" is no other than "being awakened." Being Buddha. Another disclaimer is warranted here. In the Zen tradition, being Buddha is not considered to be something elevated and sublime, something extraordinary and special. Any tendency to want to capture "Buddha" into an idealized state or romanticized concept is immediately swept away in practice, with the famous dictum, "If you meet the Buddha, slay him!" Rather, it is also affirmed, "being Buddha" is no other than living one's life in the most ordinary way.

> Chao-chou earnestly asked Nanchuan, "What is the Way?" Nanchuan answered, "The ordinary mind is the Way." Chao-chou asked, "Should I direct myself toward it or not?" Nanchuan said, "If you try to turn toward it, you go against it. If I do not try to turn toward it, how can I know that it is the Way?" Nanchuan answered, "The Way does not belong to knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is delusion; not-knowing is a blank consciousness. When you have really reached the true Way beyond all doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as the great empty firmament. How can it be talked about on a level of right and wrong?" At these words, Chao-chou was suddenly enlightened. (*Gateless Gate*, No. 19)

This encounter between Chao-chou and his Teacher, Nanchuan, is said to have occurred when the former was himself a young student practitioner. This anecdote marks his formal entry into the world of Zen, with his initial experience of enlightenment, called *kensho*, literally, "seeing one's true nature." It ushered him into a vision and a way of life that he was to continue cultivating throughout his entire life, until the ripe old age of 120 (Chao-chou assumed the role of Teacher at the age of 80 and lived another 40 years thereafter, guiding others on this path of Zen).

To summarize, in response to the question "What is Zen?" the tradition itself offers these four marks described above as a way of characterizing what it is all about. Let us now examine how engagement in meditative practice in the Zen tradition can be liberative.

Toward Liberating All Sentient Beings

The four vows of the Bodhisattva noted above may sound like an impossible dream, a preposterous proposition right at its inception. One intending to even attempt such a venture might also be deemed as something of a foolish Don Quixote, seeking to undertake a task much, much bigger than one's own capacity. Let us examine more closely what Zen practitioners intend in reciting this vow.

Mahayana—The Great Vehicle

The notion of Bodhisattva is a keynote of Mahayana Buddhism, a development that found momentum in India around five hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha. Proponents of this movement (who were both monastic as well as lay) accused many monastic followers of the Buddha as having selfishly turned their backs on the world, seeking liberation from the sufferings and dissatisfaction associated with life in ordinary human society. They criticized those followers as taking a "lesser vehicle" (Hinayana), like a small boat that can only carry one person across to the other side. They called their own path the "Great Vehicle" (Mahayana), likened to a great big ship that can contain all living beings to take them to the other shore (of nirvana).

This Great Vehicle is an expression of the boundless heart and mind of compassion of the Buddha, which embraces all beings in all directions of the universe. For proponents of the Mahayana, a central motivation that leads one to embark on the path of awakening is to liberate all beings from the sufferings and dissatisfactions characteristic of their state of life, and not just to seek one's own liberation separately or independently from others. This is the heart and mind manifested by Shakyamuni himself, who set out on the path of awakening not just for his own sake but precisely for the sake of and as a representative of all living beings. His enlightenment experience was therefore not just "his own" but is considered as a pivotal event that embraces and affects all beings who were ever born and lived before him and who will be born and live after him.

This also relates to another key tenet of Mahayana Buddhism: that all beings are endowed with Buddha nature, that is, they have the capacity to arrive at enlightenment and attain ultimate realization. In other words, as expressed in Hakuin's Song of Zazen, a famous

verse also chanted in Zen halls throughout the world, "all beings are originally buddhas." The question is only whether one realizes this or not. The practice of Zen meditation is thus considered as the locus in which this realization takes place.

Who Are Sentient Beings?

Who is included in the expression "sentient beings are numberless"? Buddhist understanding derives from Hindu cosmology, which classified six realms of living, or sentient beings. These are 1) hell-dwellers, 2) hungry ghosts, 3) malignant spirits, 4) animals, 5) human beings, and 6) heavenly beings. Buddhists then added four more, to include 7) hearers of the word of the Buddha, or disciples who belong to the Buddhist community, 8) solitary saints, who attain enlightenment on their own through rigorous lives of asceticism and meditation in secluded areas, 9) bodhisattvas, or those who live in service of others or who have come back to this earthly life in order to help others on the path of awakening, and 10) buddhas, who have gone beyond and are in nirvana.

These can be taken literally as separate categories of living beings, with each one assigned a realm somewhere in this universe, or perhaps better, multiverse. Many Buddhists (as well as followers of different forms of the Hindu tradition) do take this received cosmology as such. Especially as regards the first six, however, these classifications may also be taken as states of being, or states of mind, that different human beings find themselves in, or that the same human being finds oneself in throughout different phases or dispositions of life. For example, a "hell-dweller" can be taken to be one who is closed in upon oneself, wrapped only in one's self-centered little world, having excluded everyone else from one's life and concerns. A "hungry ghost" is one who is seeking to fill one's inner hunger for something or other, whether it be food, drink, some kind of chemical, sex, fame, money, power, and so on. Such beings thereby desperately grasp and cling to whatever they can hold on to, wanting more and more, yet never getting satisfied. Such a state of mind, in psychological terms, is also called "addiction." A "malignant spirit" is one who always needs to be ahead of or better than others, always picking a fight, always wanting to prove oneself or assert oneself at the expense of others, and is not immune to taking steps to hurt or eliminate others from the scene. An "animal" is one who lives in a way that is governed by basic drives and

instinctive impulses rather than by measured and reasoned responses to situations. Placed above the human level, a "heavenly being" is one who lives in comfort and some degree of contentment. It is said to be a state that is furthest from awakening, as those in this situation want to cling to their comforts and their easy way of life. Until, like Shakyamuni during his youth as he contemplated the privileged situation he was in, they begin to feel some sense of boredom and dissatisfaction in it and start asking, "Is that all there is to life?"

In the context of the above, a "human being" is one who contains all the above as possible states of mind or dispositions, but who is able to discern these tendencies and make decisions and take action in a reasoned way with consideration for the consequences of one's decisions and actions. It is in this state that the quest for enlightenment takes place, as a human being experiences the sense of dissatisfaction (the basic meaning of the term *dukkha*) in finite pursuits and seeks to overcome it by taking steps on the path of awakening. The seventh to the tenth realms refer then to those who have taken up this path of awakening, in their differing modes and levels.

What is Liberation?

The next question is: what is meant by the liberation of sentient beings, as articulated in the first Bodhisattva vow? ("Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to liberate them all.") The second, third, and fourth Bodhisattva vows can shed light on this.

The second vow goes: "Delusive passions are inexhaustible. I vow to eradicate them all." "Delusive passion" is an English rendition of the Sanskrit *klesha*, which can be translated also as "impurity," "stain," or "obstacle." The (Chinese) Japanese translation of this is a two-character compound pronounced *bonno*, which refers to something that causes distress, unease, or unhappiness, based on an attitude of needlessly clinging to something or other. In Buddhist thinking, these are all rooted in the "three poisons" of greed (also rendered as "lust"), anger (also rendered as "animosity" or "ill will"), and ignorance. Thus, the first level of meaning to be understood in the term "liberation of sentient beings" is the liberation from these delusive passions, rooted in the three poisons noted above. Now to acknowledge that "delusive passions are inexhaustible" appears to be giving up on this task, but the vow is precisely to eradicate these, that is, to strike them down at their root.

This is to abbreviate a process of analysis presented in many Buddhist texts and commentaries, but the root of all these delusive passions is ignorance. This refers to a state of mind of not realizing things for what they are and how they are or misconstruing what is the case for something else (that appears to be but really is not the case). Pursuing this further, this ignorance of "what is, as it truly is," is what leads living beings to think, speak, and act in a way that is motivated by greed or lust, and anger or ill will, thus causing unhappiness to others as well as to themselves. To eradicate delusive passions then is to strike at their root, this ignorance, overturning it, enabling one to truly "see things as they are." In the Zen tradition, the practice of seated meditation (*zazen*) is regarded as the direct path to this way of seeing things as they are. The practice of meditation, then, with the formal prescriptions regarding posture, breathing, and silencing the mind, is regarded as the most effective way toward the eradication of delusive passions.

The third vow is as follows: "Gates to the Dharma are innumerable. I vow to learn them." This suggests that there is an infinite variety of ways of approaching, and entering the Dharma, or liberating Truth. The vow is to dispose oneself to learn and to master all these gates to the truth. This involves the cultivation of an attitude whereby one takes whatever happens in one's life, whoever one encounters in the different situations of daily life, and whatever one sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or places in one's mental image, as a pointer to that liberating Truth. Putting it in this way recalls the "finger pointing to the moon" noted above. All these things, events, encounters, that occur, every moment of one's life, points to the moon of enlightenment, "right here, now."

Seated meditation then is a way of cultivating one's mind, enabling one to pay attention each moment and to see things truly as they are, freed from delusion and attachment. As one continues this practice on a regular basis, one develops and deepens one's capacity for paying attention, the capacity for being fully there each moment and open to its mystery and wonder. One is thus able to meet every moment in its freshness and not give in to a mind that keeps turning to the past for comparisons of what could have been, or to a mind full of expectations and idealizations of what could be or should be. And as one maintains this attitude of openness to the mystery of each present moment, there may come precisely one such moment, even a brief one, wherein one's eyes are suddenly opened. Aha! And a new horizon, a new world is opened.

Such an experiential moment is called *kensho*, literally, "seeing one's true nature." This is another way of referring to "seeing things as they really are." It is an event wherein one's perspective, one's standpoint vis-à-vis the world and oneself is overturned, and one sees as it were with new eyes, and hears with new ears. This is a way of seeing that has overcome the conventional dichotomy between "subject" and "object," that is, between the seer, identified with "me, myself, and I," and the seen, understood as "whatever confronts me in the world of things and other persons, out there before me, outside of me." This experience opens one to a way of seeing that no longer separates the seer and the seen, a way of hearing that overcomes the separation between the hearer and the heard. For example, in considering a tree, one comes to realize, in an intimate and direct kind of way, that "I" and "tree" are not separate at all. "I" and "the world" no longer constitute separate or separable entities. Cultivating this awareness each moment in one's daily life, enlightened by such an experience of "seeing things as they are," is the way to realizing the fourth Bodhisattva vow: "The Enlightened Way is unsurpassable. I vow to embody it."

What does all this mean in terms of "liberating all beings"? The pivotal point in Zen Buddhism is this experience of "seeing into one's true nature," which is also a way of seeing things as they truly are. In seeing things as they truly are, one arrives at peace with oneself, peace with the world, and the entire universe. One thereby seeks to offer this deep, deep inner peace to all beings, whom one embraces in a heart of boundless compassion. The Zen way of life then is one that cultivates this way of seeing, enabling it to shed light on every nook and cranny of one's day-to-day existence. To see things as they truly are is to see oneself as not separate from, but rather connected with everything and everyone. To see in this way is thus spontaneously to embrace each and every being as one's very own true self. This direct seeing of one's intimate interconnectedness with all is the ground of that heart of boundless compassion, enabling one to bear the pain of the world as one's own pain and to share the joys of all beings as one's very own. This is the realization that each and every being in this universe is no other than one's own true self, seen "as it really is."

Summarizing the above, Zen practice bears fruit in a transformation that occurs in an individual's life. It brings about a way of seeing and understanding oneself, as not separate from the world, not separate from all beings in this universe, but precisely as bound in destiny with all. From this perspective, one can only deepen one's resolve to

liberate all beings. Now how does such a transformation that occurs in an individual's life have bearing on life in society, life in this world of conflict and violence and oppression and ecological destruction?

Zen and the Social Dimension

The transformative and liberative power of Zen practice takes effect in individual practitioners' lives; and this can impact the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ecological dimension, as practitioners interact with society as a whole in their given particular contexts, as individuals and as communities. In concrete terms, how does this form of spiritual practice relate to the social dimension? We begin by first noting the "mixed" track record of Zen Buddhism in this regard (Habito, 1996:135–52; 1997:165–76).

Historically and sociologically, up to at least the latter part of the twentieth century, Zen Buddhist practitioners have not been known for leadership nor for initiative in movements of social transformation. Zen Buddhist communities have up to recently been identified with large monastic institutions in East Asia. From the fact that such institutions needed logistical and other kinds of support from economic elite and from political rulers to be able to maintain themselves, they have largely been associated with the status quo, rather than with those elements that have worked for transformation in society. The same can perhaps be said in general of the role of Buddhist sanghas in different Asian countries throughout history, whether in the Theravada countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and others, or in Mahayana countries like China, Korea, and Japan. This is not to say, however, that there have been or are no Buddhists in Asia who have been aligned with those groups struggling against various forms of oppression and/or seeking sociopolitical transformation.[6]

Zen has also been the subject of harsh criticism especially in recent years, with the publication of Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* (1997), and subsequently, *Zen War Stories* (2003), describing and highlighting the participation and active engagement of well-known Japanese Zen Masters and practitioners in acts of war in the context of Japan's imperialistic and militaristic past. This is a critique that Zen practitioners, especially those in the Japanese lineages with centers in Western countries, still need to consider and take into account as they reflect on the social and political implications and consequences of their practice.

Is Zen Individualistic and Deterministic?

Certain facets of Zen Buddhism tend to militate against effective engagement in socioeconomic and political issues on the part of the practitioners. One set of features has to do with psychological factors on the part of practitioners as they engage and continue in Zen practice. Another set has to do with the underlying worldview assumed in Buddhism as inherited from the Hindu tradition. One key factor that militates against engagement toward social and ecological transformation is an "inward turn" many individuals take as they begin their meditative practice in the Zen tradition. This attitude is revealed in the remarks of a Japanese Zen Master at a symposium on Zen and Society held at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan, in the 1980s: "We Zen Buddhists are primarily concerned with issues of life and death as we settle into our cushions and practice meditation. We thus do not have time to spare for getting involved in social and political issues, as these will only deflect us from these fundamental questions of life and death."

Such an attitude is also shared by many who have been drawn to Zen practice precisely as they grapple with existential questions about human mortality and one's own impending death, the meaning of life, and the point of it all. And with such "life and death" questions looming in one's horizon, understandably, all else fades into insignificance. There are of course those who turn to Zen meditation from other kinds of motivation, including plain curiosity, physical well-being, or relief from stress. But personal, existential issues being "the matter of prime importance" for many Zen practitioners, the question of engagement toward socioecological transformation is either pushed aside or not considered "relevant" or worthy of attention at all. Given such an attitude, Zen is thus (rightly in many cases) accused of being an individualistic kind of spiritual practice.

Another set of factors also goes against fostering active engagement toward socioecological transformation among many Zen practitioners. Buddhists generally assume the worldview that all living beings, including humans of course, are subject to a repeated cycle of births and rebirths (whether one takes this literally or as a symbolic form of expression of the interconnectedness of all events and things in the universe). This relates to another received notion, namely, the law of karma, whereby events or situations in this life are understood as having concomitant causes traceable to past actions in this life or

even in past rebirths. Taking such a view in a literal way, various kinds of suffering and/or oppressive situations to which human beings are subject can be "explained away" by attributing them to actions of those particular human beings in their past lives. Such a deterministic kind of attribution is thus tantamount to blaming the victims for their suffering, rather than, say, bringing to light and addressing their causes in unjust relationships and oppressive socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures that count as factors in such suffering.

Overcoming Individualistic and Deterministic Tendencies

Indeed, it can be said that the majority of those who turn to meditative practice in Zen Buddhism are primarily motivated by personal, existential issues that come up in different stages of their journey of life. This is precisely the area wherein the transformative power of Zen practice can be experienced and realized in a given person's life, that is, toward the resolution of "the fundamental matter of life and death." As noted above, the preoccupation with such central matters in one's life can deflect an individual's attention from concern with issues of society in general. As an individual continues, however, and deepens in one's meditative practice, and as the fruits of this practice begin to manifest themselves in one's life, one comes to a realization that one cannot exclude questions of the social dimension from one's concerns.

For one, there comes the acknowledgment that one's personal life is inextricably bound up with those to whom one is intimately related as a human being, beginning with one's family, relatives, friends, associates, and so on in wider and wider circles of connectedness. In other words, this realization of one's interconnectedness with each and everyone in this circle of life is one of the fruits of meditative practice. Further, as one's meditative practice deepens, one can also begin to see not just those in immediate and tangible relationship to oneself, but precisely all beings, as not separate from, and intimately connected, to one's own true self.

As one continues Zen practice, and together with the community, recites the Bodhisattva vow that begins "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to liberate them," the import of this vow starts to sink in upon one's awareness. This move transforms a practitioner from one with an individualistic frame of mind toward one with a more inclusive and open mind and heart that now embraces all living beings

within the field of one's concern. This, in short, is the cultivation of the mind of compassion in and through Zen practice.

Regarding the deterministic tendencies in the underlying world-view based on the law of karma, Shakyamuni himself encountered this view among many of his contemporaries. In this vein, he presented an understanding of the notion of "karma" that challenged the deterministic views of his listeners. Emphasizing that the term "karman" comes from a verb (kr) which means "to do," he preached how each person is holy and to be esteemed as such, not because of birthright or social class, as the received notion of the law of karma would have it, placing some members of society above others. The rightful emphasis is then on what each individual is and becomes, based on what one does, rather than on what one's past actions and past lives have consigned one to be. Zen practice, involving a straightforward look at oneself and at all there is "just as it is," can also enable one to see things in this way, and thereby overcome a deterministic view of the law of karma.

Zen Practitioners and Socioecological Engagement

Rather than presenting theoretical formulations and idealized portrayals of how a Zen perspective can ground socioecological engagement, it would serve us to look at some concrete examples of how some Zen Buddhist practitioners and communities have taken on different kinds of engagement in the socioecological dimension. A most notable example in this regard is the Vietnamese Zen monk and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Thich Nhat Hanh, regarded as the one who coined the term "socially engaged Buddhism." His life experience, having been born and raised in Vietnam during times of his country's turmoil, and having turned to Buddhism early on in his career, forged him in the struggle for peace from his Buddhist perspective. A central feature of his teaching is the insight into the interconnectedness of all beings, which provides the ground for offering oneself to the healing of the world's wounds. A well-known poem, entitled "Please Call Me By My True Names," encapsulates this teaching in a dramatic and poignant way:

> I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
> My legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
> And I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.
>
> I am the 12-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat
> Who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate

And I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.
(Hanh, 1987:63–64)

Another prominent socially engaged Zen Buddhist is Robert Aitken, known to many as the Dean of American Zen, who is a cofounder, with Gary Snyder (another Zen practitioner) and others, of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. The latter is now a vibrant nationwide organization with international links with other Buddhist groups working for peace and justice around the world. It has a five-point stated mission that includes "making a clear public witness to Buddhist practice and interdependence as a way of peace and protection of all beings" and "to encourage the practice of nonviolence based on the rich resources of traditional Buddhist and Western spiritual teachings" (Simmer-Brown, 2000:78).

Many of the contributors in a recent volume of collected essays on engaged Buddhism (Moon, 2004) are Zen Buddhist practitioners, who bring their spiritual practice to bear on issues of social inequality, racism, gender and sexuality, economics, political action, war and violence, ecology, and other matters of crucial concern to the entire human family. These essays, and many others of related themes published in *Turning Wheel*, the journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, provide concrete examples, experiential accounts, insights, and scenarios affirming the inseparable connection of meditative practice and sociopolitical and ecological engagement.

David Loy, a noted Buddhist philosopher who is also an authorized Zen Teacher in the Sanbo Kyodan tradition, has published many works providing theoretical grounding for the interconnection of spiritual practice and socioecological transformation.[7] A growing body of literature with detailed examples attests to, describes, and grounds the liberative power and possibilities of Zen Buddhist practice, overcoming stereotyped notions of its being an individualistic, deterministic, and solipsistic kind of "spiritual auto-eroticism."

It is also relevant here to cite examples not just of individuals but of entire communities as loci of liberative praxis toward socioecological transformation. Stephanie Kaza describes the Green Gulch Zen Center, located north of San Francisco, as well as Spirit Rock Meditation Center, dedicated mainly to Insight (Vipassana) meditation based in the Theravada tradition, located in San Geronimo Valley, California, as two places that incorporate an ecological vision and emphasize practices toward ecological wholeness (1997:219–48). The ecological

vision of Zen Mountain Monastery, located in the Catskills, in upstate New York, is described by its founding Teacher, John Daido Loori, as an integral component of living the Buddhist precepts (1997:177–86). Gary Snyder offers a view of Nature as Community as he presents a vision of Great Earth Sangha, laying out foundations for such communities of spiritual practice to engage in liberative praxis for socio-ecological transformation (Barnhill, 1997:187–218).

Concluding Reflections: Toward a Vision and Praxis of Integral Liberation

In examining Zen Buddhism, I have noted various features of the tradition that militate against socially engaged liberative praxis. These may be found in the historical background and sociological character of the tradition, as well as in the psychological disposition brought by many of those who turn to Zen meditation practice. Nevertheless, the very orientation that motivates this practice, and the culminating vision that grounds it, is no other than what can be called "integral liberation." This vision of liberation involves transformation in the personal, social, and ecological dimensions of our being, in a way that integrates these various dimensions. The term "integral" also denotes the bridging of the separation between what is construed as "self" and "other," in the realization of one's interconnectedness with all.

From a given angle, personal transformation receives the emphasis in Zen Buddhist prescriptions for behavior and meditative practice, individually and in community. This transformation occurs in a person who takes these prescriptions to heart in one's own life and action. A person so transformed realizes the import and content of the following words of Dogen, a Zen Master of thirteenth-century Japan. "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to let the self be actualized by the myriad things of the universe. When actualized by the myriad things of the universe, one's body and mind, and the body and mind of others drop away. There is no trace of enlightenment left, and this no-trace continues endlessly."

A key point to note here is that while initially a practitioner may seem to be preoccupied with "studying the self," the deepening of one's practice enables one to "forget the self." In so doing, one comes to realize that one's "self" is not separate from, or better, no other than, the myriad things of the universe. The separation between one's own

body/mind, and the body/mind of others, drops off, and one is able to live freely as one who has overcome dualistic notions and delusive ideas of separation. From such a vantage point, the pains and sorrows, as well as the joys and hopes, of everyone in the world, are experienced as one's very own. Such is the mind of one enlightened by the wisdom to "see things as they are" and moved with a heart of compassion for all living beings. "Living beings" are no longer seen as separate or different from one's very own self, and one is thus poised to respond in appropriate action toward the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of the well-being of all as one's own alleviation and well-being. Integral liberation, then, involves spiritual practice leading to personal transformation, blossoming in an awakened way of life that incorporates the cultivation of attitudes and action toward transformation in the socioecological realm.[8]

Notwithstanding their personal failings on the individual level, as well as blatant shortcomings on the communal and institutional levels, which make them liable to the kinds of criticisms already leveled against them (as noted above), those in the Zen tradition seek to embody this awakened way of life that incorporates meditative practice with liberative praxis toward socioecological transformation. They are thus poised to cooperate with those from other religious traditions, or with those who profess no religious tradition, in tasks shared by all of us as members of the human family, toward addressing the causes, and thereby alleviating the various forms, of our communal and individual suffering. These tasks include the dismantling of oppressive attitudes and structures, whether these be on the personal and psychological, or in the social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological levels of our being.

9

CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM

—Wan-Li Ho

Introduction

The idea of "liberation theology" stems from a concern for the poor and unfortunate of the world. Liberation theology insists that the church concentrate its resources and efforts in such a way as to alleviate the suffering of oppressed and impoverished people. Two principal, native Chinese religions, namely, Confucianism and Daoism (or Taoism, as it is sometimes written), appear at first glance to have little in common with liberation theology. Varieties of the latter advocate the alleviation of oppression and poverty through the efforts of the church, while the former lacks an analogous activist philosophy. Nevertheless, in China, the birthplace of these two religions, the majority of the population still consists of people engaged in agriculture and mired in rural poverty, as it has been for more than four thousand years.[1]

Even though scholars of Chinese religious traditions have not focused heavily on how these religions treat the poor or underprivileged, both Chinese religious traditions contain principles and traditions that lead practitioners to be sympathetic to the plight of the poor. Additionally, these religions have been used by the poor, for thousands of years, as tools for survival. This essay will analyze ancient Chinese texts and core Confucian and Daoist texts, including the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Dao De Jing*, and the *Zhuangzi* of Daoism, to examine the development of liberative concepts over time, as well as to offer some insights that can contribute to the study of liberation theology.

Finally, this essay will suggest future directions for liberation theology within the Chinese religious context in order to examine potential conflicts and confluences between the various religious approaches to poverty and marginalization.

The Need for Liberation

At the heart of our humanity lies our twofold ability to know and to choose, both of which are interdependent. To be authentically human, we must be free to follow wherever our knowledge leads us. Any restriction on our human freedom, other than that which protects the freedom of others, is a limitation of our humanity. Despite the human possession of higher powers of reason and choice, human existence for the vast majority of people has been, as per Thomas Hobbes of the seventeenth century, "nasty, brutish, and short" (1998:84). It is not just exterior freedom from physical misfortune—death, disease, poverty—that humans seek. Interior freedom is also a paramount goal. In many systems of thought, these two pursuits are intimately related. This essay will investigate these two dimensions of human freedom—exterior and interior, physical and spiritual—to see how Christian liberation theology and Chinese Confucianism and Daoism approach this critical issue of liberation.

The father of liberation theology is the Peruvian Catholic priest Gustavo Gutiérrez. He helped define the movement with his 1972 book, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Gutiérrez understands liberation theology as operating on three distinctive but interrelated levels: political, cultural, and spiritual.

Political Liberation

Liberation theology stems from the desperate hope among the poor and socially oppressed to gain freedom from the oppression of the rich in political, economic, and social contexts. Liberation is not only a theology, it requires action—praxis. Gutiérrez saw that the development in his and neighboring countries benefited the feudal rich, and not the perennially poor and oppressed (1973:17). He sought change through raising the consciousness of the poor in their struggle for freedom.

Cultural Implications

Liberation is understood as a long human process unfolding throughout history. In order to move from theoretical to practical freedom, there must be a struggle against the powers that oppress humans. The goal of liberation is not reduced to providing a better quality of life for needy people, but, more importantly, to create a new form of humanity where the pursuit of freedom is an endless and continuous creation, "a permanent cultural revolution" (Gutiérrez, 1973:18–21). We humans are responsible for our own fate, our own destiny. The goals of liberation theology include the achievement of personal freedom, the creation of a new model of humanity, and the establishment of a revolutionized society.

Spiritual Aspects

The model for liberation theology comes from the Bible. Jesus is seen as a liberator who brings freedom to the people by freeing them from sin. Sin is understood in the Bible and in modern society as caused by the corruption of human relationships, and it is this corruption that causes social injustice. While Gutiérrez considers sin as the ultimate reason for social oppression and domination, he emphasizes that people cannot ignore the social structures that also contribute to oppression—and behind unjust societal structures is sin, which consists of an individual abandoning God and neighbor (Gutiérrez, 1973:25).

Liberation theology maintains that one person must not be dominated by another, but must share in power. Liberation theology insists that humans ought not be selfish, lest the entire system becomes corrupt. The importance of love is emphasized, for it is love in action that brings freedom. For Christians, complete liberation is granted by the grace of Christ and can be found in communion with God and with other human beings (Gutiérrez, 1973:24–25). In the twenty-first century, however, this spiritual level of liberation must be understood in a religious and ethically pluralistic manner, so as to include other religious and nonreligious persons. After all, everyone seeks inner and outer freedom, thus all can work together on the political, cultural, and spiritual levels to pursue the liberation of humankind.

Historical Background of the Two Religious Traditions

Confucianism and Daoism are native religions of China. Though the two religious traditions differ in both theory and practice, the cultural traditions they bear are inseparable within Chinese society. The difference between Confucianism and Daoism lies within how they perceive humans and human relationships. Confucianism emphasizes the function of human beings within society whereas Daoism focuses on humans' connection to the natural realm. According to Confucian beliefs, the roles of humans in society are fixed. In Daoism, social roles cannot be fixed. Where Confucianism promotes the cultivation of human relations and stresses the importance of purposeful action, Daoism promotes the cultivation of natural spontaneity and practices the concept of non-action. Though Confucianism and Daoism vastly differ, they are still entwined like the *yin-yang* symbol in Daoist literature. The two religions complement each other and only together do they comprise a whole (Little, 2000:127, 130–31).

The other prominent religion that historically coexisted in China with Daoism and Confucianism was Mahayana Buddhism. A combination of elements from these three religions has shaped Chinese philosophy, religion, and daily life for more than twenty-five hundred years. It is commonly said the Chinese "wear Confucian hats, Taoist robes, and Buddhist sandals." When Chinese people gather to conduct official duties of the state, they use Confucian social edicts to govern their politics. When someone falls ill, Daoist priests are called from the mountains to heal them. When death approaches, Buddhist monks sit by the dying one's bedside in order to guide them into the happiness in the "Western Paradise." Little distinction has been drawn between the practices of the three religions in the daily life of the Chinese, and over time the three religions have seemingly melded into one.

This chapter will mainly focus on Confucianism and Daoism because both traditions originated in China, whereas Mahayana Buddhist beliefs were imported from India and entered in the first century of the Common Era.[2] I would like to describe how these two traditional Chinese religions have addressed contemporary societal needs. In order to find the roots of Confucianism's and Daoism's stance on the poor, on social justice, and on social harmony, the history and development of the two traditions must be studied and textual analyses conducted. It is important to recognize that sacred traditions in general, and Chinese traditions in particular, are not static, archaic museum

pieces, but rather fluid forms of thought that are constantly being challenged and reformed by the needs of the world's modern global societies. Ancient wisdom is not only applicable to ancient societies but can be relevant to our own contemporary culture and society.

Confucianism

Scholars recognize four stages of the development of Confucianism. The first stage is Ethical Humanism, which was established by Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.). He is considered the "first Chinese philosopher" and taught about social virtue and the ideal society. The second stage is Idealistic Confucianism. Elaborated by Mencius (Mengzi, 371–289 B.C.E.), a distant disciple of Confucius, this philosophy teaches that human nature is essentially good. The third stage is Neo-Confucianism (1200–1400 C.E.), when scholastic philosophy was often practiced to reinterpret ancient Confucian books in response to the effect of Buddhism on Chinese culture. Zhu Xi was the leader of this movement; his "Zhuzi Yulu" will be discussed below. The last stage is New Confucianism (1918–present), which refers to the period of Modern Confucianism. It insists on rehabilitating the great values of the tradition and bringing them into dialogue with modernity, especially science and democracy.

Though there were different stages of development, Chinese thought has primarily emphasized the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. The founder Confucius was the first of the *ru jia* (Confucians), that is, the school of private educators who tutored students in the "six classics" in preparation for taking their place in society. He encouraged the study of the six classic books: *Changes* (or *Yijing*), *Odes*, *History*, *Rites*, *Music*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. These are the books used to educate aristocrats during the Zhou dynasty. The key concepts of Confucius's teaching are *Ren* and *Li*. *Ren*, which comes from the Chinese character for a human being, is the Confucian virtue of benevolence, love, empathy, consideration for others, or the ability to cultivate human relationships. *Li* refers to the external rites which help individuals become aware of who they are, specifically of the hierarchy/social differences. Confucius identifies five "natural" relations: father/son, older brother/younger brother, ruler/subject, friend/friend, and husband/wife. Among these relationships, the virtues governing the family are foremost in the social realm. Vir-

tue grows organically in a society when each member of the extended family plays his/her role.

Mencius enriched Confucius's teaching by explicitly asserting that human nature is originally good. "Since man is originally good, one must develop one's mind to (its) utmost, (then) one can serve Heaven and fulfill one's destiny" (Chan, 1973:50). Mencius was known for simultaneously advocating both humanity (*Ren*, love) and righteousness, making them go hand in hand. He was the first one to ever claim that righteousness was at the highest level of priorities among moral virtues (Chan, 1973:50; *Mencius* 1A:1, 4A:10, 20, 27; 6A:1, 4, 6, 11), believing that the government should function according to the dictates of these values. Regarding the government, Mencius proclaimed that if a ruler was virtuous, and treated his subjects well, they would not rebel against him but would fight for the defense of the kingdom. If the people rebelled, it signaled the ruler's unworthiness; but if the people remained loyal, then it signified the ruler's benevolence (Chan, 1973:76; *Mencius* 1B:7, 8; 4B:3). "People are the most important factor in government, and they have the right to revolt. This idea of revolution was not only novel in Mencius, it also made him the greatest advocate of political democracy in Chinese history" (Chan, 50).

Daoism

Two types of Daoism exist: philosophical and religious. Philosophical Daoism was founded by Laozi (600–500 B.C.E.), who claimed to know the *Dao*, the "way" of natural harmony. He wrote a slim book called *Dao De Jing* (*The Way and Its Power*). It is a small classic of about 81 poems, 5,250 words.[3] No other Chinese classic with such few words has exercised so much influence; apart from the Bible no other work has been translated as many times into other languages. The *Dao De Jing* centers on the *Dao* as its most important concept. The *Dao* is the Way of the Cosmos and the Way of Life. The mysterious origin of the universe is present and visible in everything. It moves in the heavens and the depths as well as in the individual heart. Second to the *Dao* comes the "natural course of things" as the best way, followed by manifesting plainness, embracing simplicity, reducing selfishness, and having few desires. One of the key terms in Daoism is *Wu-wei* (literally "no action" or "no strain"), which refers to doing only what comes spontaneously and naturally choosing the effortless (Molley, 1999:232). This type of lifestyle emphasizes quietness and avoiding

aggression. The next major figure in Daoist philosophy is Zhuangzi (369–286 B.C.E.), who taught the relativity of all ideas and a reverence for natural spontaneity. His book, the *Zhuangzi*, is filled with wit, entertainment, and imaginary conversations.

As for religious Daoism, Laozi eventually became a cosmic deity (*Taishang Laojun*). As a religious tradition, Daoism existed from a very early time, still, the Daoist religion became institutionalized in the later Han dynasty. During that time, a significant religious movement developed in Sichuan Province under Zhang Daolin (34–156 C.E.), a movement which is frequently considered the beginning of the institutional Daoist thought. In the early period, religious Daoism could be considered a "Cult of Immortality." An "Immortal" (*shen xian*) was in this view the ideal being of religious Daoism; a being who has attained physical immortality is no longer subject to "this world" and is a master of magic skills. In later Daoism, magic *Qi* developed into a more reachable goal than immortality. Some celestial masters (Tian-shi, the Zhang lineage) and Daoist priests (Dao-shi) passed along these skills. The most important text for religious Daoism is the Daoist Canon (*Daozang*) which includes more than a thousand volumes compiled more than fifteen centuries ago (1,476 works in 5,487 volumes). As a collection of writings which formed the basic Daoist doctrines and practices, it includes the Lao-Zhuang commentaries, numerous alchemical texts, and documents on medicine, botany, astronomy, religious sexuality, and so forth.

Religious Perspective of the Oppressed in Confucianism and Daoism

Shared Perspectives within Confucianism and Daoism

As noted above, Confucianism and Daoism (as well as Buddhism) became so intertwined in Chinese culture, despite their significant differences, that at times one can speak simply of Chinese religion. In their treatment of poverty, also, the two strains mix and merge.

Misfortune Is an Undesirable Trait

The ancient book *Zhoushu* (*History of the Zhou Dynasty*) stated that there are five fortunes and six limits that inhere in life. The five fortunes are longevity, prosperity, a peaceful and healthy life, abiding

in the love of virtue, and living out one's life to the end. A life consisting of all five of these fortunes is deemed virtuous and complete (Ruan Yuan, 1956:12.176). The six limits are living a short and brutal [life], sickness, worry, poverty, hatred, and weakness. The greatest exponent of Neo-Confucianism was Zhu Xi (1130–1200 C.E.). He gives a further explanation, saying that wealth, longevity, health, and peace are what [all] humans want, while death, poverty, and suffering are what all humans detest. Those who want the former must consider themselves the same as other humans, and those who do not desire the latter are no more than other humans.[4] Hence material poverty is an undesirable trait not only for oneself but for others as well.

Confucius, however, also reminded us, "Wealth and honor are what every human desire. But if they have been obtained in violation of moral principles, they must not be kept. Poverty and humble station are what every man dislike. But if they can be avoided only by violation of moral principles, they must not be avoided" (Chan, 1973:26; *Analects* 15:2). The term "moral principles" is here understood as *Ren* (humanity, benevolence, love), the core value of Confucianism. This humanity should not be abandoned even for so little as a single meal.

Misfortune Determined by Fate

In the collections of *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang Tzu*), one of most important Daoist books, there is a story of the sage thinking about poverty: "I was pondering what it is that has brought me to this extremity, but I couldn't find the answer. My father and mother surely wouldn't wish this poverty on me. Heaven covers all without partiality; earth bears up all without partiality—heaven and earth surely wouldn't single me out to make me poor. I try to discover who is doing it, but I can't get the answer. Still, here I am—at the very extreme. It must be fate" (*Chuang Tzu*, 1964:88).

For Zhuangzi, if fate brought both poverty and riches, life and death, preservation and loss, failure and success, worthiness and unworthiness, slander and fame, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, then we can see that those are the alternations of the world, and like day and night they change place before us. If you can accept these alternations as natural happenings, "they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the storehouse of spirit. If you can harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for joy, if you can do this day and night without break and

make it be spring with everything, mingling with all and creating the moment within your own mind—this is what I call being whole in power" (*Chuang Tzu*, 1964:70). Although the poor are indeed misfortunate, if they accept their misfortune as a natural occurrence they can still maintain a harmonious life.

Misfortune Leads to Virtue

There is a very interesting story which describes Confucius's own life as one of poverty. When Confucius was traveling in the various states that made up early China and his companions were all poor and hungry, Zi Lu the disciple of Confucius complained, "Are there times when gentlemen become impoverished?" Confucius answered, "When *junzi* (superior men, gentlemen) became impoverished, they can still persevere in virtue; when petty men are impoverished, they will act in defiance of virtue" (Chan, 1973: 44; *Analects* 15:2). For Confucius, then, wealth and power cannot corrupt a person, poverty cannot erode his principles, and threats cannot make him bend. Only such a person can be called a gentleman, a *junzi*: "*Junzi* seeks the Way and not a mere living. There may be starvation in farming, and there may be riches in the pursuit of studies. The superior man (gentleman) worries about the Way and not about poverty" (*Analects* 15:3; Chan, 1973:44). As a result of this exchange, Confucius's favorite student, Yan Yuan, could truly see the greatness of the Way. Yan Yuan's mind was at peace; and, being at peace, there was nothing with which he was not contented. There being nothing with which he was not contented, wealth and poverty were as one.[5]

A famous passage in *Mencius* states: "When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man, it will exercise his mind with suffering, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him into poverty, place obstacles in the paths of his deed, so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is competent" (Chan, 1973:78; *Mencius* 6B:15). Thus, poverty became a means of training an individual to be even stronger in different ways. When people are embroiled in poverty and strife in all that they do, they cannot avoid exerting themselves, on the one hand to rid themselves from their poverty and stress, and on the other, to advance in their studies.[6]

Thus both Confucianism and Daoism dealt with the inevitable problem of evil, of misfortune, somewhat differently, but not com-

pletely so. For both, misfortune clearly was not something to be desired by anyone. Nevertheless, it cannot be avoided. The Daoist response to inevitable misfortune was to accept it and not let it disturb one's inner calm (this too is the response of Buddhism). Confucianism, however, gave it a more positive twist, seeing misfortune as an opportunity, a challenge to rise above it and shape oneself into a virtuous person.

Dealing with Poverty within Confucianism

Education—Confucius's Idea of Equality in Education

In traditional Confucian thought there is no discrimination against the poor, and teachers are supposed to accept students from all economic backgrounds. Confucian thought is often described as egalitarian in the sense that everyone has an equal chance to develop himself through learning. Confucius said, "There has never been anyone who came with as little a present as dried meat (Shuxiu, for tuition) that I have refused to teach him something" (*Analects* 7:7; Chan, 1973:31).[7] Confucius also said, "In education there should be no class distinction" (*Analects* 15:38; Chan, 1973:44). He was the first to pronounce this principle in Chinese history, and this was a major contribution to the common folk of China. Since Confucius believed in equality in receiving education, his student body included commoners as well as nobles, foolish people as well as intelligent ones.

In teaching, Confucius approached students based on his principle: "Stick to the way, to your goal, base yourself on virtue, lean upon benevolence, and take your recreation in the six arts" (*Analects* 7:6; Chan, 1973:31).[8] "The six arts are all practical, and one should not be lacking in any one of them."[9] More important than the six recreational arts, however, the most important principle taught was "guiding the people by virtue." This pertained to teaching the people how to live according to virtue by oneself being a virtuous person, and, therefore, in doing so, making service to other people one's first priority (*Analects* 2.3). This is similar to the obvious necessity of fulfilling one's own filial duty before one can teach others about filial piety. One must first completely fulfill the role of a younger brother/disciple—only then can one teach others about being a younger brother/disciple, and so on. "Regulate your own family, and [only] then can you regulate the nation's people; regulate your elder and younger brothers, and [only] then can you instruct the nation's people."[10] The principle of "guid-

ing people by virtue" is not only a means to cultivate oneself in *Ren* (benevolence), *Li* (propriety), and *Xiao* (filial piety), but also a means to help and care for other people within different relationships.

Civil Examinations

The implementation of civil examinations promoted a strong upward social mobility in Chinese society. The civil examinations were a method in dynastic China of allocating positions in bureaucratic civil service based on individual merit and education. By passing this test any male could, theoretically, regardless of wealth or social status become a high-ranking government official. Throughout the early years of the Zhou dynasty (1111–249 B.C.E.), a common system was used to identify subjects qualified to be appointed to office positions. Talents were ordered in the following levels of importance: virtue, administrative ability, and finally language comprehension and utilization. During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), the government created a way to monitor and analyze why certain people were selected to be appointed to an office after completion of an examination. Under the Sui dynasty (606 C.E.), the examination system was fully institutionalized, and, after the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.), developed into a standard, widely used form that persevered until the end of the Qing dynasty (1905 C.E.). Thus Chinese culture has a long history of implementing examinations as means of identifying qualified persons. There have been numerous examples in Chinese history where an individual of poor social status has been able to move his way up to become a political influence through success in the imperial exam. Notwithstanding, the civil examination was abolished at the end of the Qing dynasty (Wang Jian-Sheng, 2000:204–5).[11]

The Local Covenant (Xiangyue)

The local covenant (*Xiangyue*) was an establishment for village rules and conventions through a village organization for a local self-government within the Song dynasty (960–1279 C.E.). The *xiangyue* was started by local gentry and aimed at promoting education in villages (Zhou, 2005:110–11) by establishing rules of self-cultivation, social conduct, dispute resolution, generational deference, and basic community functions such as poor relief, health care, and local

defense. There was nothing related to officialdom or the imperial state in the *yue* (covenant). Unfortunately, *xiangyue* later became an imperial tool for ideological control over local society (Wang Jian-Xun, 2005). Still, in Neo-Confucianism (1200–1400 C.E.), the *xiangyue*, together with the *shecang* (public granary) and the *shuyuan* (academy of classical learning), constituted the principal parts of the local social structure. Therefore Neo-Confucianism not only encompassed studying to obtain *zhi* (knowledge) but also represented *xing* (practice) by demonstrating social concern in the community. These two dimensions of Neo-Confucianism, knowledge and practice, (*zhi* and *xing*), are foundational in being able to exercise moral ideals, and through them stimulating social order (Zhou, 2005:110–11).[12]

The righteousness field (*Yitian*), similar to the local covenant (*xiangyue*), was another form of social practice. "Righteousness Fields" were used for feeding and aiding the crowds and clans. The famous example was the Upright Duke Fan Wen who

> was fond of helping others throughout his life. He selected the poor among his family and the virtuous among his acquaintances and completely supported them. When he became wealthy, he took responsibility for one thousand acres of frequently harvested fields outside the city walls and, calling them the "Righteousness Fields" to help the crowds and clans. They had food each day, clothes every year, and he provided for all their [rites of] betrothal, engagement, wedding and mourning. He selected clan-elders and worthies to administer these plans and regulate the income and expenditure of the estate. Each person received one liter of food per day, and one bolt of silk per year. Families marrying off their eldest daughters received fifty thousand, and thirty thousand for their second daughter. Families into whom wives were married received thirty thousand for the first, and fifteen thousand for the second.[13]

In Chinese history, the Confucian idea of equality in education, the construction of a civil examination, the village covenant (*xiangyue*), and the righteousness field (*yitian*) demonstrated that Chinese religions tried to reconcile public practices with the establishment of good human relationships in society.

Dealing with Poverty within Daoism

*Philosophical Daoism—Emphasis on Individual Freedom
and Simplicity*

Daoist philosophy, which is drawn from the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, emphasizes the principle of individuality and an individual's inner value. When a person believes that he or she has personal inner value, he or she cares less about wealth, fame, or social status. This belief enables such individuals to free themselves from the stress of economic and social competition and enjoy their own inner freedom. For example, Zhuangzi claims the value of the carved wood in temples has the same inherent value as the uncarved trees in the wilderness. While uncarved trees are of no value economically, they are beautiful in nature and thereby have aesthetic value. The text of Zhuangzi states, "Why do you not plant it [a useless tree] in the domain of non-existence in a wide and barren wild? By its side you may wander in non action; under it you may sleep in happiness. Neither bill nor ax would shorten its term of existence. Being of no use to others, it itself would be free from harm" (1933:40).

Stories such as this illustrate how everything has a particular fitness. Everything is useful in a certain way and useless in another: "Thus the most useless is useful" (1933:40). Daoism teaches people to see beyond superficial differences to find hidden valuable aspects of objects and individuals, thus freeing people of petty social concerns so individuals can be free to practice *ziran*, the spontaneous or natural way.

Another passage from Laozi presents similar thoughts which are said to lead to simplicity in life: "I have three treasures to hold and to keep: The first to mother by love. The second is frugality. The third is daring not be at the world's front" (*Tao Te Ching*, 1989:208). Among the three treasures, the second treasure is most related to this subject. The second treasure, "usually rendered frugality stands for the economy of nature that does not waste anything. When applied to the moral life, it stands for the simplicity of desire" (209). When people practice frugality, they will have more room for becoming free as they have fewer or no strong desires to impede their progress toward becoming free.

Daoist Religion—Immortals Were the Role Models of Generosity

Though not specific when concerned with talk about life after death, the religious beliefs of Daoism stress the idea of the Immortals (*hsien, xian*). As noted above, the ideal being of religious Daoism is the Immortal, a being that has achieved physical immortality and is no longer subject to the material world. With such mastery, the Immortal is believed to gain control of magic skills as well. For the Daoist, there are three levels of immortality: the Perfect Immortal, the Heavenly Immortal, and the Earthly Immortal. Even for the lowest level of the three, the Earthly Immortal, special Daoist techniques can bring about changes despite his or her physical mortality. Such Earthly Immortals may have very few or no wrinkles, never have their hair turn gray, and they may maintain the face of a child, having a smooth-skinned face (a peachy face) for many, many years.

The stories of Immortals became very popular resources in Chinese literature, folk religions, or in religious Daoism. Thus, these resources gave social influence to common people. For example, Immortals provided many stories with specific instructions for strengthening the body and spirit. Even more, the stories of Immortals also presented role models of guidance and generosity. Although the stories are not necessarily followed by commoners, many often use these stories as sources of inspiration to adopt a more generous and virtuous lifestyle. The following story is one such example:

> After he left his hometown to become a divine person, Tan Yi's parents thought of him, and his townsmen established a shrine in order to worship him. In the Bingwu month of 766, Tan Yi suddenly returned home, wearing a cap embroidered with clouds and a cloak of feathers, in the style of the Perfected Transcendent. He spoke to his father and mother saying: "Your son has taken office as a transcendent official, and cannot tarry long in the human world. Although you both miss me, it's not appropriate to have made this temple. I fear that it will become possessed by some spirit that will recklessly tyrannize the local people and harm them. Please demolish it. Under the foundations of the temple, there is a cache of gold that has been secreted there of old. Once you've taken down the temple dig the soil there and dig it up. You can divide it up and aid the poor, distributing it among the townspeople." Having finished his speech, he rose into the sky and departed. As he had said, they tore down the temple and dug up the grounds, and everyone got some gold. At

the point where they dug it up, a numinous well-spring gushed forth which was exceptionally clear and limpid. In heavy rains it did not increase, nor in droughts did it decrease. People from the surrounding county and prefecture came there to pray for blessings, which were unwaveringly answered. This is why it is named Tanzi's pond, and also called Heavenly Pond.[14]

People believe that by being generous to needy people, one accrues merit,[15] and even if you are poor and destitute, the ancestral spirits or Immortals will protect and bless you. Many famous books and transcendent texts recorded these stories in order to edify the populace.

Nourishing Life and Body through Daoist Practices

The self-nourishment of body and mind (*yang sheng*), such as *Taichi Chuan* (Grand Ultimate Martial Art) and *Qigong* (*qi*, or energy exercise), has been receiving popular attention in the world. In *The Illustrated World's Religions*, Huston Smith introduced different powers in Daoism, such as efficient power from philosophical Daoism, vicarious power from religious Daoism, and another power in Daoism, "Daoist Hygiene and Yoga" (1994:128–33) which is *qi* (vital energy), referring to the power of the Dao. The main object of *qi* was to remove the obstacles that reduced its flow. Energy is a source of delight, for energy is the life force and Daoists love life. Maximizing *qi* can become an endless lesson for people who want to stay in good health, especially for the majority in a subsistence agricultural society, who needed to maintain good health naturally for this kept them from having to see expensive doctors. They either ate things or took herbal medicine to see if *qi* could be ingested nutritionally, or practiced *Taichi-chuan* and *qigong* to invite *qi* from the cosmos and remove the blocks to its internal flow. Daoist inner alchemical meditation can also lead to a union with *Dao* as a whole. In early Chinese history, most *yangsheng* texts and medicines were mainly in the possession of the elite, as these were quite expensive. The poor, however, still found cheaper methods for achieving the same goal to maintain healthy *qi* flow. Although the paradigms within which these practices took place were most famously described in metaphors which reflected imperial and feudal social structures, they also show that these were widespread practices throughout early China, adopted by commoners and elites alike.

Thus, the issue of poverty is taken care of in Confucianism and Daoism. For Confucianism, Confucius's idea of equality of receiving education, civil examinations providing the opportunity to move up in social status, and local nongovernment organizations supporting elderly and poor—all share the same concern. For Daoism, the focus on inner value aims at a life centered on freedom; the Immortals serve as role models, and yangsheng helps people in poverty (the majority) remain in good health physically and spiritually. Both social practice and self-cultivation offer tools for caring for oneself and others, including poor and needy people.

Comparison between Chinese Religion and Liberation Theology

Areas of Similarity

People often face either material or spiritual poverty. As concerns the materially poor, even though there are more who are not poor than ever before in history, there are also vastly more who are in fact poor. Many qualify as spiritually poor, for they lack a deep human interaction with other people or communion with the transcendent. As the name indicates, the main goal of liberation theology is to give humans freedom. In traditional Christianity, freedom is achieved through liberation from sin and communion with God. In Confucianism and Daoism, freedom is achieved through liberation from desire and lust and becoming one with heaven and earth.

Poverty Is not Desirable; However, Virtue Can Be Obtained through It

Even though material poverty is not something people welcome, it can lead to spiritual virtue. Traditional theologies serve as a companion to the poor and oppressed. This companionship derives from the light of the Bible, which emphasizes God's love to help a person going through hardship and make him or her a better person as a result. The starting point of liberation theology is love for those in poverty. "Even Marxist Leninist like Ernesto 'Che' Guevara gives love a central place in his thinking and even says that 'a revolutionary is a person possessed by deep feelings of love' " (Miguez Bonino, 1989:121). As José Miguez Bonino states, "Love, which is the only absolute future and the only absolute opposition to sin, is the power

that gives an insight into new possibilities and motivates the struggle for "the greater good" (126).

Similarly, at the core of Confucianism is the virtue *Ren*, the essence of empathy, benevolence, and love. If one lets one's inner *Ren* flourish, it facilitates deeper communication with one's inner self and with others. For Daoism, virtue is not the product of order but is something truly tested in adversity. To create virtue in a state, one should cherish the times of difficulty. With virtue, one develops a larger capacity for tolerance of hardship, thus allowing more wisdom to come into one's life, more compassion for others' sufferings, and a better sense of all beings in heaven and on earth.

Action against Poverty Must Be Implemented

The first priority of liberation theologies is *praxis*; their fundamental outlook stresses the importance of putting theory into practice. For instance, Gutiérrez asserted that "God is practiced," which, for Gutiérrez, is a "matter of putting the will of the Father in to practice, of practicing God's kingdom, from a solidarity with the poor and oppressed" (Araya, 1988:79). Liberation theology can be seen as a challenge to traditional theologies. Traditional theologies basically confirmed orthodoxy as the theology rule. Traditional theologies are ortho*doxy*. Liberation theology is ortho*praxy* which emphasizes the practice and the witness of a Christian's life (Vu Kim Chinh, 1993:223). According to liberation theology, things happen not because people lack luck but because the whole system and the logic behind operating the system are faulty (Gutiérrez, 1984:117). Because of the sinful structure of society, culture, and history, people are oppressed and poor. This focus on the oppressed and poor as a priority in religion reinforces the importance of humanism.

In Chinese religion, beginning in ancient times, a good government had to do six things to protect and nurture the common people: have compassion for the young, nurture the aged, uplift the poor, distribute food to the needy, relieve illness, and bring peace and prosperity (Ruan Yuan, 1956:19.16.156). These all required concrete actions. The ancient Chinese historical record, the *Zuozhuan*, describes the ideal ruler by saying that in yielding, the ruler of virtue bestowed the poor and orphaned with grain.[16] It is also recorded in the fourteenth Year of Zhou Gong: "In the summer, the prince of Chu sent a red-tally order[17] for troops from the upper country and the troops of the royal

house to provide relief for the people. They should distribute to the needy and uplift the poor, raise orphans and tend to the old and sick, receive the lonely and provide disaster relief."[18]

Neo-Confucian philosophers were concerned primarily with moral cultivation. They often debated the relationship between knowledge and action. One of them, Wang Yangming, developed his own theory of the "unity of knowledge and action." For Wang Yangming, "knowledge" is rooted in moral choice and action; all knowledge is moral knowledge, and action refers to moral behavior. All human action must be "viewed as the execution of a moral imperative" (Bresciani, 2001:233–34). With such a theory as foundational, the local covenant (*xiangyue*) and righteousness field (*yitian*) can be explained as referring to Confucian actions in lifting up poor and oppressed peoples. In this sense, both liberation theology and Chinese religions share an insistence on taking action to eradicate poverty.

Yin-Yang Concept Applies to Both Liberation Theology and Chinese Religions

In Chinese religions, one important influence on both Confucianism and Daoism is the *yin-yang* theory. The Way (the *Dao*) arises only through the mutual dependence of opposites. This concept is repeated in Laozi's philosophy. Laozi saw that the world was made up of opposite yet complementary poles.[19] When humans interact well, harmony and balance are created between the two poles; if people are not in harmony with each other, the two poles are in disorder. One can say that the Yin and Yang polar concept helps to explain liberation theology, as in the case of, for instance, person-structure, theory-practice, or utopian-reality.[20] The most important set of poles in liberation theory concerns sacred life versus worldly life and freedom versus responsibility. The harmonization of these poles is precedent to finding a way to resolve conflicts and bringing about resolution. For example, the church encourages people to pursue a sacred life, however, their needs must also be taken care of in their worldly life. Similarly, wealthy people have more financial freedom than poor people, whereas poor people seem to have more obligations in daily life. According to this polar theory, it should be wealthy people's responsibility to act generously and share their wealth in order for poor people to have more freedom in daily life. This might help to reduce conflict in their relationship.

Confucianism also explains its main theory using the contrasting poles. According to Confucius, the polarity of (*inner*) benevolence and (*outer*) propriety (*Ren* and *Li*) is used as the method for balancing major conflicting relationships such as men versus women, heaven versus earth, and even the poor versus rich. According to Mencius, individual benevolence and communal righteousness (*Ren* and *Yi*) provide better foundations for resolving cases of conflicts between the rich and the poor. People need to try harmonizing these two or negotiating between them since balancing *Yin* and *Yang* forms the basis of harmony. One must not overemphasize either side for fear of creating an imbalance. One must resolve conflicts and then all will harmonize perfectly. Therefore we can say that both liberation theology and Chinese religions can use the concept of *yin-yang* to continue to develop themselves in their concern for the poor and oppressed.

Areas of Differences

First of all, we need to notice that although 85 percent of the people in Asia live in poverty, we cannot easily say that all Asian countries belong in the Third World category alongside countries of Africa or Latin America. For example, Japan, mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore have competitive economic markets. Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore are called Asia's Four Tigers because these countries share an incredible economic growth rate, rising from poverty to relative economic success since the 1980s. Asia's Four Tigers and Latin America have different philosophic bases of economic growth. While Asia's economic growth stems from ancient religious ideology, Latin America uses the power of liberation theology to struggle for economic justice for the poor (Vu Kim Chinh, 1993:270). While Asia's economic growth might stem from ancient religious ideology, Latin America used the power of liberation theology to struggle for economic justice for the poor. Starting from this basic difference, we will look at the other differences between liberation theology and Chinese religions.

Different Methods to Achieve Freedom from Poverty

Confucius is concerned about the poor and about poverty, peace, and security in the country, as the following passage shows:

> Confucius said, "I have heard that those who administer a state or a family do not worry about there being too few people, but worry about unequal distribution of wealth. They do not worry about poverty, but worry about the lack of security and peace on the part of the people. For when wealth is equally distributed, there will not be poverty; when there is harmony, there will be no problem of there being too few people; and when there are security and peace, there will be no danger to the state." (*Analects* 16:1; Chan, 1973:45)

The spirit of Confucius's way to serve one's own people is that,

> Fathers should be righteous and mothers compassionate, elder brothers should be friendly and younger brothers respectful. Husband and wife should be kind, men and women clearly distinguished, sons and disciples should have learning and one's hometown should perform rites. When people suffer poverty or adversity, their relatives should come together and help them. At times of weddings or funerals, the community at large should come together and help one another.[21]

Clearly, Confucius's way of caring about the poor is to start with the family then, community, and finally country. Though the Chinese system of civil examinations and the local covenant/righteous field have disappeared, the spirit of helping people, family, and then the extended community still exists in modern times.

According to Laozi, humans must return to the way of *Dao* in order to achieve harmony and balance in the universe. Thus, Daoist practice is a way of restoring the self to the original *Dao*. It encourages people to look within and to enter a transformed relationship with the world by adjusting the ideologies with which they identify. Occupying this transformed, liberated psychic space can itself be seen as a form of rebellion (Ots, 1995:116–37; Chen, 2003). These kinds of self-cultivation practices seem to provide a clearer space of "liberation" for people, including liberation from poverty. Daoist self-nourishing of body and mind (*yangsheng*) is another method which is practiced widely. Anyone can afford to practice *Tai Chi* and *qigong* and through these techniques people are equalized within the space of the group practice. In addition, there is little hierarchy based on financial status in these groups.

As for the liberation theology of Chinese religions, two levels of liberation have been shown: When we try to understand the concept of liberating, the first interpretation is negative: to move away from a

situation of domination and being confined. The second level of liberation attempts to ensure there is no domination, no confinement, but that all is just (Liu, 1996:228). In brief, one can say that the differences between liberation theology on the one hand and Confucianism and Daoism on the other, are that liberation theology is both active and political, whereas Confucianism tends toward local level social action and Daoism is internally and externally passive.

Future of a Liberationist Perspective

Pursuing Social Justice Could Be a Common Issue That Concerns All Religions

Confucianism still uses the concept of responsibility and justice. For example, Mencius discusses social justice several times, as mentioned above. His concepts, however, were considerably different from the concepts of social justice used today. In general, in past Confucian history, not enough attention has been paid to critiquing the current state of justice and striving for justice among the poor and oppressed. Professor Lin Anwu's explanation for this is worth quoting at length:

> There are three types of Confucianism: the first one is "Adaptive Confucianism" which provided guidance for the activities and occupations of daily life. Secondly, "Dominating Confucianism" was used as a political tool to organize and dominate over a monarchial and patriarchal society. The third type of Confucianism is "Critical Confucianism" that criticized injustice and other social problems in society and government. Dominating Confucianism has been the primary type of Confucianism practiced in Chinese history, therefore it suppresses the development of Critical Confucianism. (2003:114)

Similar to Confucianism, philosophical Daoism has two phases. The first phase occurred during the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.). This phase marked the advent of Daoism, during which Daoism's most respected scholars, Laozi and Zhuangzi, are said to have compiled the major canonical Daoist works. The second phase lasted from the end of the Qin dynasty (around 206 B.C.E.) to the Qing dynasty (A.D. 1644–1912). During this time, Daoism existed under political monarchy. Due to the restrictions placed on physical activities during the imperial monarchy, philosophers researched subjective metaphysics instead.[22]

Confucianism and Daoism emphasize self-cultivation more than social justice. As far as political action is concerned, Confucians and Daoists have been known to campaign for changes in the Chinese political structure. For instance, local covenant (*xiangyue*), discussed above, emphasized helping each other and promoting philanthropy; however, changing the social structure was not advocated. Therefore, in some sense, Confucianism and Daoism have been more affiliated with subjective cultivation of mind and body and seem to lack the critical perspective that designates social awareness.

Liberation theology on a large scale does denote specific and rigid ideas of what constitutes social justice, but it can serve as a social theory to practice justice fully. According to liberation theology, its perspective on justice is central, and pursuing social justice is at the heart of following God's will (Liu, 1996:235), "for whatever you have done to the least of these brothers and sisters, you have done to me . . . Enter into the reward prepared to you for all eternity" (Mt 25:31-46). This differs greatly from Karl Marx's theory of liberation and also differs from that of Confucianism and Daoism. In the modern world, one-third of the global population suffers from starvation. Liberation theology can encourage different religions and cultures to continue to develop a means to be in solidarity with this population. Therefore, some tenets of liberation theology can be joined with tenets of Confucianism and Daoism and hand-in-hand they can work to develop a more philanthropic culture, internally within the minds of people and externally by changing the social structure.

Minority Groups Should Be Given a Voice in Their Pursuit of Freedom and Social Justice

Liberation theology is supportive of the poor. All the same, more attention should be given to the "poorest of the poor" (Gutiérrez, 1983:137), those who not only lack material goods, but also human dignity and full participation in sociopolitical life. Some vivid examples of this type of poverty can be seen among the American Indians, the indigenous peoples of Latin America (77, 185), and also within the history of mistreatment of Taiwanese aboriginals by successive governments in Taiwan. Such poverty is often illustrated by the oppression of aboriginal or native cultures.

Few scholars of Confucianism and Daoism have addressed the issues of poverty, justice, or freedom with regard to minority groups

and aboriginal people in Chinese society. As in the case of aboriginal people in Taiwan, although their financial situation is better than before because Taiwan has grown stronger in general as an economic power over the past three decades, the life expectancy of Taiwan aboriginal people is approximately ten years shorter than the life expectancy of the native population of most other countries (Iskakafutet, 1998:35). Many aboriginals still live in poverty, and their native language and culture have been disappearing rapidly due to long periods of colonization and extreme marginalization. The aboriginal people in Taiwan have been colonized by many different countries and have survived under the rule of many different forms of government.[23]

How has the general education in the public school affected Taiwanese aboriginal people? I asked some aboriginal people who hold advanced degrees whether Confucianism and Daoism have helped them to identify themselves in their society and also whether the two religions have helped them to build social communities and strong social bonds within the Han society. Many interviewees did not respond positively. One of the aboriginal pastors frankly said, "Our aboriginal culture has been suppressed for a long time. What we study in school, history, math, etc. doesn't help the formation of our identity as aboriginal people." He felt that among the religions of Taiwan, Christianity[24] has supported them the most in the formation of self and culture. Beginning in late 1987, when martial law was lifted in Taiwan, the aborigines engaged in social activism to fight for their own dignity and rights. The denomination of the Christian Presbyterian Church has consistently played a large role in supporting the aborigines during times of social discord. For example, the denomination helped aborigines by protesting society's high ratio of teenage aborigine prostitutes, by claiming a better name for aborigines which is the *Yuanzhu min* (original residents) instead of *shande ren* (mountain people), and by negotiating with the Taiwanese government in order to return land to the aborigines. In addition, three major movements centered around the aboriginal right to reclaim their land. With assistance from the Christian Presbyterian Church, tribe members from all over Taiwan conducted three major social movements in 1988, 1989, and 1993, with more than two thousand aboriginal people present at each of these three instances. These movements received both national and international attention, with the purpose of making a previously unaware public aware of their unfair treatment. Their ultimate purpose

was to enlist the support of society in seeking positive changes from the government and legal system (Iskakafutet, 1998:556–61).

Confucianism and Daoism have been internalized and put into practice among the Chinese Han, but not among minorities or aborigines. Minority groups should be given a voice in their pursuit of freedom and social justice to overcome poverty and restore their dignity. In this, liberation theology can certainly be of great service.

Conclusion

Liberation theology is about caring for the poor and oppressed. The poor should be respected and have equality and freedom. But because of the structures of society, culture, and history they have always been oppressed. The "preferential option for the poor" of liberation theology, making them a priority in religion, confirms the importance of humanism (stressed in Confucianism, Daoism, as well as in Christianity), supports human rights, and builds a world that is more just and peaceful.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the three traditions, liberation theology, Confucianism, and Daoism, all include elements sympathetic to the plight of the poor. Liberation and Chinese religions need to be in dialogue. By practicing dialogue each can learn from the other. The three together can do more to liberate the poor and oppressed of the world and make human rights real everywhere than they can alone.

10

MINJUNG THEOLOGY

—Choi Hee An

Minjung theology is one type of Christian theology practiced in Korea. Because of the long colonial history of Korea and its multireligious background, this theology has developed unique characteristics during its growth on Korean soil. To understand the characteristics of *minjung* theology, two Korean words must be explored: *Minjung* and *Han*. Because these words express the essence of *minjung* theology, it is crucial to denote the complicated meaning of these words.

The Understanding of *Minjung*

Minjung is a Korean word, a combination of two Chinese characters with Korean pronunciation: *min + jung. Min* literally means "the people" and *jung* means "the masses." This word, however, has more complicated meanings than just "the mass of people." The word originated from one of Korea's ancient dynasties, the Yi dynasty (1392–1910). The Yi dynasty had a social political caste system, comprised of the ruling class (*yangban*) and the common people (*minjung*). The term *minjung* was used to denote the class opposite the ruling, autocratic, elite class; in other words, it referred to the common, grassroots, non-autocratic, and non-elite class of people.

The meanings of *minjung* warrant further exploration within modern Korean society. In a broader sense, *minjung* has a similar meaning to "the proletariat," but it differs from that term in that *minjung* cannot

be fully defined in social, political, and historical terms. According to Kim Yong-bock, "This difference between the *minjung* and the proletariat entails different views of history. *Minjung* history has a strong transcendental or transcending dimension—a beyond-history—which is often expressed in religious form" (1981:184–85). Many *minjung* theologians have refused to conceptualize its meaning and there is no consensus on a clear definition of *minjung*, but there is some agreement on its definition as expressed by Han Wan-Sang: "The *minjung* are those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated sociologically, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters."[1] In a further definition, Lee Jung Young has added the following:

> They [*Minjung*] are economically poor, politically weak, socially deprived, but culturally and historically rich and powerful. This is what makes *minjung* different from the people who are only poor, weak, and oppressed. The *minjung* are the custodians of the indigenous cultural and historical heritage of the Korean people. Nevertheless, they have been oppressed by the small elite group who have manipulated the political, economic, and educational system for their own interests. The alienation of *minjung* is, then, none other than the alienation of the Korean people and Korean history. (1988:4)

Even though *minjung* lacks a conclusive definition, the consensus of *minjung* theologians and *minjung* activists is that "*minjung* are the people as the subject of Korean history."[2] *Minjung* are the people who have led Korean history, have created Korean culture, and have borne and transformed the suffering of Koreans' everyday lives. They are the people who have challenged the world and changed it from within. In this sense, *minjung* can refer not only to Koreans but to the people who create and act on new visions for the world.

This extended understanding of *minjung* beyond Koreans can be found in Ahn Byung-mu's works. Interpreting the Gospel of Mark, he makes a distinction between "*laos*"[3] and "*ochlos*" (Mark 2:4) and identifies *ochlos* with *minjung*. He characterizes *ochlos* as referring to the people who are with Jesus, who are on the side of Jesus, and who are not the rulers. These people include sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and the sick. They have been marginalized and abandoned within their own society. Yet Jesus sides with these *minjung*, accepts them for who they are, stands with them, gives them a new way and a new hope, and promises them the future of God (Ahn Byung-mu, 1981:138–51). *Minjung*, then, is not restricted to Koreans. *Minjung*

are those people who can be found in the middle of war, poverty, the desert, and any other form of suffering. They are the people who suffer in the world, but who, at the same time, open new ways and create new hopes for transforming this world with justice and love.

The Understanding of *Han*

With all the difficulties of defining the concept of *minjung*, there is one common experience with which all *minjung* identify. It is called *Han*. Just as the definition of *minjung* was complicated, this untranslatable word, *han*, contains different connotations. Suh Nam-dong, one of the pioneers in *minjung* theology, wrote: "Han is a deep feeling that rises out of the unjust experiences of the people. 'Just indignation' may be a close translation of han, but it evokes a refined emotion yearning for justice to be done . . . han is the suppressed, amassed, and condensed experience of oppression caused by mischief or misfortune so that it forms a kind of 'lump' in one's spirit" (1981:68). Suh expanded this definition with four points:

1) Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding powerful nations so that the very experience of the Korean nation has come to be understood as *han*.

2) Koreans have continually suffered the tyranny of rulers, thus they think of their existence as *Baeksong* [common people].

3) Also, under Confucianism's strict imposition of laws and customs discriminating against women, the existence of women was *han* itself.

4) At a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population were registered as hereditary slaves and were treated as property rather than as people of the nation. These people thought of their lives as *han*.

These four may be called the fourfold *han* of the Korean people (58).

Han is understood as a feeling of defeat, grudges, unresolved resentments, tenacity of life, frustrated hope, the collapsed feeling of pain, letting go, resentful bitterness, the wounded heart, and inner wounds (Park, 1992:15–19; Lee, 1994). At the same time, it is the "spirit of *minjung*" (Ro Young-Chan, 1998:49), the strength of *minjung*'s energy, the force of liberation and justice, the "transforming

power" (Choi, 2005:4–5) of spiritual, sociopolitical, and cultural consciousness and movement. It contains layers of positive and negative complex life experiences.

Han is caused by many factors and influences, such as social class, sexism, racism, elitism, colonialism, imperialism, heterosexism, ageism, good health, and others. It rises from painful individual and communal histories and sociopolitical, religious, and institutional structures. The effects of these toxic environments accumulate and condense within the people's collective unconsciousness and consciousness. It is not a feeling or energy limited to the Korean people. Whoever is oppressed, marginalized, or has suffered from such environments bears *han*.

In order to demonstrate what *han* is, many *minjung* scholars and activists analyze folk stories or create stories that illustrate *han*. Kim Chi-ha, a *minjung* poet and novelist writes, "This little peninsula is filled with the clamor of aggrieved ghosts. It is filled with the mourning noise of the *han* of those who died from foreign invasions, wars, tyranny, rebellion, malignant diseases, and starvation. I want my poems to be the womb or bearer of these sounds, to be the transmitter of the *han* and to communicate a sharp awareness of our historical tragedy" (Suh Nam-dong, 1981:61). He recognizes himself as a transmitter of *han* and chooses to be a medium for the sound of *han*. In his short story "The Story of the Sound,"[4] he illustrates who the *minjung* are, how they are treated, how they have survived, and how they have been transformed. In this story, *minjung* have no voice. Whatever they do, they lose. Their life is tired and hideous. Their bodies are torn apart. They are dead. Yet, the soundless cry of the *minjung* makes people shiver. The screams, sighs, tears, and pain of the *minjung* make their oppressors tremble. Even death cannot stop them. Their *han* cannot be silent, nor can it be removed without justice. Even though many *minjung* have died in poverty, war, and suffering, they become alive again and continuously challenge the world. Because of their *han*, they are resurrected again and again despite their suffering until they resolve their *han*.

Han has been the subject of Korean religious studies in general as well as *minjung* theological discourse in particular. It is the ultimate reality in which the *minjung* have lived. It desiccates the lives of the *minjung* as well as their spirits and nourishes their strength for liberation and their resilience for social and spiritual transformation. *Han* is the subject that the *minjung* needs to redeem.

History

It was Suh Nam-dong who wrote the first article about *minjung* theology. He published the article "Theology of *Minjung*" in the journal *Gidoggyo sasang* (*The Christian Thought*) in April 1975 (Suh Jin Han, 1995:11). *Minjung* theology emerged in the early 1970s. During this time, the so-called first generation[5] of many *minjung* theologians and activists such as Ham Sok-hon,[6] Ahn Byung-mu,[7] Suh Nam-dong,[8] Hyun Young-hak,[9] Kim Yong-bock,[10] Suh Kwang-sun David,[11] Kim Chi-ha,[12] and others influenced, discussed, and developed *minjung* theology from their understandings and experiences of *minjung* and *minjung* movements.

Several immediate historical and social factors led to the development of *minjung* theology in the 1970s. One factor was the urgency of developing a Christian voice to speak for *minjung* and their liberation movements against former president Park Chung-hee's dictatorship. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, many mission groups and organizations, such as the Urban Industrial Mission groups and the Student Development Service Corps (SDSC), were involved with industrial evangelism. These groups realized that they could not evangelize or even communicate the Christian gospel to workers without experiencing the reality of workers. In order to experience this reality, many students and evangelists became laborers for six months to a year. They not only joined workers, but also became part of them (Suh Kwang-sun David, 1981:38–41).

As a result of their work, the industrial mission workers experienced enormous injustice and discovered unimaginable working conditions and abuses. They discovered that in the name of national economic growth, many industrial workers, *minjung*, were abused and sacrificed. Many students and evangelists learned about the *han* of *minjung* and became seriously conscientious to act for social transformation. As the industrial mission workers observed this situation, they were often deeply engaged in forming labor unions and organizing weekly meetings to help the urban poor understand their human rights. These movements provided a model for social justice issues to other Christian groups, such as the Christian Ecumenical Youth Council, Church Women United, Priest Corps for the Realization of Justice, the Christian Faculty Fellowship, the Human Rights Commission of the National Council of Churches, and others. The Christian human rights movements worked together with the secular students'

movements and many *minjung* churches joined these movements to support this social gospel.

From this context, many theologians realized that the Christian gospel could not be explained without the *han* of *minjung*. Many of them who were elite and educated in Western theological schools consciously raised the question of how to work with *minjung* and found the answer: that they had to join *minjung* and to see the world through the eyes of the *minjung*. They started their theological concerns from the reality of *minjung* and *minjung*'s dehumanization and embraced Korean colonial suffering and *han* as their own theological perspective. Through solidarity with *minjung*, *minjung* theologians began to reinterpret the Christian gospel and to reconstruct Korean history and culture.

In the 1980s, *minjung* movements were accelerated by grassroots workers, poor farmers, common civilians, elite workers, students, and other activists. Through the Kwangju uprising, June uprising, and student movements, they protested the dictatorships of the fifth and sixth Korean governments and raised serious suspicions about the benefits of capitalism (Kim Myung Su, 1997). Despite the economic growth of the time, *minjung* suffered from new forms of colonial power, capitalism, and ruling social structures. In the midst of this suffering, they defied a modern social stratification between upper class and middle/lower class and denounced this new form of imperialism. They formed the movement for (*minjung*) democracy and struggled for unification of North and South Korea. They challenged traditional perspectives dependent upon sociopolitical and historical paradigms that were created and taught by the socially and politically elite class.

These movements were severely persecuted by Korean military governments. Many students, ecumenical leaders, teachers, ministers, and professors were arrested and punished under anticommunist and treason laws. Students were removed from their college programs and sent to the military. Teachers and professors were removed from their teaching positions and were imprisoned and tortured. The second generation of *minjung* theologians justified these *minjung* movements with Marxism and other sociopolitical theories. They advocated community-oriented liberation against Western individualism and sought the substitution of *minjung* liberation for capitalism (Kim Jin Ho, 1997). They tried to deconstruct not only the power of oppressive social classification but also the power of colonial Christianity to redeem the *han* of the *minjung*.

Since the 1990s, with the constitution of democratic governments, the phenomenal economic growth, the amplification of multimedia networks, and the emergence of globalization, *minjung* entered a new postmodern era. Responding to this multidimensional reality, *minjung* movements became more diversified. Instead of ideological struggles between communism and democracy, they embraced various movements for peace, life, ecology, local/international relationships, class struggles, antisexism struggles, foreign workers' human rights, cultural exchanges between North and South Korea, and other sociopolitical issues. They joined the postmodern cultural and social revolution. In this context, the third generation of *minjung* scholars has wrestled with a new task: how *minjung* can claim their subjectivity under this drastic globalized reality (Kang, 2000). In order to achieve this task, they have investigated new collaborative ways to work with current *minjung*'s diverse issues inside and outside of Korea for and among *minjung*. They have seriously considered the paradigms of postmodern culture and its actuality for *minjung*. Now they are ready to try all possibilities for participating in this *minjung* actuality.

Basic Theological Understandings

In the middle of these *minjung* movements, Korean theologians reached an impasse in finding their God and faith through Western theologies. They realized that Western Christian doctrine, theological discipline, and thought could not explan *minjung* reality in Korea. Even though Latin America and other Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s made a global impact with their liberation movements, only a few Korean theologians were introduced to liberation theology, mainly due to the South Korean government control of all media and materials dealing with liberation movements. "This relative isolation from the development of liberation theologies in other parts of the world worked to the advantage of the South Koreans, for it enabled them to develop their own indigenous theology" (Lee Jung Young, 1988:7).

They needed a theology that started not from a Western context but from their own. They refused to accept traditional Western interpretations of the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, and other doctrines. Rather, they included Korean indigenous religious cultures and literature and tried to rediscover *minjung* movements throughout Korean history. Before we explore these interactions, here is a very brief introduction to

some theological understandings about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that *minjung* theologians as well as other Korean theologians offered. Even though it uses the Western trinitarian formula, it shows a uniquely Korean understanding of God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit.

Minjung found their understanding of God through Korean colonial history, multireligious culture, and their own everyday life. This is shown in the nomenclature of God in the Korean language, *Hanunim*. Korean Christians called God *Hanunim*, *han + nim*. They did not create this name for the Christian God. This word is adapted from the Korean sky god, who already existed in multiple indigenous Korean religious traditions. The concept of *han* in *Hanunim* implies nonboundedness, transcendence, immanence, the one and the many simultaneously. This meaning of *han* is found in Shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It denotes definite reality. This *Hanunim* exists as one of many and many of one. In this sense, God, people, nature, cosmos, and all others are one and many and many are one. All are connected (Choi, 2005:43). Many Korean Christians and *minjung* theologians see God not as the Christian God, who is introduced by Westerners, but as God who has lived and worked with the Korean people from the beginning of the Koreans' existence.

This transcendent understanding of God leads to an understanding of the Holy Spirit different from the Western concept of the Holy Spirit: because God existed in Korea before Christianity came to Korea, the presence of God is manifested in the form of the Holy Spirit. From the multiple religious influences, especially Shamanism, the Holy Spirit is not seen as a Western concept in Korean people's minds. *Minjung* understands Holy Spirit as holy spirits and ghosts who have lived in their everyday lives with "omnipresent" and "omnipotent" power.[13] When the Holy Spirit sets foot on Korean soil, *minjung* sees this Holy Spirit as their spirits whom they have worshipped and served and to whom they have talked and listened. In the midst of this transmittance, God in the form of the Holy Spirit has worked with *minjung* beyond time and space and the power of the Holy Spirit has existed throughout their history (Lee Jung Young, 1988:13–14). In other words, as Holy Spirit, God is presupposed in all *minjung* movements; and by the power of the Holy Spirit, *minjung* overcome their suffering throughout the generations. Because of this pneumatological approach, *minjung* trinitarian understanding offers Korean Christianity more ways of being inclusive and continuous with multiple religious traditions.

The understanding of Christology has raised the most interesting controversy in the discourse of *minjung* theology. The best example is shown in the subversive interpretation of the Good Samaritan's story. In this story, Suh Nam-dong asks who the Savior is. In the traditional Western interpretation, the answer is the good Samaritan. However, is the good Samaritan the only one who is the Savior? Suh answers differently. He emphasizes the important role of the person who is robbed, because this unidentified person gives this Samaritan a chance to act on love. This person lets the Samaritan act humanely. This person's suffering and sighs awaken the goodness of the Samaritan's humane nature. The burden, pain, and suffering of the robbed person leads the Samaritan to save both of them. Who plays the role of Savior? It is the person who is robbed, naked, thirsty, hungry, and abandoned. The act of saving this person is the act of being saved by God. This is the meaning of Jesus' suffering, cross, and death.

In this sense, Ahn Byung-mu identifies *minjung* with the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. *Minjung* take away the sin of the world, its suffering, as Jesus does. They are hungry because of others. They are thirsty instead of others. They save the world from its own suffering. The function of *minjung* is to play the role of Jesus as Messiah. Jesus is transformed into this type of person, a *minjung*, who is naked, thirsty, and hungry. While *minjung* individuals suffer, the *minjung* also wills God's liberation. Because Jesus is with *minjung*, s/he appears as a *minjung* and asks the people to practice love. This person, the Messiah, *minjung*, gives the people a way of salvation. Therefore, *minjung* become the Messiah.[14] *Minjung* become liberators themselves. This does not mean that *minjung* are equated with God or Christ. It means that *minjung* are the people who act with God. Their will and power belong to God. *Minjung* cannot exist without God, and God cannot exist without *minjung*. This is the God that *minjung* theologians discovered for Korean *minjung*.

This paradigm shift requires *minjung* theologians to participate in *minjung* reality and urges them to experience God and God's reality anew. It is a fresh endeavor of creating both a spiritual and sociopolitical transformation. With this understanding, *minjung* theologians began to identify *minjung* events as Christ events. They became the witnesses of God's work through *minjung* movements.

Liberation in the Colonial and Multireligious Contexts

In order to understand *minjung* theology's unique contribution to the Korean struggle for liberation, it is important to see how *minjung* theology interacts with Korean colonial history and its multireligious context. This section explores how *minjung* theology mines Korean colonial history for evidence of God's presence in *minjung*'s struggles. It approaches Korean multicultural traditions as manifestations as well as transformations of *minjung*'s *han*.

Interactions with Colonial Struggle

While many Korean theologians and Christian historians recognize Korean Christianity only after Western missionaries' arrival and ignore Korean traditions, *minjung* theologians redefine the roots of Korean Christianity from the beginning of *minjung* history and culture. As *minjung* become the subject of salvation history, *minjung* theology sought to critically analyze Korean colonial history and the history of the hierarchical ruling class to rediscover the history of Korean *minjung*.

Suh Nam-dong traced the genealogy of the *minjung* movement from the Ancient Chosen period and reinterpreted Korean history through *minjung* eyes. He illustrated his points with fourteen *minjung* movements (Suh Nam-dong, 1981:169–71). Even though most of these movements happened before Christianity came to Korea, these movements were interpreted as *minjung* messianic movements. *Minjung* led Korean history by fighting against colonial invasion from the outside and against hierarchical oppression of their dictators from the inside.

When Christianity marched in with Western missionaries and their national political colonial power, *minjung* did not accept this religion as a religion. Rather they thought this religion would kill Korean spirituality. When Christianity, however, started to breathe its spirit among *minjung*, it became a *minjung* religion. Especially when Koreans fought for their national independence during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the Korean Christian church became the body of this *minjung* movement and the core of *minjung* organization. One of the best examples was the March First Independence Movement in 1919. Through this movement, they declared Korean Independence. Thirty-three signers, of whom fifteen were Christians, wrote and read "The Korean Declaration of Independence." Many Christians organized national demonstrations across the country.

After the March First Independence Movement in 1919, many *minjung*, women and men, were tortured and killed. Many churches were destroyed and demolished. Beatings and unimaginable violence, however, could not keep them from their faith. As men started to move their struggle to places outside of Korea and organized other independence movement groups, women took the role of single householders and supported these independence movement groups from inside Korea. Because of Japanese colonial pacification maneuvers and other Christians' noninvolvement, however, they often faced enormous struggles and paid unimaginable prices. Both men and women, *minjung*, deployed their independence movements economically, politically, culturally, and socially inside and outside the country (Lee Uoo Jung and Lee Hyun Suk, 1988:70–75).

Minjung refused to stay inside church walls, and they protested against silence. They chose to resist colonial power and to separate themselves from western missionary colonial theology. Many Korean Christians who participated in the Korean independence movements believed that they were fulfilling God's will. For these nationalist Christians, Christianity became one with their thoughts, minds, bodies, and souls. Their movements did not stop until Korean independence was achieved. Despite their tribulations, their attempt to achieve Korean independence was accompanied by their faith in God.

Minjung transformed Christianity into its own grassroots color and created a Koreanized Christianity. In the process, this transformed Christianity became a *minjung* religion. The *minjung* journey continued under several severe dictatorships and eventually gave birth to *minjung* theology, as we have seen above.

Interactions with Other Faith Traditions

To understand *minjung* life and spirituality, one must recognize that *minjung* theology draws on resources not only within Christian traditions but also other religious traditions. Even though many Korean Christians are located within a very conservative stream and do not want to engage in dialogue with other religions, *minjung* theologians see the importance of genuine *minjung*-ness within Shamanist, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions, and within Korean traditional folk culture genres such as mask dance, mindam (folklore), and p'ansori (a native Korean form of singing). Two examples of their ventures

into other faith traditions are their explorations of *minjung* belief in Maitreya and folk mask dance.

In the first example, *minjung* theologians attempt a comparison between the Buddhist *minjung* tradition and the Christian *minjung* tradition. In his 1979 article "Belief in Maitreya and *Minjung*," the poet Ko Eun compares belief in Maitreya to belief in Amita. He interprets belief in Maitreya as the *minjung* choice of faith within the Buddhist tradition. He characterizes Maitreya as the *minjung* Buddha, and he interprets Amita as the rulers' Buddha. These two beliefs contain two different worldviews: Amita Buddha points to a paradise in the West after our death, while Maitreya Buddha looks forward to the future Yongwha world.

The belief in Amita is manipulated by ruling governments to persuade people to believe the promise of paradise after death. The ideology of this belief is designed to placate people who are slaves, the poor, and the oppressed, by convincing them not to resist the reality into which they are born, and to accept existing social structures. Because of the usefulness of this ruling ideology in pacifying people, many ancient Korean governments, as well as other Asian governments such as China and Japan, adopt and support this belief.

In contrast, belief in Maitreya empowers people to believe in the possibility of the manifestation of the Yongwha world, the ideal society, in this world, even though it will come some billion years later. It means that people can hope to change their present world. They can challenge their current reality and create new things in order to prepare for this new world. This belief often has been present in *minjung* minds and has contributed to many resistance movements in Korean history.

Suh Nam-dong compares belief in Maitreya and belief in Amita in Buddhist tradition with belief in Millennium and belief in Kingdom of God, in Christian tradition. In his understanding, the belief in the Millennium movement is the desire of *minjung* just as the belief in Maitreya is the hope of *minjung*. While the Kingdom of God belongs not only to a historical future but also refers to a realm beyond human history, the Millennium brings social justice in the historical and social sense. As the Christian Kingdom of God becomes a heavenly and ultimate symbol which is similar to the Buddhist paradise in the West, the belief in the Millennium, like belief in Maitreya, fosters new hope in *minjung* and a vision for a real new world. Suh makes a connection between Korean Buddhist and Western Christian faith to understand the characteristics of *minjung* faith and movement in Korean history

and uses it as a reference to develop *minjung* theology and *minjung* history (Suh Nam-dong, 1981:155–82).

Ahn Byung-mu compares Buddhist belief in Maitreya with Christian faith in the Jesus-Event, the archetype of all liberation events. The belief in Maitreya, like the Jesus-Event, is a path of suffering, death, and resurrection. As belief in Maitreya works for the future world, not the world after death, the Jesus-Event takes place in life in the world. The Jesus-Event puts emphasis on changing the real world, not on expecting the world after death. Its expectation is for a better future that people can achieve in their lifetimes. Through the eyes of *minjung*, this understanding of the Jesus-Event is shaped in the intersection with Korean traditional/adapted religious cultures. This interaction among multiple religious traditions provides a space for dialogue in which *minjung* theologians can rethink the identity of Korean Christianity and people of God in Korea. This non-Western Christian theological discourse cannot be dismissed without reconstructing the identity of Korean Christianity in its multireligious context.

Exploring the mask dance has been another way for *minjung* theologians to better understand *minjung* life and spirituality. The mask dance has been a part of religious shamanistic rituals for a long time in Korea. It originates in an old, annual village festival; and its performance coincides with the appearance in the 1700s of the commercial class. It was not just a dance but included various forms of music, song, and dialogue between the performers, the musicians, and the audience. This *minjung* festival functioned to get rid of social, political, and natural bad luck and to pray for peace. Today, each different province has a different type of the mask dance. One of the famous mask dances is called Bongsantalchum (Bongsan mask dance).

This mask dance has three main stories. The first story is about an old monk and Chipali, who are portrayed as a corrupted religious leader and a low-class playboy. While this sad, desperate monk represents abstract, metaphysical, unrealistic Buddhism, Chipali signifies productive, concrete, realistic *minjung*. Through Chipali, *minjung* scorn this "high" religion as corrupted spirituality. They deride the besmirched national religion. The second story is about three yangban (aristocrats) and Maltugi (their servant). In this play, Maltugi is the one who controls the action, and these yangban are the objects of laughter and jokes. Through Maltugi, *minjung* validate their worth, their honesty, and their experience. The third story is about Miyal Halmi (Old Woman Miyal) and her husband. It is a story about *min-*

jung themselves. This old couple represents *minjung* who have suffered war, poverty, separation, and death. Miyal Halmi, an old woman, suffers her entire life and ends up with death. Even among *minjung*, women are the people who suffer and sacrifice more (Hyun Young-hak, 1982:48–50).[15] This story reveals that among the *minjung*, there are fights and struggles to get more privilege and power. They are brutally honest about their own reality, their miserable life, and even their own fate, yet they laugh at themselves. Even though *minjung* are the people who suffer first, most, and worst, *minjung* are also people who do not obsess about the world but participate in reality concretely, honestly, authentically, and truthfully, living with humor and laughter.

Through Chipali, Maltugi, and Miyal Halmi, according to *minjung* theologians, *minjung* laugh and seek to find their transforming power. Hyun Young-hak understands this mask dance as a manifestation of the outburst of *minjung han* (1982:363). In the mask dance, *minjung* can laugh at the world. They can criticize their own religion and their own social structure. They expose the stupidity of their masters, their gods, and even themselves. They criticize everything, and still they can laugh about it. While performing and watching the mask dance, they can experience their dreams and desires. Through dance and song, *minjung* experience a rudimentary religious phenomenon that manifests the union between heaven and earth and between holy spirits and human beings to create a new world and culture (Yoo Dong-sik, 1975:347). In this union, they heal their *han*. The mask dance provides *minjung* with a way of discovering transforming power and the wisdom to respond to this world. This is their way to actualize the future in their present situation.

Critical Reflections

Positive Agreements

Minjung theology explains who *minjung* are, how *minjung* suffer, and how they transform not only the Christian tradition but also Korean cultural, social, and historical movements. Through the analysis of history, culture, and multiple religious traditions, *minjung* theology has made a significant contribution to a Korean Christian theology as well as to Christian theologies of the rest of the world. *Minjung* theology has moved beyond a Western concept of theology and dem-

onstrates a paradigm shift from Western theological Christian exclusivity to Korean multireligious dialogical inclusivity. It helps Korean Christianity understand its natural multireligious identity and the sensitivity of its sociospiritual transformation. It tries to engage in every aspect of *han* and its liberation in a multidimensional way and shows a painful struggle to establish Koreanized Christianity and its new identity. It gives a new picture for the story of *minjung* as well as God in Christianity and beyond.

Various Disagreements

The first generation of *minjung* theologians refused to define *minjung*. They believed that once something was defined, its essential meaning would die. It becomes the object of dead theology. Because *minjung* is a living essence, it should not be defined in the Western sense of "making a definition." The *minjung* theologians denied the Western hermeneutical analytic methods and employed narrative storytelling as their theological method.

In the 1980s, the second generation of *minjung* theologians brought a new understanding of *minjung*. With the new knowledge of Marxist as well as socialist methods and strategies, they tried to define *minjung*. They insisted that without a clear definition of *minjung* and without knowing the subjects, they could not develop a tactic and strategy to help *minjung*. They employed sociology and politics to understand *minjung*'s reality and pursued a scientific resolution to solve *minjung*'s *han*. Considering the situation of cold war in the 1980s between the East and the West, they believed that this adoption was a natural process of doing theology (Suh Jin Han, 1995:14–22).

These theoretical and scientific methods, however, brought a distance from Christian traditions because many second-generation *minjung* theologians rejected the institutional church structures and dismissed traditional Christian doctrines, traditions, and ideologies. "Unreasonable" and "unexplainable" theological subjects and faith traditions were often ignored and dismissed. In the middle of this transition, *minjung* theology somehow derailed from *minjung*'s reality. *Minjung* theology was criticized by church leaders and other Korean theologians as a political disclosure alienated from *minjung*'s real life. *Minjung* theology tried to analyze *minjung*'s reality through socio-scientific theory but not to share it with *minjung* through faith. Sociopolitical theological theories were used to challenge the society

but faith traditions were left behind. The analysis of second-generation *minjung* theologians caused the separation between faith and acting in *minjung*'s reality. These conflicts challenged the roots of the traditional Christian identity. Some *minjung* theologians feared that they had to dismiss Christianity and build a new religious identity for *minjung*. Another criticism was that their socio-scientific methodology had become another "ghetto" theology (Kim Chang-Nack, 1997:54–98).

From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, not only these second and third generations of *minjung* theologians but also other Korean theologians started to question non-dialectical, non-dualistic methods and nonorthodox approaches practiced by the first generation of *minjung* theologians. They critically engaged in dialogue with the authority of Bible and Christian traditions, and their concerns included forming a synthesis between Christian traditions and multireligious traditions, and the authenticity of multireligious Christian identity (Lee Jung Young, 1988:20–23). Many *minjung* theological topics were debated and reconstructed. They compressed the importance of diversity and changeablity in *minjung*'s new postmodern reality.

One of the most critical challenges of *minjung* theology in this period is losing the connection with the *minjung* church. In the early 1980s, many Christian organizations actively involved the *minjung* movement and gave birth to the *minjung* church. Many *minjung* churches supported and worked closely with their local communities and people who were labor workers, political activists, women, children, and other oppressed people. They understood *minjung* theology and adopted it as their theological resource. After the late 1980s, many *minjung* members left the *minjung* church and other political intellectuals did not have any interest in religious issues. Because of changes in economical developments and sociopolitical situations in this developing country, many members of the *minjung* church lost their need for the *minjung* church. From the beginning, the *minjung* church was not recognized as a church. Rather, the *minjung* church was understood as just one of the supportive places for sociopolitical justice (Ro Chang Sik, 1995:24–29).

From this intricacy, the *minjung* church itself started its self-evaluations and one of the self-evaluations was that of *minjung* theology. Because of overwhelming modern theological scientific theories and philosophies illustrated above, the *minjung* church claimed that the *minjung* theology had lost touch with *minjung* and their reality. The *minjung* church enunciated not only *minjung* theology's socio-

logical political cultural privation but also its psychological spiritual dereliction. Because of *minjung* theologians' desire for theological academic qualification and recognition from the Western theologies, *minjung* theologians overly depended on modern social political theories and scientific logic and reason. They unintentionally obliterated *minjung*'s veracity and their vision for the new world and disparaged *minjung* churches' reality in the postmodern society.

Nonetheless, in this twenty-first century, the second-generation and third-generation *minjung* scholars and *minjung* theological centers became keenly aware of this problem and have continuously tried to find different paths to carry out this struggle. They understand the importance of their academic edifice, but at the same time, they try to resuscitate the significant meaning of faith and its spiritual transformation in *minjung* and their everyday lives.

Future of Minjung Theology

As the reality of *minjung* has changed, it has been necessary to change the practice of *minjung* theology and to constantly experience the *minjung*'s actuality. Many difficult issues and problems remain in Korea: the unification between North and South Korea, women's issues, foreign workers' human rights issues, colonial and postcolonial issues, and globalization issues. All these issues need to be dealt with by *minjung* and interpreted by *minjung* theologians in a new context. As *minjung* theology has given Korean Christians as well as world Christians new eyes to see the world of God differently, now it needs to contribute to an understanding of how these issues should be addressed in *minjung*'s postmodern lives.

Minjung theology has been a Korean theology that understands and supports people of God, *minjung*. It has actively participated in *minjung*'s reality and listened to their voices. As long as it carries this mission out, it will continue to be a living theology that transforms *minjung*'s souls and bodies beyond their *han*.

11

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

—Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha

Liberation According to the "Bumuntu Paradigm" of Ancestral Religions

To those who subscribe to the economic, political, and civilizational orthodoxies of our time, African liberation theology may seem obnoxious, fallacious, or even blasphemous. And yet for the masses of Africans crushed by poverty, genocide, dictatorship, neocolonialism, economic exploitation, political oppression, and racism, much of the current "world order" is blasphemous. Over the last five centuries, African interaction with the outside world transformed the continent into a melting pot of different religious, moral, cultural, economic, political, and philosophical structures and worldviews which bequeathed to the people a "cross of humiliation and marginalization" amidst an ambivalent progress of modernity. Indeed, in the global context of geopolitics and market economy, Africa has remained since the fifteenth century poor, weak, and a battlefield of competing powers of domination and domestication.

At the same time it remains a continent of resilience and resistance par excellence, the land of Chaka zulu, "Jeanne d'arc du Congo," Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, or Wangari Maathai. In other words, Africa is a privileged locus of liberation theology. This chapter will articulate the basic tenets of such a liberation theology as it developed for centuries under the guidance of ancestral spirituality which has continued to work in new religions,

be it Islam or Christianity. In so doing we shall address the question of "what Africa needs to be liberated from, and how." Traditional Africa referred to oppression with the concept of witchcraft (butshi, ndoki, buloji) which includes evil heart (mucima mubi), evil eye (diso dibi), poisonous tongue or evil speech (ludimi lubi), and greed (mwino). Oppression is thus viewed as that which diminishes the vital force, brings about death, destroys life, destroys peace and harmony, creates chaos, anxiety, and insecurity, and hinders human flourishing. It is the opposite of a harmonious mode of existence.

As a "pursuit of unhappiness," oppression takes a myriad of forms. But for the sake of brevity, we can identify ten major categories of local and global forms of oppression which affect ten major dimensions of African existence: First and foremost we find cultural and racial oppression, which constitute the justification of other forms of oppression, notably economic, political, and religious oppression. To these types of oppression, we shall add gender oppression, biological oppression or "bioterrorism," environmental oppression, and artistic and aesthetic oppression. These forms of oppression are often grounded in the tenth category of epistemic violence or intellectual oppression which includes scientific, philosophical, and theological terrorism. Such intellectual oppression serves to rationalize oppression and to belittle African creative capacity and contribution to world civilization and thus world spiritual and moral values. In so doing it turns dehumanization into humanism and forms of oppression into pacification and liberation.

On the local level, oppression can be summarized into "seven deadly sins" which include the abusive use of divination (mwavi); tribalism; patriarchy, polygamy, and female circumcision; dictatorship; the manipulation of taboos and dietary regulations; the abusive use of the ideology of "divine kingship"; and moral vices in general (more notably greed, selfishness, envy, and libido dominandi). As for foreign forces of oppression, we could identify "ten plagues" that accompany the process of globalization since its inception: 1) "pauperisme anthropologique," 2) racism, 3) economic terrorism and "beggar thy neighbor" trade policies, 4) political terrorism, 5) military terrorism and arms trade folly, 6) cultural and linguistic terrorism, 7) religious, spiritual, and theological terrorism, 8) ecoterrorism, 9) bioterrorism, 10) sexual terrorism. A thorough analysis of such a catalog of oppression is beyond the scope of a succinct chapter such as this. We shall

therefore limit ourselves to highlighting a few major categories of oppression in the local and global context.

We shall proceed in two major steps. First, in order to clarify our *locus theologicus*, we will articulate the basic beliefs of African traditional religions that constitute the foundation of traditional African liberation theology. Here we will focus on two basic notions, *Shakapanga* (the supreme creator or God) and *Bumuntu* (the concept of a virtuous person). The notion of God as creator points to that of an ultimate judge of oppressive behaviors and an ultimate source of legitimacy for liberation struggle and resistance to oppressive rulers. The notion of genuine personhood (*Bumuntu*) establishes the sacredness of human dignity and thus delegitimizes oppression. Second we will analyze local and foreign or global forces of oppression and response of African liberation theology. For the sake of brevity we will focus on political, economic, cultural, intellectual, religious, and gender oppression.

The Basic Tenets of African Liberation Theology

African Traditional Religions and the Foundation of Liberation Theology

African liberation theology is based on the notion of the transcendence which constitutes the foundation of human dignity and the sacredness of the struggle for liberation from all forms of dehumanization. It is in reference to God and religious moral values that a behavior or institution is deemed oppressive or liberatory. Therefore a genuine understanding of the nature of African liberation theology requires a careful understanding of the fundamental beliefs of African traditional religions.

African traditional religions provide meaning of life to almost three hundred million people in Africa and in the Americas. This religious tradition is not a thing of the past but rather a living religion which entered a profound phase of revival with the collapse of colonial empires in the 1950s. African traditional religions originated more than twenty-eight thousand years ago[1] in the Bantu area that spans roughly from Nigeria to South Africa. Since the encounter between Europe and Africa in the fifteenth century, they progressively migrated to Europe and especially to the Americas where they found major

centers of development, especially in Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, and the United States, where they are practiced in about ten different ways, including Vodun (prevalent in Haiti and Louisiana), Santería or Lucumi (Cuba), the four types of Afro-Brazilian religions (Candomblé, Macumba, Umbanda, Quimbanda), Kumina (of Jamaica), Shango (of Trinidad and Tobago), and Orisha or Yoruba religion. Some elements of African traditional religions can also be found to a lesser degree in Curanderismo and Espiritismo.

For centuries colonial scholarship denied any moral and spiritual value to African traditional religions. Theories and concepts such as "Deus otiosus," "anamarthesis," animism, ancestor worship, witchcraft, and magic contributed to turning African ancestral spiritual tradition into a religion of error, terror, and horror. We shall not dwell on this issue here; but suffice it to mention that although some of these colonial and racist fantasies still linger today, the process of decolonization of knowledge that began after World War II and intensified with the independence of most African nations in the 1970s and 1980s has led conscientious scholars to progressively acknowledge the spiritual and moral values of African traditional religions. Thus R. Bastide acknowledged that "among the Yoruba and Fon there is an entire civilization of spirituality comparable to that of the wood carvings and bronzes of Benin" (Zahan and Martin, 1983:126). Even Pope John Paul II acknowledged in 1994 that although Africa remains economically poor, "she is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole. . . . Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation" (Browne, 1996:245).

Broadly speaking, African traditional religions encompass many of the beliefs common to traditional religions found in various regions of our planet, from Native American religions to Shintoism in Japan: the belief in a "Great Spirit," one supreme deity understood as the main source of all existence in the universe; the veneration of the ancestors, the veneration of nature as sacred and home to various spirits; the belief in the afterlife, the belief in communication with the world of the dead; the practice of divination; rituals of initiation, and rites of passage; the belief in goddesses and a greater role for women as priestesses and receptacles of deities; the practice of exorcism and

a greater role of religion in the healing process; and a code of ethics based on solidarity, hospitality, harmony, and the notion of "pure heart" (*mucima muyample*). Worship includes incantations, prayers of various kind, purification rituals, libations, sacrifices, dance, trance, and observance of taboos, especially dietary regulations and rules pertaining to sexual behavior and bodily functions. It should be noted however that the goal of religion is ultimately to join the village of the ancestors safely and enjoy a blissful immortality. Hence the centrality of good character in African traditional religion, for as a Yoruba proverb has it, "Good character is the essence of religion" ("Iwa Lesin").

Thus the notion of God as Creator and the notion of Bumuntu as good character constitute the basic theological principles that guide liberation theology within the realm of African traditional religions. They serve as the criterion of distinction between good and evil, between oppression and liberation.

The Notion of God

The African conception of God is well articulated in creation myths, proverbs, praise songs and prayers, incantation formulas, and indeed the names by which the African people refer to God.[2] For the sake of brevity we shall not assess all the studies produced on the subject. Suffice it to mention that God is understood fundamentally as Creator of all life and Supreme Owner and Ruler of the universe; and in this capacity he is called the Ancestor of days (Hilolombi), the Bearer of the universe (Mebee), He who is everywhere and hears and sees everything (Nyi), and Father of all humans and things (Sha-Bantune-Bintu). In many creation myths God is spoken of as the Molder or the Potter who created the first human couple (male and female) by using clay. The Shilluk believe that God used clay of different colors in making men, which explains the diversity of human races. The Dogon explain racial differences by the fact that Amma who created all human beings used the light of the moon for the skin of Europeans and the sun for Africans. Thus contrary to an ingrained prejudice against the so-called tribal religions, Africa has the conception of a universal creator which led to an ethic that values the dignity of every human being and not merely that of the members of one's clan or ethnic group. The motherhood of God, another important point in African religion, constitutes the foundation of an African feminist theology.

Finally, God is referred to as "Vidye kadi katonye" (the blameless God). This belief in divine purity and goodness is enshrined in timeless cosmogonies. In their numerous creation myths, Africans have wrestled with the question of the origin of evil and suffering. The conclusion is that the source of evil is not God but rather the human heart. Because he abhors evil and punishes evildoers, God is not merely the fundamental source of morality but a God who abhors oppression. Africans say that God has long ears and is "the great eye," the Discerner of hearts, who sees both the inside and outside of human beings. As omnipotent, omniscient, pure, and wise, God is fundamentally against oppression and as such he remains the source of legitimacy for all forms of resistance and struggle for liberation.

Bumuntu: The Concept of Human Beingness

The fundamental question before us is "what makes somebody a good human being," a liberated person and a liberator, or an oppressor and an evil man. The African conception of the nature of human beings can be gleaned from African proverbs, creation myths, taboos, moral precepts, marriage and family institutions, kingship, and many other customs and traditions. The African vision of personhood is encompassed in ten key concepts (Muntu, Kintu, Bumuntu, Mucima Muyampe, Ludimi luyampe, Bilongwa biyampe, Fadenya, Badenya, Buya, Bubi) and ten key proverbs.

To the critical question of liberation theology, "what is a human being?" Africans respond with one word: *Bumuntu*.[3] The term stems from the lexicon of Bantu languages. A human being is referred to as a *Muntu* in Kiluba language (with *Bantu* for the plural). The concept of *Bumuntu* refers to the essence of being a human. The word *Bumuntu* comes from the Kiluba language, but it is widespread in regions that speak Bantu languages, from some areas of West Africa up to South Africa where *Bumuntu* has different linguistic variants such as *Ubuntu*. *Muntu* is not an ethnic concept but rather a generic term for every human being of any ethnicity, gender, or race. The opposite of a genuine *Muntu* is *Kintu* (a "thing"), a term that is used to refer to a human being without moral content, a person who has lost his *Bumuntu* through immoral conduct. *Bumuntu* is the African vision of a refined gentleperson, a holy person, a saint, a shun-tzu, a person of dao, a person of Buddha nature, an embodiment of Brahman, a genuine human being. The man or woman of *Bumuntu* is characterized by self-respect

and respect for other human beings. Moreover he/she respects all life in the universe. He/she sees his or her dignity as inscribed in a triple relationship, with the transcendent beings (God, ancestors, spirits), with all other human beings, and with the natural world (flora and fauna). *Bumuntu* is the embodiment of all virtues, especially the virtues of hospitality and solidarity.

While compassion, generosity, solidarity, and hospitality are expected from family members, a genuine *Muntu* is expected to extend these virtues to the global village of the human race; the highest expression of *Bumuntu* is found in the treatment of those who cannot be expected to pay back favors: the strangers, children, and the most marginalized segments of society, especially the handicapped, the sick, poor, and beggars. In other words, one is genuinely human only when one honors humanity in every human being. Hence the belief among the Yoruba that prayers and invocations offered in Ile-Ife remain incomplete until prayers are offered for the people of the entire universe (Abimbola, 1990:138); this is why the Meru of Kenya believe that a genuine believer must pray not only for himself or herself but also for the welfare of all humanity, begging God to remove "the trouble of the other lands that I do not know" (Shorter, 1997:197–98).

This attitude of hospitality and solidarity is extended in a special way to the stranger, the poor, the weak, the defenseless, and people with disabilities. Thus the Bulsa treat strangers, orphaned, handicapped people, beggars, and lepers very well because of their belief that their ancestors visit them in these forms, and the Fang people of Gabon believe that an ancestor passes by in the person of a stranger, and therefore a stranger should be given a very kind and warm treatment (Olikenyi, 2001:105). The Fang are not an isolated case. As Moila rightly pointed out, generally in most African communities, it is believed that unexpected guests are the embodiment of ancestors; hence, they are given the ancestors' food (2002:3). Such a hospitality goes beyond simple courtesy. It is viewed as a way of communicating with the ancestors.

Such is the manifestation of *Bumuntu*, or the African understanding of "good character." This vision of *Bumuntu* is well expressed in the wisdom of proverbs. In West Africa, for example, an Akan proverb proclaims the divine origin of humans: "All human beings are children of God, no one is a child of the earth." Hence the centrality of good character on the path of becoming humane as the Yoruba put it explicitly, "Good character, good existence, is the adornment of a

human being." Such goodness of character is inconceivable without hospitality and respect for the stranger and people with disabilities. Thus a Luba proverb commands to treat an alien guest with care and respect due to deities, for "your guest is your God." As for those with disabilities another Luba proverb warns: "Do not laugh at a crippled person, God is still creating." And to those proud of their knowledge a Luba proverb reminds them that the only true or worthwhile knowledge is to know how to live in harmony and loving relationship with our fellow human beings. In this African model of society, altruism and appreciation for the community are not viewed as antithetical to self-love, for as an Akan proverb has it, "If you do not let your neighbor have nine, you will not have ten." This vision of the humane mode of being is extended to political power. Thus a Luba proverb reminds the ruler who has a penchant for tyrannical behavior that "power is the people." Likewise in South Africa the tyrant is reminded that "one is a King only as long as he is acknowledged as such by the people." To those who suppress individuality, many proverbs remind them of the uniqueness and dignity of each individual in the eyes of the ancestors. "Human beings," says a Chewa proverb, "are like sand out of which one cannot make a mountain." Likewise the Baluba emphasize the value of individual privacy: "No one can put his arm into another person's heart not even when sharing the same bed."

One of the most striking aspects of this African theological anthropology is the distinction between a real or authentic human being and an empty human being that is regarded as a nonhuman. From West Africa to South Africa, there is the widespread belief that people of bad character are not truly human. In Nigeria, the Yoruba say: "He/she is not a person." In South Africa we find the expression "he is not human" or "he is a dead body walking." From an African standpoint a vicious dictator, for instance, is not merely regarded as a "bad ruler." He is viewed as a nonhuman altogether. The same is said about any person whose behavior is oppressive to others. The distinction between a good and a bad human being is well expressed in the *Muntu-Kintu* paradigm of Luba religion. According to Luba anthropology, every human being exists as a pendulum between two categories of being, *Muntu* and *Kintu*. A person of good thought, good speech, and good deeds is a genuine *Muntu*, a person of *Bumuntu*. The person of evil thought, evil speech, and evil deeds loses his humanity and falls into the *Kintu* category of things, as the following table shows:

BUYA (goodness)	*BUBI* (evil)
Mwikadilo Muyampe	Mwikadilo Mubi
mu-ntu (good human)	*ki-ntu* (a thing, worthless or evil person)
LIBERATOR	OPPRESSOR
mucima muyampe (good heart)	*mucima mubi* (evil thought)
ludimi luyampe (good speech)	*ludimi lubi* (evil speech)
diso diyampe (good eye)	*diso dibi* (evil eye)
bilongwa biyampe (good deeds)	*bilongwa bibi* (evil actions)

In African society, "the perfect person is the person with a good heart"; that is, one is human who has learned the art of living and promoting the essential harmonies of life. Such a person must have acquired fundamental *Bumuntu* virtues, and the whole traditional process of education in the African family and initiation in school consists of inculcating these virtues. The most important of these virtues are: respect for and protection of life, hospitality, solidarity, compassion, love, self-control, politeness, moderation, humility, friendship, goodness, and kindness. Such an ethical framework shows that the rejection of oppressive behavior toward other human beings occupies a pivotal role in African understanding of what it means to be a human being (*Bumuntu*).

This openness to the other is part of the very nature of every human being as the "Fadenya-Badenya" paradigm teaches us. The African vision of personhood has a specific understanding of the individual and collective dimension of personhood which has an enlightening bearing on liberation theology. This vision of personhood was well captured in the Fadenya-Badenya paradigm to borrow the language of the Mande people. This anthropological paradigm points to a conception of the individual which is far from an "absolutized individualism," or a faceless token of the community. In the African worldview the *Muntu* is not a windowless monad. As the Mande well point out, each person is made up of two forces, Fadenya and Badenya, which explain the constant tension between individuality and respect for the community (Bird and Kendall, 1987:14–16).

Fadenya or "Father-childness" is the centrifugal force of individualism which paves the way to individual greatness. It orients people toward heroic actions and a defense of personal dignity and honor that stimulates resistance and rebellion against oppressive traditions, debilitating conventions, and status quo. But since the search for personal fame can easily lead to self-aggrandizing passions, selfish pursuit of self-interests, and antisocial behavior, Fadenya is feared as a force of social disequilibrium, a force of envy, jealousy, abuse of power, competition, and self-promotion. The individual can find equilibrium only with the intervention of a counterpower, the centripetal force known as Badenya or "mother-childness." This force pulls the child back home, back to the mother's womb. It is a conservative force of submission to authority, stability, cooperation, and dependency on others. From Badenya arises social solidarity, benevolence, altruism, and hospitality. Fadenya corresponds to the Promethean impulse within the being: restless, heroic, rebellious and revolutionary, individualistic, and innovative, eternally seeking freedom, autonomy, change, and novelty. Badenya, on the other hand, represents the Saturnian impulse: conservative, stabilizing, controlling, that seeks to contain, sustain, order, and repress (Tarnas, 1991:492). Fadenya and Badenya stand as two sides of the *Bumuntu* within every *Muntu*.

The Fadenya-Badenya paradigm indicates that a healthy mode of being requires a harmonious balance between the individualistic and altruistic tendencies of each human being. Fadenya is a revolutionary power that stimulates rebellion against all forces of oppression. It is an indispensable engine of the struggle for liberation. On the other hand the Badenya dimension of humanity curbs human's libido dominandi, i.e., the drive to exploit others and be a "proud oppressor."

In conclusion, African traditional religions bring to liberation theology the notion that oppression occurs at the level of thought, speech, and deeds. This means that an African liberation theology intends to liberate people who are victims of evil thought (especially epistemic violence in the form of scientific, philosophical, and theological terrorism), evil speech (the badmouthing of Africans in literature, science, philosophy, and comparative religions), and evil deeds (including slave trade, colonialism, problematic trade policies, inhumane wages, and excessive taxes). Most importantly, according to this African mode of thinking, in the "master-slave" dialectic it is the oppressor who is inferior and not the oppressed. Through thought and deeds that destroy humanity in other humans, the oppressor destroys his own humanity

and becomes a *Kintu*, a thing, a nonhuman. Liberation theology, in this context, is not merely about a compassionate liberation of others. One liberates oneself from oppressive instincts, from a self-inflicted inhumanity, and increases one's own humanity by rejecting an oppressive mode of being and by struggling for the liberation of others. Such are the principles that have guided traditional African liberation theology. We shall now examine how these principles played out historically and how they apply to local and global forces of oppression.

Liberation from Local and Global Forces of Oppression

Liberation from Local Forces of Oppression

What are the local forms of oppression and how did liberation theology address such a challenge? Oppression takes a myriad of forms; however, for the sake of clarity we have identified in the introduction "seven mortal sins." These seven types of oppressive behaviors fall into two major categories that constitute the major forces of oppression: religion and the state government. For the sake of brevity we shall focus here on the response of traditional liberation theology to sociopolitical forms of oppression.

The liberation struggle for decency and full humanity is as old as Africa itself. Indeed, well before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, Africans have challenged their own rulers, abusive priests, and abusive religious customs. Africa, like any other society in human history, has produced virtuous people and institutions, as well as corrupt and vicious individuals and oppressive institutions. Even ancestral traditions could turn oppressive in the hands of unscrupulous individuals or rulers. A deep-seated patriarchy shaped proverbs and the traditional wisdom itself. Both colonialism and slave trade would not have been successful without the "collaboration" of some Africans. Likewise neocolonialism is led among others by those *dictateurs aux dents longues* that continue to loot their own countries and transfer wealth to Swiss banks and elsewhere while their population starves. Indeed, Africa has known about the human condition and the paradoxes of human nature. It identified evil or harmful impulses in human heart, thought, speech, and actions, and referred to it with the concepts of *Mucima Mubi* or *mucima wa nshikanyi* (evil heart), and *butshi* (sorcery). Most people today regard African politicians as "witches" and the very word "politics" has become a synonym of

harm, trickery, and lie. They look upon this "independence of dictators" as a betrayal of the ancestral tradition of sage kings. Given its use of religion and its direct impact on all aspects of social life, political tyranny plays a crucial role in the grand scheme of oppression.

That political power is dangerous in the hands of unscrupulous individuals is a point well known in Africa. If African historical memory celebrates some rulers as sage kings, many others are remembered as monsters that brought misfortune and bad luck to people. In Luba empire, Nkongolo Mwamba is remembered as a paradigmatic tyrant. Even Ngoie Nsanza, who is celebrated for his reign of justice, is remembered for establishing an oppressive penal code which inflicted terrible forms of punishment to criminals, including mutilation: the cutting off of a hand to a thief, the upper lip to a liar, an eye or the nose to one guilty of adultery, and an ear to one who does not listen and disobeys constantly.

The question before us is: how did people react in the face of oppressive behaviors or institutions? Did they passively submit to oppression by accepting that the perpetrators acted according the will of the ancestors? Here African liberation theology found its most explicit expression in the traditional doctrine of "sage king," in political institutions created to control the power of the king and make sure that the ancestral sage king principle was followed, and finally in the numerous resistance movements by which people strived to liberate themselves from the yoke of tyrants.

A careful examination of African history shows that most oppressive actions were met with a liberatory reaction. This reaction begins with the power of the word. At the core of African social life we find the institution of palaver, a legitimate discussion and debate which indicates that the will of the ancestor was not left to the canonical interpretation of kings, priests, or the privileged class of noble people. Indeed, Africans have agreed to disagree on the interpretation of the *Kishila-kya-bankambo* (the will of God and the will of the ancestors). The manipulation of religion and tradition by the powerful did not go unchallenged. Quite often it was rejected as a betrayal of the will of the ancestors. And indeed rebellion flourished whenever people had enough power to ascertain their resistance. A king was considered divine only insofar as his rule followed the will of God and the ancestors. Like in the Chinese doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, once a king became oppressor to his people, he was ipso facto considered as a being abandoned by the ancestors and therefore a candidate to

impeachment and even execution. Thus the Asante people destooled several of their kings. King Osei Kwame, for instance, was destooled in 1799 for absenting himself from the capital Kumasi and endangering the security of the nation in failing to perform his religious duties. Karikari was impeached in 1874 for extravagance, among other failings, and Mensa Bonsu for excessively taxing the Asante people. And the Asante were not an exception in that regard. Although the Zanj people of East Africa considered their ruler as a "supreme Lord" they never hesitated to depose and execute him in case he departed from the rule of equity (Davidson, 1994:36). In Africa as in other parts of the world, resistance against tyranny remains the first article of people's conception of political power. As the Luba proverb "Bulohwe I Bantu" put it, power is for the people and a ruler who tyrannizes the people ipso facto delegitimizes his authority and forfeits his right to rule. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa we find similar examples.

By glorifying for centuries sage kings at the expense of tyrants, African myths and popular traditions translate the peculiar aspiration of the African people to a good government and a radical rejection of despotism as immoral. Well before the United States declared independence from England, Africans overthrew many kings. Even Hegel who held African politics in extreme contempt declared that "when the Negroes are discontented with their king they express their dissatisfaction and warn him by sending parrots' eggs or a deputation, and finally when there is no change they depose and execute him" (Hegel, 1994:208).

What is most important is not merely rebellion against tyranny. African traditional religions produced a powerful antidote to tyranny, a political theology of good governance, enshrined in proverbs and investiture speeches. This doctrine begins with a distinction between a legitimate and an illegitimate ruler. The Baluba who make a distinction between Mulohwe (sage king) and Kilohwe (an inhuman tyrant) remind the ruler who has a penchant for tyrannical behavior that *bulohwe* is *Bantu* (power is the people). Likewise in South Africa where a clear distinction is made between the *Morena-Inkosi* (a king of the people) and the *Morena wa Mekopu* (the king of pumpkins), the tyrant is reminded that *Morena Ke Morena Ka Batho* (one is a king only when and as long as he is acknowledged by the people). It is significant to note that kings became kings during their investiture, often preceded by a divination which has to guarantee the legitimacy of the new ruler by confirming his acceptance by the ancestors.

Investiture happened after days of the rite of passage during which the future king had to symbolically die to his "ordinary nature" in order to be born as a new being capable of carrying the heavy duty of government with honesty, fairness, and passion for the common good. The criterion was that the will of the ancestors was to foster happiness and guarantee justice and the protection of the people. This vision is widespread in Africa as can be seen in the case of a Tswana Chief, who under pressure from his courtiers to act in an obviously prejudiced manner against another, retorted: "I cannot do that! How shall I face my fathers if I do so?" (Setiloane, 1993:148).

Finally and most importantly, African political theology of the sage king found its best articulation in investiture speeches. The investiture speech of the Ashanti, for example, stipulates that the king should not disclose the origin (ethnicity) of any person, should not curse people, should not be greedy or violent, should not call people "fools," and should never act without following the advice of his people (Ayittey, 1992:57). The investiture speech of the Asanti people of Bekwai warns the new king against the danger of drinking and other shameful behaviors and prohibits him from making civil wars and "gambling with the people." Everywhere rulers are told that they must listen to the advice and the wish of the people.

In conclusion, traditional religions generated a liberation theology based on five basic principles that constitute the traditional "pentagon of power."

1. African traditional religions built their political theology on the notion that life is the central gift from the ancestors and the creator. In virtue of its transcendent origin, life was regarded as sacred and the fundamental ethical criterion for distinguishing virtues from vices, good rulers from bad ones, liberation from oppression.
2. African traditional religions maintained that the *raison d'etre* of government is to ensure the welfare of all the people, by protecting life and being sure that people are not stripped of adequate means of existence.
3. African tradition acknowledges civil authority as vice regent of the Divinity on earth, however it does not view any individual civil authority as absolute.
4. A ruler is accepted as ruler only in so far as he conforms himself to the will of the ancestors and the creator, who established civil

authority for the good ordering of society, and for the transmission of life and beneficence of the Divinity to the people.

5. When a civil authority ceases to be the transmitter of the graces and benefits of Divinity, i.e., to execute what has been entrusted to it, it forfeits its validity. At this level a "bellum justum" component emerges in traditional liberation theology. According to African traditional religion, such a forfeiture of validity by the king means an extrication of the people from his authority and rule. If the illegitimate government refuses to resign, then it becomes the "abomination of desolation" standing in the ancestral shrine, a hindrance to people's access to the Divinity, hence the foundation of the legitimacy of uprising and resistance to the evil rule. It is then believed that it is against the will of the ancestors to fail to strike an evil regime, be it local or that of a foreign occupier. This is the foundation of Africa resistance to slave trade, colonialism, African dictators, and some ambiguous powers of globalization. This leads to the analysis of forces of foreign oppression.

Liberation from Outside Forces of Oppression

The fact that foreign forces, using a superior military might directly or indirectly seize control of African political and economic life implied not a greater prosperity for Africa but rather ipso facto African loss of freedom and various human rights. It implied slave labor, ridiculous salaries, heavy taxes, an unfair judicial system, appointment of token African rulers, transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe, and fake elections. Pseudodemocratic regimes ruled from Paris, Brussels, London, or Washington. African response came instantly by way of resistance movements. In 1891, when the British were trying to turn Ghana (then the Gold Coast) into their protectorate told the king Prempeh I of Asante that the Queen of England wanted to "protect" him and his kingdom, he replied: "The suggestion that Asante in its present state should come and enjoy the protection of Her Majesty the Queen and Empress of India I may say is a matter of very serious consideration, and which I am happy to say we have arrived at this conclusion, that my kingdom of Asante will never commit itself to any such policy. Asante must remain as of old at the same time to remain friendly with all white men" (Boahen, 1990:1). In 1895 Wobogo, the Moro Naba or King of Mosi (in modern Burkina Faso) told the French Captain

Destenave: "I know the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, and yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want: I have my own merchants; also consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off. Go away now, and above all, never come back" (Boahen, 1990:1).

Similar reaction is reported from Lat Dior, the Damel of Cayor (in modern Senegal) in 1883; from King Machemba of the Yao in modern Tanzania in 1890; from Hendrik Witbooi, a king in southwest Africa; and many other regions. In Central Africa, between 1885 and 1905, more than a dozen groups revolted in the Congo alone. Likewise a series of enlightened "sage kings" emerged in various parts of Africa challenging slave trade. In 1526, Affonso, King of Kongo, sent a letter of protest to the King of Portugal (Dom Joao). The letter first describes in detail the evils of the slave trade and then concludes with a decision to abolish it:

> To the most powerful and excellent prince Dom Joao, King our Brother

> Sir your Highness (of Portugal) should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways . . . so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely depopulated, and Your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. . . . That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding your factors that they should not send here either merchants or wares, because it is our will that in these Kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them. (Davidson, 1991:223–24)

Affonso's analysis of the impact of slave trade on Kongo contradicts also the argument often used by some scholars who claim that the kingdoms of black Africa flourished because of the wealth gained by African kings through slave trade. But this phenomenon of enlightened kings is not unique to Central Africa. Another notorious case is reported in West Africa in the eighteenth century by the Swedish traveler Wadström. In a report to the British Privy Council Committee of 1789 on the political chaos caused by the slave trade in Africa, Wadström evokes the case of the enlightened king of Almammy who in 1787 enacted a law stating that no slave whatever should be marched

throughout his territories. This same passion for moral correctness led the Asantehene of Ashanti (Ghana) to reject a European demand for enslaving people. In 1819 he replied to a European visitor that it was not his practice "to make war to catch slaves in the bush like a thief."

This resistance to the injustices of the global trade and global politics was deeply rooted in the traditional religious sense of dignity and justice. The few examples quoted above do not constitute a treatise of liberation theology. But they do wonderfully reflect the effects of a spirit of liberation theology at work, for those kings were influenced by a specific worldview steeped in ancestral spirituality. Indeed, traditional religions and their priests and diviners played a crucial role in formulating a liberation theology that provided moral legitimacy to resistance and even outright wars of liberation. The role of African traditional religions in liberation theology was twofold: First religion established the principle of just cause thus providing legitimacy and a powerful motivation for struggle against oppression. Secondly it established the principle of divine and ancestor assistance during wars of liberation. Such assistance was materialized in the "blessed water ritual" by which the ancestors bestowed strength, invulnerability, and even invisibility upon the warriors on the battlefield.

Thus, traditional religion, Africanized Christianity and Africanized Islam, spearheaded the "art of resistance" against slave trade and colonial oppression. Various "prophets" and "prophetesses" emerged on the political scene, preaching a kind of "social gospel," a "liberation theology." The Maji Maji uprising resorted to African traditional religion and the power of its "magic." In so doing it became the most serious challenge to colonial British rule in East Africa.

Germans too faced in their colony of Tanganyika the powerful prophet Kinjikitile Ngwale who resorted to traditional religious practices and worldview to preach that the war of liberation was ordained by God, and that the ancestors would return to life to assist the African people in this war. God and the ancestors, he added, want the unity and freedom of all the African people and want them to fight the German oppressors. The war raged for more than two years, from July 1905 to August 1907. Although Kinjikitile himself was captured early on and hanged by the Germans, his brother picked up his mantle, assumed the title of "Nyamguni," one of the three divinities in the region, and continued to administer the "Maji," a religiously blessed water aimed at rendering the warrior invulnerable (Mwanzi, 1990:80). This practice of blessed water is widespread in Africa. Among the Baluba it is

referred to as "koya kizaba" (taking a bath in a magical water, blessed by the ancestors to gain extraordinary strength and invulnerability on the battlefield).

The traditional role played by women in African traditional religions brought them to the forefront in resistance movements. In the Zambezi valley, the Shona mediums instigated the famous rebellions of 1897, 1901, and 1904. In the Congo the notorious case remains that of the Christian independent church of Dona Beatrice: Kimpa Vita's struggle for freedom in the Kongo kingdom was so passionate that historians have called her "Jeanne d'Arc du Congo" in reference to the spirit of French Revolution. In Congo-Brazaville, the priestess Maria Nkoie instigated the Ikaya rebellion which lasted for five years, until 1921. And many other women have played a crucial role in the struggle for freedom. Almost all wars waged against Western conquest were backed by religious belief in justice and just cause. Enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic carrying with them a liberation theology that was to have a global repercussion in the famous Haitian revolution and various slave rebellions in the United States and in Latin America.

The spirit of traditional religions impacted various charismatic figures converted to Christianity, such as Simon Kimbangu, and led them to challenge not only colonial governments but also the colonial Christianity that lent moral and spiritual legitimacy to foreign tyranny. Indeed, well before the rise of African theology and its process of Africanization of Christianity, and almost 250 years before the rise of the civil rights movement and the ensuing Afrocentric paradigm in the United States, Kimpa Vita, a young Congolese girl nicknamed "Jeanne d'Arc du Congo," after initiation in both traditional religions and Christianity, set up a radical movement to reform both religions. Preaching against some traditional customs, she also challenged the Portuguese slave traders and their understanding of Christianity and articulated her own version of Christian theology. Disgusted by racism within the sanctuary of Christianity, she taught her followers that Christ appeared to her as a black man in Sao Salvador and that all his apostles were black. She argued that Jesus identified himself with the oppressed black Africans and opposed the white exploiters and oppressors. She also created a Christian creed adapted to the African situation.

Persecuted by the Portuguese missionaries she was burned at the stake, but her liberation theology and her doctrine of the Africanization of Christianity was to continue in subsequent generations of new

prophets. Beatrice Kimpa Vita did not only attack the structure of the global market of that time but also its religious foundation in a colonial version of Christianity. She was also capable of transcending the colonial mask to appreciate the values of Christianity, thus exhibiting that fundamental African spirit of religious tolerance and appreciation of the spiritual values and truth inherent in other religions. Her critical evaluation of African traditional religions and customs also exemplifies that traditional African power of self-criticism so relevant to issues of liberation theology.

This is the traditional spirit that had instigated the impeachment of many traditional kings and recently the democratic movements against African dictators. It is also to this traditional liberation theology that African Christian theologians have turned in their effort to Africanize Christianity and articulate a Christian theology that takes into account the well-being of the African people. The theme of the Africanization of Christianity is important for understanding the impact of traditional religious worldview on Christian liberation theology that is now dominant in Africa. It stems from the failure of Western Christianity to adequately address the needs of Africans. This brings us to one of the crucial issues of religious oppression.

Religious Oppression

It is widely acknowledged, by Christian and Muslim scholars alike, that in Africa the traditional religions, not Christianity or Islam, offer a great tradition of tolerance. According to the Catholic theologian Bénézet Bujo, religious wars were unknown in African traditional society (1992:55). Summarizing the Islamic view, Ali Mazrui, a Muslim scholar, is more explicit:

> Of the three principal religious legacies of Africa (indigenous, Islamic, and Christian), the most tolerant on record must be the indigenous tradition. One might even argue that Africa did not have religious wars before Christianity and Islam arrived, for indigenous religions were neither universalist (seeking to convert the whole of the human race) nor competitive (in bitter rivalry against other creeds). . . . Like Hinduism and modern Judaism—and unlike Christianity and Islam—indigenous African traditions have not sought to convert the whole of humanity. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to the Yoruba religion—or vice versa—and neither the

> Yoruba nor the Ibo compete with each other for the souls of a third
> group, such as the Hausa. Because they are not proselytizing reli-
> gions, indigenous African creeds have not fought with each other.
> Over the centuries, Africans have waged many kinds of wars with
> each other, but they were rarely religious ones before the universal-
> ist creeds arrived. (1999:77)

Writing from the perspective of the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, Abimbola observed that the Yoruba religion starts with myths of creation that maintain the idea of a universal common descent of all human beings from the same God creator, Obatala (Abimbola, 1990:138). Thus arises the African belief in the necessity of respect for all the religious traditions of humankind, as a condition for a peaceful coexistence among people and nations. Although in recent decades religious conflicts have erupted in Nigeria and the Soudan, religious crusades were alien to traditional religious spirit. This traditional spirit of religious tolerance epitomized by the extraordinary harmonious coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Senegal, and some other countries as well, constitutes in this era of rising fundamentalism one of the most important contributions of Africa to the liberation of the world from religious extremism and "sacred" violence.

Gender Oppression

African feminist philosophers and theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye and many others have abundantly challenged the sexism inherent in African traditions and traditional religions. I also have elsewhere analyzed in detail the oppressive nature of African patriarchy (Nkulu-N'Sengha, 2001:69–108). In light of growing modern forms of sexism (including grotesque pornography, "leisure industry" or "sexual tourism," the global trade of women for prostitution, and the exclusion of women from priesthood) women are now turning toward ancestral notions of womanhood and dignity to combat the alienation generated by a modernity that purports to be essentially a force of liberation.

Conclusion: The Wisdom of the Poor

"Wisdom," says Ecclesiastes, "is better than strength; Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised; and his words are not heard"

(9:14-16). As a poor continent, Africa has been largely conceptualized as the unwise land of oppressive ancestral traditions awaiting for foreign liberators. Such a perception is in itself one of the major oppressive forces that not only Africa but the outside world needs to be liberated from. The wisdom of African liberation theology begins with faith in the self-liberation capacity of the African tradition. Such a tradition is grounded in ancestral spirituality. Africa has indeed a long tradition of ancestral wisdom which enabled life to thrive by constantly overcoming local and foreign structures of oppression. As Jacques Maquet (and Georges Balandier) pointed out in their classical *Dictionary of Black African Civilization*, "African wisdom is not merely a convenient expression; it is something that exists. It is a collection of unique precepts that enable the people of traditional Africa to settle as harmoniously as possible the disputes that mar human relationships" (Balandier and Maquet, 1974:336).

Overlooked and despised during the colonial era, this wisdom is being increasingly acknowledged as indispensable for solving many of the problems that Africa faces in modern times. This wisdom is well encapsulated in the key notion of Bumuntu that has shaped the African idea of genuine humanity and authentic mode of being, from the Nile to the Niger, from the Congo river to the Zambezi. For millennia, this Bumuntu wisdom of "the good life" has guided the African sense of good and evil, and the African understanding of oppression and liberation.

The effort to rediscover African traditional values is in itself a liberatory act. It takes the first step in the articulation of a genuine liberation theology. I have remarked that although 80 percent of Africans have converted to Christianity and Islam, traditional religions still remain the foundation of African identity and African spirituality and the soul and heart of African civilization, so much so that in Africa even Christianity and Islam are deeply shaped by a traditional worldview. This traditional spirit enables African Christians to challenge the oppressive nature of colonial and neocolonial Christianity. It is indeed the traditional spirit of Bumuntu wisdom that led the children of Soweto to face the machine guns of the apartheid regimes and elsewhere animated adult and school children to challenge the tyranny of Bokassa, Idi Amin, or Mobutu Sese Seko, and other ubuesque dictators. It is the same spirit of Bumuntu that produced Kimpa Vita and Wangari Mathai, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, Kwame Nkru-

mah and Patrice Lumumba. The same spirit led Sarawiwa to face the tyranny of oil companies such as Shell.

Although African ancestors did not produce a written treatise of a systematic liberation theology, such a theology existed in oral tradition and is well expressed in countless African resistance movements to local and foreign oppression. Nowadays such a theology exists in African independent movements as well as in writings by some Christian theologians who make extensive use of traditional religions and ancestral values in their articulation of the Africanization of Christianity which is perceived as a *sine qua non* condition for African spiritual liberation. It is a theology that repudiates religious patriotism, religious fanaticism, and religious imperialism. It is also a theology deeply grounded in the notion of human dignity we have referred to as Bumuntu. African liberation theology moves beyond the Cartesian "Cogito ergo sum" into an epistemology of solidarity and hospitality which maintains that "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" as John Mbiti put it beautifully.

12

ORISHA TRADITIONS IN THE WEST

—Dianne M. Stewart

Pinpointing exactly where the Orisha chose to rest their pots in the Americas and the Caribbean is no easy task. They have danced and exchanged raffia with so many other gods commencing on Africa's soil and abiding across the Atlantic to slave settlements in the African diaspora.[1] Today, in the Black Atlantic world, beyond traditions claiming the Orisha appellative, we see traces of them in religious cultures such as Vodou, Winti, Comfa, Kumina, and Spiritualist and Sanctified Black Christian traditions. The Orisha can be examined as archetypes, principles, personalities, divinities, forces, energies, elements, and nature. In some senses, the Orisha are as old as time, encompassing and surpassing all of creation. From a cultural slant, the Orisha have come to rest in customs that comprise institutional religion and a spiritual orientation that now nurtures approximately thirty million people who pay homage to these illustrious and elusive entities. An estimated five million of these devotees make their homes in locations such as Salvador, Matanzas, Caracas, Tegucigalpa, Panama City, Port of Spain, Loiza, New York, South Carolina, Toronto, and Birmingham.[2]

Scholarly efforts to chronicle the dispersal of African religions throughout the Western Hemisphere unveil a tangled and enduring history of the multidirectional movement of African peoples across and around the Atlantic under circumstances as varied as diplomatic missions, global expeditions, commercial ventures, human trafficking, indentured labor programs, evangelical enterprises, military conscription, back-to-Africa emigration schemes, exiting-Africa

immigration schemes, and diaspora-inspired ancestral pilgrimages to the "Motherland."[3] Across these landscapes of encounter, the Yoruba-based Orisha tradition has mushroomed into present-day movements and spiritual families of *omorisa* (Orisha initiates). Although it would be premature and in some circumstances incorrect to conclude that Orisha traditions have roots as primitive as the auction blocks where the enslaved were portioned out to the highest bidders, at present, Orisha is arguably the most celebrated African-derived religion in the West. In some regions across the Black Atlantic, Orisha traditions have even furnished the wider society with defining cultural scripts, templates for African consciousness, and a metalanguage for African spirituality: consider how the names of Oshun and Yemaya, feminine archetypes of beauty and power, ooze from the jazzed spoken word of Larenz Tate on the *Love Jones* soundtrack;[4] cowrie shells mean something more than decorative adornment to Santeros in the streets of Havana; and the term "ashe" has almost replaced "amen" in count-less sanctuaries across the black world. Orisha traditions, like other mainstream religions, broker today not just the secularization of the spiritual but also the consecration of the profane.

If this is not enough to warrant a place for Orisha among the estab-lished "world religions," since the last decades of the twentieth cen-tury, Orisha devotees worldwide have embraced a global awareness of Yoruba civilization and its theological import across local communi-ties in Africa and the African diaspora. Organizing under the compre-hensive umbrella of the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture (Orisa World Congress), practitioners and scholars of Afri-can-derived religions, especially Orisha-inspired traditions, have been holding global meetings toward the formal recognition and official documentation of Orisha as a world religion.[5] As a result, efforts at centralization and institutionalization complement attempts to protect the legitimacy of local Orisha expressions across the globe.

This essay offers an elaboration of liberation theological motifs in Orisha traditions in the West and is indebted to the mounting litera-ture in this area, much of which is conceptually framed by theories of African retention and religious syncretism. To begin such a task, we cannot attribute to African religion any foundational liberation theo-logical agenda as we find for example in the protest theologies of African North America and Latin America.[6] African religion is not primarily oriented toward responding to social suffering. On the other hand, African religion has all the ingredients for liberation thought

and praxis. In East Africa Nyabingi and Mau Mau rebels[7] shrouded their skins and political convictions with African religion and the latter "saved our country from white rule and exploitation," my Christian-identified Kenyan classmate once remarked with pride during a seminar discussion on African theology. We can consider a number of examples across Africa, from Queen Ya Asantewa's military protest against British colonial occupation of the Gold Coast, to the Igbo women's rebellion at Aba, to Kimpa Vita's campaign to reunite the Kongo kingdom. Was it even possible for Africans to hunt or go to war without accessing their gods, ancestors, oracles, medicines, and spiritual technologies? In the context of racial slavery, liberation praxis, if not theology, was axiomatic for countless Africans who must have asked Nana Peasant's question over and over of the exotic Christian fetishes—crucifixes, Bibles, medallions of madonnas and saints—"dat protec ya?!" and who, like Lucy in *Sankofa*, had the impulse to tear the ropes holding images of the Virgin Mary from around their converted kinfolk's throats.[8]

For practitioners of African-derived religions, transgenerational racial slavery constituted the preliminary circumstance compelling individual and communal liberation praxis, a condition of primordial deprivation indeed for those born in the slave economies of the Americas and the Caribbean with iron around their necks. The Christian demonization of African religions went in tandem with this culture of involuntary servitude, providing divine justification for African bondage in the West and a new beginning for a new creation: the black race. Both forms of oppression are, at the very least, social oppressions that have deprived persons, families, communities, and civilizations of life, liberty, justice, and sovereignty—indeed all that the West has outlined as fundamental human rights.

In this type of inquiry African, African American, Latin American, and Caribbean theologies should each have some relevance to a liberation theological analysis of Orisha traditions in the West. This notwithstanding, my approach to liberation theology in this essay takes seriously the professional theological claim that authentic conceptual sources for liberation theology are situated where grassroots communities, inspired by religious convictions, struggle for justice. In other words, I resist here a top-down approach that principally acknowledges the conceptual formation of scholastic liberation theologies. I seek then to interrogate the orientations, beliefs, practices, and experiences that might inform a scholarly elaboration of liberation theology in Orisha

traditions, many of them "hidden transcripts"[9] offering alternative sources of meaning and power. Since there are infinite angles from which to approach the subject, I will begin with a limited discussion of widespread patterns and trends that indicate common beliefs, pre-occupations, and priorities of many Orisha devotees across the globe. In so doing, I will explore specific theological themes that address the question of liberation for Orisha practitioners. Through this exercise, I hope to underscore the implicit and explicit attention given to multiple oppressions within Orisha communities.

Foundational Features of Orisha Religion in the West

Orisha traditions in the West have their beginnings in the Yorbua and neighboring religious cultures of West Africa. Following the integration of so many African cultures under conditions ripe for extinction, Orisha traditions have unfolded with some variation in the Americas and the Caribbean. Numerous studies providing extensive accounts of the shared and divergent Orisha subtraditions are now widely available and their contents need not be repeated here.[10] Instead, I will present a concise outline of some of the foundational characteristics embraced across a wide spectrum of practicing communities.

   The Orisha religion bears witness to the created order as dually contained. Distinct but interactive communities populate each world domain. The invisible domain is home to a community of deities (also called *Orisha*), spirits, ancestors, and other powers, while human, animal, and vegetative life forms, as well as elements and minerals, inhabit the visible domain. Much of Orisha religious practice is organized around individual devotees' affiliation with one or two of the 400+1 divinities.[11] Each Orisha is associated with an abundance of qualities, talents and skills, natural phenomena, departments of life, occupations, virtues and vices, human anatomy and physiology, flora and fauna, colors and temperaments, and other aspects of life and creation. To take the example of Oshun, Isabel Castellanos describes her many caminos (paths) for Cuban devotees:

   Ochún, the goddess of love. On the one hand, Ochún is Ochún Yeyé Moró (also called Yeyé Karí): a sensuous saint, all full of *joie de vivre*, knowledgeable in the art of lovemaking, fond of music, beautiful clothes, and dance. Together with Changó, she epitomizes the fullness of life. At the other end of the spectrum, Ochún is Ochún

Kolé-Kolé (also called Ibú-Kolé). Poor, owner of a single faded dress, this Ochún eats only what Mayimbe, the vulture, brings to her door. Another Ochún, Ochún Awé or Galadé . . . is intimately related to death. . . . At the center of the continuum sits Ochún Olólodi or Olodí, who is very serious and domestic. She is not a dancer and, like Yumú, she is fond of sewing and keeping house. All the other Ochúns fall somewhere between the two ends of the continuum. (1996:45)

In addition to these intricate deities upon whom omorisha lavish their devotional energies and attention, Orisha communities recognize a representative high God, Olodumare/Olorun/Olofin, a remote, gender-neutral deity to which most of the created order is attributed.[12] The created order is also home to a class of 200+1 antigods, collectively called Ajogun, and is infused with a ubiquitous force (*ashe*) that energizes and empowers everything within creation. Ashe is commonly understood as "the power to make things happen."

Orisha devotees rely on ritual specialists and divination as well as their personal *ori* (inner divinity/soul complex) to navigate through life. Life is a journey, and while Orisha upholds a polydemonic concept of evil (the 200+1 antigods), good and evil are anything but essentialized categories. Agency is conceived as neutral, ambiguous, and contextually "good" or "evil." Because power is everywhere and can be accessed and deployed with constructive or destructive intentions, Orisha devotees seek to protect themselves against any malicious or antisocial forces that can potentially compromise their health, prosperity, and well-being. Toward this end, they make offerings and sacrifices to their ancestors and deities as they submit petitions of all sorts. These can range from prayers for good health and financial security to satisfaction in one's personal relationships and professional stability. Many of these *ebo*, as they are called, are prescribed through two major oracles: *Ifa* and *Merindinlogun/Eerindinlogun/Dinlogun*. Both divinatory systems are essentially sacred texts where the collective wisdom of the Yoruba heritage is recorded in the poetry, chants, and narratives of the lives of the Orisha. A less elaborate form of *Obi* divination is also widely practiced among Orisha devotees when circumstances might simply require affirmative or negative responses to basic questions.

Consultations with ritual specialists via divination readings begin even before a child is born and continue after death, for it is believed that the departed are still active beings who have only transitioned

to the invisible domain to strengthen their ashe, to achieve an even higher status in the ontological order, and to be destined for familial reincarnation. Orisha devotees maintain intimate relationships with their departed ancestors with confidence that they will continue to receive ancestral guidance and support.

Much of the ritual protocol and performance in the Orisha religion is punctuated with pageantry and symbolic paraphernalia. When Zora Neale Hurston opined that the Negro decorates the decoration, she must have had Orisha devotees somewhere in the back of her mind. Hurston could not have captured more poignantly the aesthetic mode of religious apprehension one comes to experience at the ritual center of African-derived religions where "there can never be enough beauty, let alone too much" (1981:53). There are countless ceremonies surrounding various stages of initiation to the priesthood, anniversary celebrations for deities, priests, and ancestors, not to mention naming ceremonies, marriages, and funerals. The expectation at most ceremonial gatherings is that the Orisha will manifest through possession trance and fellowship with the visible community. Orisha ritual life displays talented and skilled specialists from consecrated drummers to those called to perform the ritual sacrifices of two- and four-legged animals. The repertoires of songs, dance and percussive ensembles, and tastes and dislikes connected with each Orisha known to any given community are exhaustive and continue to expand as Orisha practitioners travel and share experiences with fellow devotees in distant places.[13]

The institutional structure of the Orisha ritual house or *ile* preserves spiritual lineages where initiates are brought into the religion by apprenticing with a priest (*iyalorisha/babalorisha*) under the ashe of the patron Orisha for that spiritual family. In many areas of the diaspora, devotees refer to their initiating priests as "godmothers" and "godfathers." The ile functions as the center of ritual life and training. Most ile centers carry the name of a patron Orisha and house consecrated altars for a number of deities in the Orisha pantheon.

Orisha traditions illustrate that religion is ultimately a way of life and offers humans tools for managing life. To manage life well requires mastering the self. Self-mastery is facilitated by the development of *iwa pele* (gentle and noble character) and acceptance of one's *ita* (life purpose). By living in accordance with the collective wisdom of the ancestors and the ethical teachings of the tradition (acquired through divination and experience), Orisha devotees negotiate personal and

communal life with the aim of overcoming misfortune, disease, and oppression in the here and now. Living a satisfying and abundant life, which includes sharing one's prosperity and good fortune with others, is encouraged by the promise of ancestorhood and reincarnation in the life to come.

Another long-standing goal of Orisha traditions in the West continues to be surviving the blight of religious persecution. This preoccupation cannot be overemphasized nor should it be taken for granted when one considers the abundance of time, monies, and energy expended by so many colonial state and church authorities to obliterate all traces of African religion in the New World. More subtly promoted today, yet no less vicious, this mandate remains a primary preoccupation of extremist Christian fundamentalist groups (Lopes, 2004:858). Subjected to incessant surveillance during and even after the slave era, Orisha communities, like all religious groups under attack, were compelled to prioritize the battles they would fight and the strategies they would deploy to overcome subjugation. Defending their gods against death and cultivating the courage to be had to take precedence. From this resistance praxis, which expressed *the conviction to remain African*, one can identify resources for the liberation of Christian theology and for an Orisha liberation theology. To approach this task, it is imperative to examine Orisha responses to the colonial denigration of African religion from the perspective of creative agency and theological license.

Erasing African Religion: Afrophobia in the Orisha Experience and an Orisha Theology of Inclusion

The different branches of liberation theology bear witness to suffering communities from diverse sociocultural locations. For this reason we have seen bodies of thought giving primary consideration to the problem of race (black theology), class (Latin American theology), and gender (white feminist theology). Women of color have also performed intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, and culture in their theological treatments of the African U.S. American, Latin American, Caribbean, African, and Asian experience. Turning to the experiences of devotees to African-derived religions, the threat of religio-cultural genocide within Afrophobic slaveholding societies and the continued defamation of African-derived religions to this very day is a common denominator suffered by all.[14] In reflecting

on the Cuban context, Philip Zwerling summarizes well this pervading ethos: "It is clear that in colonial Cuba, the Yoruba religion was denigrated as little more than black magic, and Afro Cuban culture was mocked as a part of the stereotypically primitive and uneducated 'negrito'" (2004:305).

Under conditions such as these, African encounters with Christianity became evident in the rituals of most Orisha expressions, especially Santería traditions across Latin America. I am certainly not alone in arguing that the "christianisms" embedded within African-derived religions are evidence of African people's agency, resistance to colonial aggression, and spiritual dexterity.[15] With the theological backing of Christian missionaries, colonial slaveholding authorities saw to it that the concepts "African" and "religion" became intransigently fixed signifiers in the New World imagination for depraved savagery and white Christianity. Never the twain could meet, except in the innovations of African religious spaces and rituals, the *cabildos* and "feasts," where many devotees protected themselves and their spiritual inheritance by feigning conversion to the Catholic faith. Their appropriation of a tradition construed to stigmatize and condemn them was an assertion of theological dissent, challenging normative Christian theologies that either upheld or accommodated African enslavement and campaigns prohibiting the religious freedom of enslaved African communities. Far from creating a new syncretic religion, Orisha devotees adapted their religious inheritance to New World conditions and adopted "christianisms" most concordant with their foundational theological orientation.[16]

I would propose that, within Orisha traditions emerging from slave societies, we find blueprints for one of the principal claims of the liberation theology school. Orisha practitioners' inventive engagement with Christian traditions allowed for the earliest New World translations of Christianity on and in African terms. (Contextualization is the foundational task collectively affirmed by Christian liberation theologians.) Each Catholic saint adopted into the tradition, for example, was constructed to have the same tastes, powers, and proclivities as an analogous Orisha. The literature, songs, dances, offerings, and attributes associated with each power were, for the large part, furnished by the African traditions that came to comprise the various expressions of Orisha religion in the Americas and the Caribbean. These and other innovative developments undoubtedly protected Orisha traditions from extermination. As the colonial establishment attempted

to erase African religion, Orisha devotees in the New World gave new spellings[17] not only to the names of African religions but also to the Christian name, contesting the mythology that Christianity was authentic religion and wholly other than the collection of "superstitions" and "barbaric" practices associated with "primitive" Africans. Through comparative theology and analogous reasoning, they asserted the sameness of Christianity and Orisha qua religion demonstrating, against the exclusive narrative of Christian revelation, multiple areas of compatibility between the two religious orientations.

Another dimension of Orisha's liberation theology of inclusiveness pertains to a communal concept that Christians have labeled "the people of God" or the "elect." Even liberation theology reserves a space for divine election (God's chosen sufferers and those who struggle in solidarity with them). Sylvester Johnson's study of this phenomenon in North America identifies some of the most sinister uses of divine elections. When coupled with divine curses and a preoccupation with saving/othering the "heathen," the consequences have been crippling for the non-elect.[18] Orisha traditions differ drastically on this point. There is no intrinsic script of "us versus them" in African religions and for much of the history of Orisha presence in the New World this basic fact seems to hold true. Police records, newspaper accounts, travel logs, and even sensationalized fiction bear witness to the fact that racial exclusion from white privilege did not encourage similar discriminatory practices in Orisha communities. Whether deliberately or not, African people, particularly in Latin American contexts, were successful in convincing many whites of the credibility of the Orisha religion. As João José Reis notes, "the history of Candomblé in nineteenth-century Bahia is the history of its creolization and *ethnic and racial mixing*" and by the latter part of the nineteenth century, "the sources so far available give the impression that all-African terreiros lived side by side with racially and ethnically mixed houses" (2001:129–31; emphasis in original).[19]

There is the invitation in black theology for privileged whites to become "ontologically black," and to express their "preferential option" for the poor and oppressed in Latin American theology. In Orisha traditions, the whites who spilled blood on the altars of the gods became African, at least spiritually and to some degree culturally, for there is no other way to practice this tradition without assenting to an African orientation and lifeworld. In this sense, Orisha, an African religion widely discredited in the Christian West, has managed to sup-

plant Christianity as the grounding religious orientation for a sizeable number of phenotypic whites and mestizos in Latin America. This very fact is enough of an indictment of Christian arrogance and claims of universal relevance and it offers a fresh location for comparative theological dialogues intent on purging racist theological imaginations.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, a new ideology and reformist theology began to take expression among black communities of Orisha devotees who, in some instances, questioned not only whether whites could partake of an African tradition but were also malcontented with how "white" the Orisha tradition had become. Concentrated expressions of this new black religious nationalism are evident among African U.S. American and Trinidadian converts to the Orisha religion.

Race-ing African Religion: Africa-centrism in the Orisha Experience and Black Nationalist Theologies of Cultural Reclamation

Under the Orisha umbrella we also find communities of black devotees dispensing with the christianisms that were adopted during periods of brutal censorship and repression. Racism and racial experience have encouraged a great proportion of phenotypically black devotees to claim the Orisha inheritance while appealing to African continental expressions of Yoruba religion and culture as the most authentic and authoritative theological source. Many following this Orisha persuasion are professed black nationalists who see no promise of liberation for people of African descent in the Christianities currently claiming the hearts, souls, and minds of millions across Africa and the African diaspora. Tracey Hucks has argued that this "reclamation of Africa" through Yoruba religion emerges time and again as an exercise of liberation theology and practice for personal, familial, and communal emancipation from the multidimensional oppression blacks have endured in the Christian West.[20]

By the 1960s, this theological platform became most pronounced in the United States within the discourse and praxis of a series of Orisha-based institutions, launched under the leadership of Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I (1928–2005). Most definitive were the Yoruba Theological Archministry (New York City) and Oyotunji Village, which was founded in Sheldon, South Carolina, in 1972. The extent of Adefunmi's influence on African American and Caribbean converts to the

Orisha religion has yet to be documented. His innovative black nation-
alist interpretation of the Yoruba religion offered a credible alternative
for African U.S. Americans and others in the black diaspora in search
of African grammars of religious meaning. The introduction posted on
the official website of the Oyotunji Village describes best the import
of this movement for African U.S. Americans who, for the most part,
had no tangibly accessible long-standing Orisha or African-derived
religious institutions toward which their energies might be directed:

> 1959 is when the Gods and Goddesses of Africa were reclaimed
> by and for Africans in America. Before that time, to speak of Gods
> and Africa in the same breath was seen as blasphemy, hearsay or
> at least insanity. Until then, it had not been fully conceived or per-
> ceived that we: Africans in [America] or elsewhere were reflections
> of the divine energy which permeates the universe. After the deities
> return[ed] we could envision the heavens filled [with] African God-
> desses and Gods and simultaneously see ourselves in the images of
> these divine entities. At last, the beginning of spiritual freedom. No
> longer are we dependent on the God of Palestine or Arabia for our
> salvation. Our Path to the heavens will be illuminated by Cultural
> Restoration![21]

Little did these black converts to the Orisha religion imagine that
the struggle to "reclaim the African Gods and Goddesses" would not
be unidirectionally aimed at severing all ties with mainstream Chris-
tian traditions. The struggle would likewise take place within the arena
of Orisha theology and ritual practice as many white Cubans insisted
on setting the parameters for recognition and official inclusion/initia-
tion as well as ideological and aesthetic propriety. Appalled by the
African-centered consciousness and perhaps threatened by the black
nationalist orientation of fervent latecomers to a religion most of them
had taken for granted since birth, more than a few Santeros resisted this
encroachment upon their religious identity. This battle for Orisha ter-
rain is certainly not exhaustive across the racial and ethnic divides of
Latinos and African U.S. Americans, for there are countless examples
of cooperation, empathy, and reciprocity between the two communi-
ties (Vega, 1995:201–6). Nevertheless, lingering tensions encouraged
one anonymous African U.S. American devotee to tackle the issue in
plain frankness with an essay entitled "A Debt Paid in Full: Latin and
African-American Relations within the Orisa Community." Under the
three most controversial subheadings "The Guilt Trip," "You Can't

Keep Me out of My Own House," and "Living with the Black Stain," the author renders a fairly candid indictment of the exclusivity and ultimately racist demeanor exhibited by some Latino devotees toward African U.S. Americans and calls for honest and open dialogue in healing the rift between the two communities.[22]

Marta Vega sheds light on this moment in U.S. Orisha history as a period when "African Americans and Cuban Americans had to confront cultural barriers and racist attitudes before the orishas could encompass both communities." She goes on to write:

> The participation of the African American Community in Yoruba traditions increased Orisha exposure, but publicity made the Cuban traditional community uneasy, since many of its members were illegal aliens trying to maintain a low profile. The images of Catholic saints in Cuban/Puerto Rican Yoruba practice created another point of conflict between Latinos and African Americans, who wished to remove all images of Western European oppression from the tradition. These issues motivated African Americans to look increasingly towards Nigeria for their development of the Orisha traditional belief system. (1995:205)

An analogous situation has also unfolded within the Orisha community on the tiny island of Trinidad. Since the 1970s, black nationalist dissolution with all things white and Christian created elbowroom for new initiates within an already existent grassroots Orisha religious culture. The Orisha community has had to negotiate an ideological and theological divide that continues to generate both healthy and less salutary internal debate. In one camp we find devotees faithful to the ritual innovations absorbed by the tradition in earlier periods, and in another camp, those attempting to dispense with christianisms and other alien influences[23] toward the end of reforming the tradition in accordance with the rituals and theology of continental Yoruba religion. Through such growing pains, the Trinidadian Orisha tradition fared much better than Brazilian Candomblé in the discursive game of government "endorsement" and is positioned today among diasporic Orisha communities as perhaps the most organized and respectfully engaged in national public life and civic participation.[24]

However one views the broken Orisha calabash,[25] Orisha's propensity for inclusion over exclusion is clearly an indispensable resource for internal dialogue not to mention its relevance to other established

traditions such as Christianity and Islam. Today, difficult dialogues are certainly occurring across Orisha yards, speaking volumes about the theological health of the tradition. By the same token, equally important conversations about gender, class, and sexuality are muted within a number of communities on the ground and are just beginning to receive attention in the scholarly canon.[26]

In addition to an ethic of inclusion, another critical domain of Orisha ritual and thought should be prioritized in a discussion on liberation theology. The conception of the human in Orisha (and other African/African-derived religions) offers a theologically mature and affirmative portrait of *human becoming*. It also instinctively interrupts the Christian conception of human deprivation and the ontological inadequacy widely associated with blackness and African descendants in the Christian imagination.

There is No Beginning and No Ending to the Story of Humanity: The Orisha Anthropological Heritage

Underlying much of the discussion thus far is the *problem of the heathen*. This problem breathed new life into the twin projects of European expansion and Christendom. It goes without saying that Africans committed to the preservation of Orisha traditions would hardly find appealing a theological anthropology condemning them to double depravity, in need of redemption from original sin. Moreover, the nature of this sin is nothing other than being born into a world with the wrong color, with the wrong culture, and pledging allegiance to false gods. Contesting this salvation history, where a white Christ is promised to return and rescue black/brown souls, is an implicit liberation theology in the logic of Orisha worship that prevailing scholastic liberation theologies have yet to interrogate.

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez attempted to characterize the new school of liberation theology noting that "today there is a greater sensitivity to the *anthropological aspects* of revelation" (1988:6–7; italics in original). This was and continues to be true of liberation theologians who have taken seriously the historical Jesus and his social location as an oppressed Jew under Roman imperial domination. For my purposes here, Gutiérrez's characterization invites comparative analysis of Orisha and Christian liberation thoughts on the question of theological anthropology. There are dimensions of Orisha belief and practice that, under mundane circumstances in precolonial Africa, had

no intended social protest agenda. In the context of New World slave societies, the manifestation of deities in human form among Orisha devotees carried additional theological meanings. Each time God took on human flesh was a protest against the denial of humanity and humane treatment to enslaved Africans. And for what purpose does the Divine rest with and in humanity? Certainly not to redeem lost souls. Instead of embracing a theological anthropology of fallenness and the diminishment of Ham, Orisha ritual life centers on the performance of a theological anthropology that transmits humanity.

The "anthropological aspects of revelation" in the Orisha tradition allow humans to experience the Divine face to face, indeed to become Divine. We cannot underestimate how valuable this must have been to those obliged to labor under the curse of Canaan. Their bodies and souls knew that Genesis was *wrong* and their descendants relive this anthropological inheritance at every *bembe* celebration and sacred crossroads. In this theological schema we are compelled then to respect the cyclical understanding of the life process, and life experience—a "*livity*" (if I may borrow a term from the Rastafari tradition) which might be punctuated with all kinds of prophets and miracle workers but has no place for salvation history and the second coming of Christ. Even a liberationist Christ cannot replace the Communion of Ancestors and their responsibilities to those left behind. As indicated in the subsequent section, human struggles against injustice do not rest in the sole inspiration of one Messiah.

Liberation Imperatives for Articulating Orisha Theologies

We know for certain that the "black church" in North America was not alone in providing institutional refuge to fugitive slaves.[27] The record of black resistance in Cuba tells us that "[h]istorically Santeria meetings had functioned in colonial times as covert gathering places [*quilombos*] to plan slave uprisings and anti-Spanish rebellions" (Zwerling, 2004:307). The Yoruba Cabildo, *Shango Tendum*, which sponsored a plot to topple the colonial regime in 1812 is one such example of many known and unknown spiritually inspired slave protests (Howard, 1998:11). Indeed "[a]s late as 1912, an Afro Cuban revolt, joined by many santeros, was viciously suppressed by a Cuban government allied with the United States" (Zwerling, 2004:305). This pattern of resistance is repeated across the diaspora. And why wouldn't it be? Can any human being prostrate in chains before the altar of a foreign

god, hungry for human sacrifices, neglect to seek refuge in her own? According to Brazilian historian, João José Reis:

> The sources insist that many candomblés of Bahia served as hide-outs for fugitive slaves. Up until the middle of the century, newspaper and police reports expressed fear that African drumming served as rehearsals for slave uprisings. In 1826, a direct link can in fact be shown to have existed between a Candomblé house and a slave rebellion, involving a *quilombo* (runaway-slave community) on the outskirts of Salvador, where the police found a house containing several objects related to African religious rituals. (2001:130)

The absence of tangible evidence situating Candomblé at the spiritual and political root of a plethora of slave revolts[28] does not mean that the relationship between Candomblé liberation praxis and the 1826 rebellion should be counted as an aberrant occurrence in Brazilian slave history. Rather, it might suggest that Candomblé devotees were successful in covering their tracks, in eliminating the possibility of discovery as purveyors of sociopolitical resistance against the slave-holding regime. There is still much to discover about Orisha traditions and liberation praxis in Brazil and the wider African diaspora. Apart from the conventional litmus test of religion-based slave revolts, Reis reminds us that

> Candomblé terreiros . . . became a major haven for runaway slaves, who sought them for religious obligations and other kinds of assistance, spiritual and secular. Slaves frequently looked for religious specialists to obtain herbs and concoctions to pacify their masters and to enlist the services of gods in obtaining the slaves' freedom. They often paid for consultations and services with goods stolen from masters" (Reis, 2001:130).

Scholars and practitioners alike should do everything to publicize this suppressed narrative of African-derived liberation theology and praxis, a narrative that has not even made its way into the footnotes of Christian liberation theological texts. Grasping this historical picture of Orisha liberation praxis makes even more intelligible the contemporary interpretation of Shango as a deity of social justice requiring direct action against systemic oppression.[29] The current literatures circulating in the Orisha community also convey a serious level of awareness about the role of religion in combating social oppressions. One

Internet poll tallied responses from reported Orisha devotees on the "State of Orisha Community." Out of ten questions posed, five relate directly to the imperatives of liberation theology. To the question of whether "Orisa'Ifa worship has a role to play in the advancement of society," two hundred viewers responded of which 75 percent strongly agreed and another 19 percent agreed, with only 1 percent strongly disagreeing. Of two hundred respondents, 52 percent strongly agreed that "Orisa temples need to [be] more involved in feeding, clothing and housing poor and low-income families" this was followed by 23 percent agreeing and 19 percent mildly agreeing, with 1 percent strongly disagreeing, 2 percent disagreeing, and another 2 percent mildly disagreeing.[30]

Taking nothing of the above for granted, if Orisha and other African-derived religions are ever to escape the discreditable verdict of worldwide condemnation, theologies delineating what Orisha/African religion is not are also imperative. As one Vodouisant remarked: "There is no such thing as Voodoo; it is a silly lie invented by you whites to injure us" (Seabrook, 1929:27). The occasion to disrupt the automatic attribution of horrific antisocial rituals to African sacred traditions has long passed. This is not to deny that people of African descent, even some purporting spiritual allegiance to an African-derived religion, might readily engage in such dealings. It is to say though that the phenomenon of "evil sorcery" is neither sponsored by African religion nor by any other religion on the "primitive" side of the globe. Rather, it is universal threat to the integrity of all religions. There is no doubt a conceptual understanding in African and other global religions that persons and invisible agents can deploy mystical power for harmful purposes. Still, no one would think of reducing Christianity to "Satanism" just because its conceptual framework contains the notion of "the devil," an agent who deploys mystical power toward harmful ends.[31] In the same poll noted above, 94 percent of 199 respondents affirmed that "the Orisa community needs a legal defense fund to protect our right to practice," with 60 percent of that number "strongly agreeing."[32] This issue has also been considered within umbrella organizations like the Orisa World Congress and the National African Religious Congress (NARC) and definitely presents an important theological focal point around which all omorisha can unite.

The imposed and internally generated tensions and silences under the Orisha umbrella position multiple sources for theological and ritual renewal at the center of the debates and dialogues taking shape today

in the community. African continental and diasporic Orisha lineages together offer a rich heritage for theological reflection and praxes of inclusion. We locate such angles of vision not only in longer standing Orisha communities that find religious meaning in Christianity and other traditions but also in novel trends and innovations. An important outcome of black nationalist attempts to approximate "authentic" Yoruba religion is the discovery of ancient African traditions that can actually challenge oppressive ideologies and practices within diaspora lineages. For example, black nationalist legacies offer good reasons for the assumption that appeals to African sources for reconstructing diaspora cultures entail absorbing more repressive gender patterns. But this after all may not be entirely true. A significant discovery gleaned from continental Yoruba contexts is that many of the male deities in the diaspora pantheon were originally portrayed as feminine or gender-neutral in Africa.[33] What kind of feminist theologies of liberation might emerge from the image of a female hunter (Ochosi) to balance some of the stereotypical characterizations of femininity we find in the personages of Oshun and Yemaya? How might the diasporic bleaching of Oshun be challenged by more profound understandings of the beautiful in Yoruba philosophical thought?[34]

In the study of Yoruba history we also encounter a contested terrain of religious leadership and narratives of an extensive female priesthood that contravene diasporic trends of positioning the almost exclusively male Ifa priesthood at the apex of Yoruba knowledge and sacred science.[35] If not already underway, the potential to replace the Christian Bible and faith confession with an invented Ifa "Bible" and a form of Yoruba-Ifa evangelism exists in some circles. The continental Yoruba heritage, if engaged critically and thoroughly, offers as well as any other religious heritage platforms to dispute the masculinist project of aping God.

A Final Thought

Christian liberation theologies retain the privilege of having emerged within the same religious family as the "oppressor." This very fact ensured the production of a liberation theological voice that would conform to the methods and conventions of the Western academy. If we examine earlier periods in Christian history, however, or in the history of any fragile religion on the verge of extinction, protest material emerges as apocalyptic vision or in the silences of symbols and

gestures. It is hoped that the coerced political quietude of operating underground will not frustrate the activation of liberation theologies among African religious communities in the New World. The task, however, begins with acceptance of alternative paths to liberation theology forged by communities still struggling with the category of "primitive religions." We cannot in all fairness expect of Orisha traditions that which no other could produce under similar constraints. The one looking over her shoulder is not preoccupied with the discipline required of the academician's pen. And then, the question should be asked, what kind of scholastic liberation theologies might Orisha communities produce? Perhaps the conversations here undertaken, not solely in this essay but in this very volume, can catalyze fragile religious traditions to contribute conceptual vistas to the liberation project. Most alluring for me, beyond the protest imperative, is the quest for the beautiful so melodramatically conveyed in Orisha and other African-derived religions. A different theological grammar emerges from this quest and might afford the children of the darker gods a new sense of the transmission of humanity (Stewart, 2005:xvii).

I think Frederich Schleiermacher was right about the essence of religion; but Hurston captured the point with the most compelling insights. Why does the Negro decorate the decoration after all? To remedy the tragic; to make life beautiful and extraordinary and to feel deeply—deeply touched and transformed beyond ordinary self-limitations. There is an aesthetic orientation that keeps the old young and the weary strong. One must vibe with this aesthetic in the company of *Ibeji*.[36] Like the hums and chants of Negro spirituals and Odu Ifa, one must move in frequency with its polyrhythm, collapse into its coolness, and absences. This mode and its cadences (Hurston helped us to see) alert us to the sacred explosions that thrill, silence, and overwhelm us with unspeakable freedoms.

13

AMERICAN INDIANS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

—Tink Tinker

Liberation: Harmony and Balance

Many American Indians refer to October 11, 1492, as the last day of perfect freedom on these continents called *amerika*.[1] This is, first of all, a political commentary and not primarily a religious or cultural one. Yet freedom is important at deeply cultural and religious levels for Indian peoples in north America.[2] So, to attend to the notion of liberation in American Indian religious traditions, we will have to keep this political inference firmly in mind. Indeed, the postcolonial reality of Indian peoples (everything since 1492) has been a perpetual struggle to reestablish some semblance of our precolonial state of personal and communal harmony and balance. Harmony and balance—that would be the American Indian ideal of freedom, envisioning a moment when our communities and the world around them are in perfect balance with all of our "relatives" in our world: two-leggeds, four-leggeds, flying ones, and living-moving ones. This has been far less possible since the advent of european colonialism in our hemisphere.

The phenomena called Native American religions pose an interesting and complex problem of description and interpretation—one that has persistently captured the imagination of european immigrant peoples, albeit in paradoxically disparate ways. When the modern concept of liberation is thrown into the mix, the complexity more than doubles. Native American religious traditions have been misunderstood, maligned, romanticized, and misappropriated.[3] Paradoxically, these

traditions have either been disparaged and condemned as primitive, savage, bizarre, and/or evil, or they have been fetishized and romanticized as an exotic colonial fantasy. When an excuse was needed to legitimize the conquest, including the murders and theft that accompanied it, the aboriginal owners of the land were accused of engaging in uncivilized savagery. The early english invaders made it clear that the aboriginals' uncivilized state extended to their complete lack of religion, having seen no evidence of church buildings in their villages. At other times, finding it impossible to maintain their argument that Indians lacked any religious attachment, the english colonialists merely insisted on the inadequacy of Native religious practice or on their charge that Indian religious practices were satanic and evil. In any case a murderous colonial response to the aboriginal owners of the land was invariably legitimized.

More recently, new age fetishists have discovered the romantic allure of a primal state of religious being and have engaged in a colonialism of mimicry and commodification of everything from religious artifacts (such as eagle feathers, drums, and herbal medicines) to the theft and replication of actual ceremonies. Indian religious traditions have proven to be a compelling exotic attraction to the imagination of some euro-western settlers from the first invasion of these shores up to these contemporary colonialist cross-dressers and mimics. Since the new age folk tend to see themselves as politically liberal, Whites once again can rationalize their invasion of the Indian world as a moral and political good. And while they experience their misappropriation of and involvement in Indian spirituality as personally liberating of themselves, they also see their presence in Indian communities as somehow liberating for those communities. Yet their mimicry and misappropriation actually increase the bondage of Indian folk. The new age attention actually causes mutation in Native beliefs as many Native folk try to capitalize on White interest in our spiritual ways. As we shall see below, new age aficionados introduce the european virus of individualism in ways that both further erode the communal value system of Native peoples, as deliberately as have the missionaries and the U.S. government, and further disrupt the communal balance of our traditional world.

When we turn to the authoritative sources of information about Indian peoples, the problem becomes even more pronounced. In almost every case the authoritative and definitive analyses of particular Native American religious traditions have been written by non-

Indians, and thus non-adherents, who lacked the lifelong habits and experiential basis for engaging their analyses. Now at the beginning of the twenty-first european century it seems that deeply held Indian traditions and beliefs have been politicized, on the one hand by academic experts, and on the other hand by new age aficionados who have mistaken Indian spirituality as a new trade commodity and as the hottest self-help curriculum of the moment. It has become increasingly clear that those phenomena called Native American religions were and are yet today very complex socially and philosophically and are therefore not easily represented or described either in popular interpretation or in the so-called critical categories of colonial academic analysis, especially when the categories of analysis have been constructed in a cultural context alien to those Indian traditions themselves.

So, any discussion of liberation in American Indian religious contexts is bound to be problematic in a variety of ways. "Liberation" is a modern concept that was foreign to north american Indian communities in that it necessarily connotes its opposite, bondage, even as it idealizes escape from or resistance to that bondage. To the contrary, north american indigenous communities had no tradition of conquest or bondage, per se, until the advent of european invasion and colonial occupation. Any retention of captured enemy combatants was usually done as a means of replenishing one's own community through the adoption of captives.[4] Once the european invasion was underway, of course, Indian communities generated their own list of patriots and liberation fighters, from Metacom (King Philip?!) and Tecumseh to Crazy Horse and Geronimo. Throughout this history, the need for liberation was for liberation from colonial invasion, a need that continues today as the need for liberation from U.S. control and the imposition of a new worldview, a different set of cultural values, and new ways of conducting our daily affairs. As such, "liberation" has become something of a technical term in postcolonial discourse and in leftist christian liberation theology. At the same time, it should be clear that liberation is a distinctly modern concept, one that had no place in traditional Indian cultures, even if the concept of freedom, as the opening paragraph infers, was strongly valued in every Indian community.

While Christianity has used some concept of liberation from its inception, it became a central focus in the late 1960s and 1970s for Two-Thirds World christian thinkers as precisely a form of resistance to the continuing colonial hegemony of the euro-west. We should not forget, however, that the concept itself comes out of the colonizer's

culture and religious tradition. That is, liberation is implicitly a colonizer category of analysis, even when it is being used in the contemporary context as a means for creating an expression of "Christianity from the margins." It still comes out of Christianity, albeit out of Two-Thirds World Christianity, in its attempts to use its imposed appropriation of christian thought to fight back in resistance to mainline euro-western and especially amer-european Christianity. And Christianity is still the principle (popular) religion of the colonizer. It continues to fuel the all-consuming economic and political machinery of the colonial west, no matter how radical a few bishops or sectors of the euro-church try to be.

To ask the oppressed now to use that tool seems blatantly disingenuous, particularly when we are talking in terms of indigenous peoples: e.g., Africans, Kanukamaoli (Native Hawaiians), Maori, Nagas, or American Indians. Christianity was imposed on us by the colonizer through the colonizer's religious functionaries as a distinct strategy for conquest, often euphemized as "the colonizing project." The imposition of Christianity was always essentially just another strategy to pry the land loose from its indigenous owners to satisfy the greed of trading companies or immigrant hordes of settlers. Liberation theology may have been a well-intentioned attempt to sever the colonizer's control over the Christianity that they imposed on us and to make the colonizer religion work for our peoples, but it is nevertheless an attempt to make the religious and political system of heteropatriarchy work for those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed by that same system. It is an attempt to rescue, that is, reform or even transform, the religion of the colonizer. In this new manifestation of Christianity, Christianity and its foundational modes of discourse and categories of cognition will continue to dominate and to impose its values as some sort of civilizing replacement for the traditional values of indigenous peoples all over the world.

Indeed, Vine Deloria Jr. has argued that liberation theology is as oppressive to Indian peoples (and other indigenous peoples in the world) as are the old dogmatic theologies of the colonial missionary movement (1999:100–107). It is as deeply rooted in the euro-western conceptual framework and thus holds indigenous peoples bondage to particular ways of thinking—even about liberation. All christian theology, even liberation theology, says Cherokee scholar Andrea Smith, is "complicit in the missionization and genocide of Native peoples" (2006:87).[5] Liberation theology's early concern to

reduce the focus of their theology to a class of people called "the poor" violates the whole goal of indigenous communities to reestablish the validity of their people-hood (Tinker, 1994:119–32).[6] In other words, it deprives Indian people of their freedom once again. Rather than be lumped in with a class of other folk (the "poor" or "workers of the world"), Indian people simply want to be recognized as discrete cultures and nations with the freedom to practice our own cultural values and behavior patterns.

Because of the modern state's need to homogenize culture in either its capitalist or socialist versions, the invention of christian liberation theology was an absolute necessity to ensure the state's continued control of the minds of minorities. "If a person of a minority group had not invented it," Deloria argues, "the liberal establishment most certainly would have created it" (1999:100). For instance, should the "poor" or the "workers" succeed in gaining control of the "means of production," Indian people will again lose control of the means of production (i.e., their freedom) to some culturally universalizing politburo that would prove to be just as ignorant and disrespectful of Indian cultures, values, dreams, and aspirations as has capitalism. Genuine liberation, as Deloria concludes, will require Indian people to take their own value systems and epistemology seriously rather than naively adopting euro-western paradigms of thinking.

Shifting Categories: Balance and Harmony

In keeping with Deloria's argument, my own writing on Indian liberation has emphasized that liberation theology for Indian people may require a firm saying "no" to Jesus and Christianity.[7] Indian liberation must, then, have a different starting point. Namely, the ceremonial structures that promoted peace, harmony, and balance for millennia before the european invasion and the values that accompanied these ceremonies must be reclaimed.[8] Indian people who are serious about liberation—about freedom and independence—must commit themselves to the renewal and revival of their tribal ceremonial life, bringing their ancient ceremonies back into the center of their community's political existence. We must reclaim our ancient traditional value system in which we see ourselves as intimately related to the whole of creation and not somehow apart from the rest and free to use it up.

To continue this discussion, then, it will be important to shift our language away from the euro-individualist notion of liberation toward

a concept that is much more clearly a part of the foundational glue that holds together an Indian community. While the word "liberation" runs the danger of becoming another imposed but inappropriate solution to the woes of poverty and the other residual effects of colonialism, freedom has always been a precious commodity to our Indian ancestors. Thus, instead of inventing some modality of liberation out of which American Indians can maneuver, perhaps we might ask what we can salvage out of what is left to us from our pre-columbian 1491 freedom.[9]

Yet even as we acknowledge that freedom was a commodity held precious in every Indian community, we must insist that freedom was never the "glue" that held society together the way that the illusion of freedom and freedom language seem to fuse amer-european society. The ideal that held every Indian community in unity both internally and with its environment was the communal goal of harmony and balance. Any disruption of the community's balance—and there was always some disruption or another—called for attention to whatever ceremony needed to be done in order to restore balance. Hunting, with its intentional violence of the killing of animals for food, always required a ceremony beforehand and some ceremonial action afterward to ensure the balance of the whole around the community, including the animals that were hunted. Since balance was an ideal that called for maintaining appropriate relationships—with animals, with plants, with rivers and mountains, and with each other—the radical individualism of amer-european peoples could never be a part of our ancestors' experience of the world or their own habitual patterns of behavior. At the same time, to complicate the matter considerably, it was not uncommon nor inappropriate for a segment of a community to withdraw and form a new community, sometimes over leadership disagreements but almost always as the size of the community and leadership problems became larger and unwieldy.

While personal balance was always important, balance in general as a community ideal was never achievable outside of the communal whole. While we might argue that freedom for Indian peoples today has to do first of all with freedom from colonialism, the notion of freedom embedded in our traditional cultures has much more to do with a general notion of freedom to live that begins with both the freedom of a community and the personal freedom inherent in being human. So, the freedom we cry out for is the ability to determine our own communities, to control our own economies, and especially to live

in harmony and balance with ourselves and with our relatives around us—the four leggeds, the flying ones (birds), and the living /moving ones (such as trees, mountains, and fish), as well as with other two-leggeds. Indeed, we might go so far as to insist that freedom means for us freedom to seek harmony and balance, since any disruption of balance around us results in negative effects that hold us personally and as communities in bondage to the consequences of those disruptive actions. The post-1492 reality, of course, has been that we Indian peoples and our communities are no longer in control of our own world. Rather, we are now expected (by the U.S. government, by the missionaries, by schoolteachers, by neoconservative pundits) to comply with the colonizer's vision of the world.[10] The forces at work on our children in public schools is to learn that colonizer world—its literature, its science, and its math,[11] but more importantly to learn euro-western individualism with its narrow ideals of success and achievement.

The ideals of balance are infused in all of Indian culture. For instance, among the *Wazhazha* (Osage), what ethnographers would classify as "religion" pervades even the habitual acts of sleeping and putting on shoes. All the ceremonies and prayers of the Osage respond to and reflect the principle of the duality and unity of all existence. Prayers commonly begin with an address to the *wako^{n}da* above and the *wako^{n}da* below, reflected and manifest in Sky and Earth, the two great fructifying forces of the universe. This principle is mirrored in the architectural structure of an Osage town and in the marriage customs of the people. The Osage people and each Osage town was divided by an east-west road into two "grand divisions" representing Sky and Earth. Just as Osages perceived the necessity of these two forces both coming together to sustain life, so the two grand divisions sustained the life of the whole. To ensure the principle of spiritual and political unity in this duality, Osages were mandated by social custom to marry someone from the other grand division. To further enforce this religious sense of wholeness, the two grand divisions developed personal habits that helped each individual remember her or his part in this communal whole. Hence, those from the *Ho^{n}ga* grand division (Earth division) customarily slept on their right side and put on the right shoe first, while those from the *Tsizhu* grand division (Sky division) functioned in the opposite manner. As a result, even in sleep the two divisions performed a religious act which maintained their unity in duality as they lie facing each other across the road that divided the whole community into two halves. Thus, the unity and wholeness of

the community comes before the well-being of any one person, however important each life is to an Indian community.

This is to say that the social structures and communal cultural traditions of American Indian peoples are infused with religious acts and spirituality that cannot be separated from picking corn and tanning hides, to hunting or making war. Nearly every human act was accompanied by attention to spiritual details, sometimes out of practiced habit and sometimes with more specific and detailed ceremony. Harvesting cedar bark in the northwest would thus be accompanied by prayer and ceremony, just as killing a buffalo required ceremonial actions and words dictated in each case by the particularity of tribal nation, language, and culture. Among the Osage the spiritual principle of respect for life dictated that the decision to go to war against another people usually required a twelve-day ceremony—time to reconsider one's actions and time to consecrate the lives that might be lost. More importantly, the ceremony provided time to perform those acts that were necessary to ensure the persistence of balance for both those persons involved in the combat and the community they would leave behind even at that moment of the greatest disruption of balance. Because the hunt required acts of violence to be successful, it was also considered a type of war. Hence, the semiannual community buffalo hunt, functioning on the same general principle of respect for life, also required a ceremony which was in all respects nearly identical to the War Ceremony. Without a clear sense of respect for all of life— trees and buffalos and human enemies—there can be no balance in an Indian view of the world.

Communitarian Values

To understand the complexity of traditional American Indian cultures, we have to begin by describing the communitarian cultural base and communitarian commitments that are infused in the traditional social structures. This is deeply rooted in the behavioral practice of peoples and is not something merely imposed externally by fiat as a control device to hold members of the society in place. Rather, this cultural affectation is deeply embedded in the behavioral practices that begin with infancy and childhood. Choices, personal choices, are customarily made with the well-being of the community in mind, and people are honored within the community for making choices that either helped to build community or defend it. For instance, the plains Indian "war

bonnet" is terribly misnamed. Rather than commemorating enemy deaths—the usual White mythic misinterpretation of the bonnet—each feather actually commemorates deeds the wearer has performed in the interest of the community's well-being. Of course, defense of the community always merited an honoring of those who performed in the highest manner.

Sun Dance

Ceremonies are always engaged for the good of the social whole, even when the principal goal of a ceremony is the healing of one person. The sun dance, perhaps the most famous of plains Indian ceremonies today (and the most notorious historically) is first and foremost a community ceremony engaged in for the healing and strengthening of the tribal community that puts on the dance. While one or more men may have a commitment to offer their flesh in sacrifice, the sacrifice is always intended for the community. Each dancer may have his own reasons for having made the commitment—the health of a child or a parent, for example—yet the community looks to the suffering of this man as a vicarious sacrifice for the health and well-being of the community. Indeed, one of the most common sayings associated with the sun dance among Lakota peoples, recited to the dancers and by the dancers throughout the several day ceremony is: "That the people may live!" (Tinker, 2005a: vol. 13, 8848–49).[12]

At the same time, many White interpreters call the sun dance a "world renewal" ceremony. That is, we dance not only that the people might live, but we understand the people cannot live unless the whole of the world is maintained and sustained in our ceremony. In its most traditional form, the sun dance was and is a male ceremony—even though women also participate and even dance. The maleness of the dance, however, in no way privileges the men of a community. Rather, it is the women who predominate in our Indian world. They are the life-givers to whom the creator has given a regular monthly life-giver ceremony of cleansing involving the emission of blood. The menstrual period or moon cycle is always thought of as a sign of the woman's inherent power as life bearer and never as uncleanness or sickness. The sun dance, then, can be thought of as men's attempt to claim some sort of equality with women, not by engaging in life-giving but rather by engaging in a life-sustaining ceremony of personal blood-shedding

and sacrifice. Women bring life into the world; in the sun dance men help to maintain the balance of the world so that life can flourish.

Rite of Vigil: The Vision Quest

Some would argue that the so-called vision quest or rite of vigil is evidence for the quintessential individualism of plains Indian peoples, yet nothing could be further from the truth (Tinker, 2005b:vol. 14, 9609–11). In fact, just the opposite can be argued. This ceremony involves the personal sacrifice of rigorous fasting and prayer performed over several days (typically four days) with no food or water, in a location completely isolated from the rest of the community and hoping to receive some personal gift of vision from the spirits. Yet in a typical rite of vigil (vision quest) the community or some part of the community is involved in assisting the individual in preparing for the ceremony and then is in constant prayer on behalf of the individual throughout the performance of the ceremony. Thus person and community are in symbiotic relationship throughout the ceremony. Moreover, whatever gift does come to that person, it becomes that person's responsibility to use the gift for the benefit of the community. That is to say, even when personal power or assistance is sought from *wako^{n}da*, it is sought for the ultimate benefit of the whole community.

White new age aspirants come into our territories looking for some medicine person to put them "on the hill" (to perform this ceremony of vigil and fasting) not in order to help our communities, but merely in order to help that individual gain some personal power that they can exercise in the anonymity of the city when they return home. When a non-Lakota New York City resident flies off to South Dakota, for instance, to perform the Rite of Vigil (the vision quest), one must wonder what close community of political and spiritual existence has made such rigorous claims on this person's spiritual strength and why he or she has chosen to make the Rite so far away from his or her community of residence. In a traditional sense, it must be concluded that this particular performance of the Rite has little or no meaning unless it has been reinvested with an entirely new and non-Indian meaning, and particularly with meaning invested in euro-individualism and the personal accretion of power and status over others. For Indian folk, the ceremony is one engaged only in relationship to the community. The person may be alone for those days fasting, yet she or he is never really alone. The community is in prayer for that person for the dura-

tion of the ceremony. And when the person finishes the ceremony, she or he is greeted with handshakes and words of thanks from members of the community. In this case, the personal achievement of the one promises greater balance for the community through the gifts given to that one person in the vision quest.

Generosity: The Give-Away

Another of the more common community-building ceremonies across tribes in north America was the give-away, a ceremony that is still practiced in nearly all communities today. In this ceremony, a person or especially that person's family shows its honoring of the community by collecting especially desirable goods and then giving them away to others in a formal ceremonial setting. Indeed, one dramatic difference between amer-european society and traditional Indian societies is that Indian people do not place the highest (celebrity) value on those who have the most of this world's material wealth. Rather, our societies place the highest value on those who give the most away. Today, anyone selected for the honor of being a "head dancer" (male, female, youth) at a powwow (a social and usually intertribal dance) returns the honor to the community at that powwow by engaging in a give-away.

This practice of generosity was so important historically in my own Wazhazha nation that one could not rise to leadership on the council of elders unless one's life had been marked by a habit of personal and familial give-away. Typically, this meant that the candidate would have engaged in a give-away at least three times prior to this crucial initiation into the leadership council. The initiation itself, then, would result in a fourth give-away (Burns, 1984:4).[13] In the Osage tradition, the give-away was intense. It meant collecting goods for up to seven years and then giving away everything that the family possessed. This act of community-building meant that the family in turn became dependent on the community for its next meal and for its own well-being until they could reestablish their self-sufficiency. What a powerful mechanism for establishing a communitarian value system and for ensuring communal harmony!

Personal Freedom

While north American Indian communities have always held to a cultural affectation marked by the infusion of communitarian

commitments, there has also been an intrinsic sense of personal free-dom inherent in all these cultures. Our communities have always been marked by an inherent sense of personal freedom, in their political struc-tures and in the daily life of the people, including their religious tradi-tions. Thus, while there is no "liberation" tradition in Indian religious thought and practice, per se, the notion of freedom is deeply rooted in their cultural understandings of the world and is readily apparent in the rich ceremonial life of every Indian community. Freedom of choice and intrinsic personal freedom is inherent in all Indian cultures.

To choose to dance in a ceremony such as the sun dance, for instance, was always a personal choice, even as it functioned as a vicarious sacrifice on behalf of the community. No one could ever tell a young man that he *must* dance the sun dance. Once an adolescent on the cusp of manhood or womanhood had made the rite of vigil, a time of dry-fasting and prayer, no one could tell that person that he must repeat the ceremony. It was always a personal choice. The imperative form of the verb has far less usage in Indian communities than it does in euro-linguistic communities. When I attempted to engage an old medi-cine man for the first time, requesting a ceremony for healing and help, I was unclear whether to offer him a pipe or how that request should be made in that particular context. The old man replied in a very help-ful manner but without the use of a single imperative. Instead modal verbs expressing possibility ran off the end of his tongue: "You could go cut a red willow stick; you could peel the bark; you could paint it red; you could tie a red cloth tobacco offering on the end of it; and you could bring it back and offer it to me." The choice was entirely left to me. Of course, had I chosen not to do these things, the old man would also have had a free choice not to grant my request, that is, to express the unfortunate impossibility of his helping me. The point here is that the habitual cultural attitude deeply rooted in Indian communities is to give people choices rather than to give imperative commands. Thus, personal choice runs through all of life in an Indian context within cer-tain parameters that help maintain the unity of the whole.

Freedom and Basic Indian Cultural Values and Traditions

Thanksgiving

American Indian ceremonies are most characterized by attention to thanksgiving and annual spiritual rites of thanksgiving. Notions of

praise for the divine, so important to amer-european religious rites, are singularly absent in traditional Indian communities. Thanksgiving ceremonies promote a communal attitude of thanksgiving that in turn promotes balance with the world. Historically, modalities of praise seem to create tension with the natural world rather than balance, setting up a diametric polarization between the natural (or secular) world and the spiritual realm of the god being praised. Rather than understanding a divine being as thriving on human praise of itself, Indian peoples understand that our own personal and communal acts of thanksgiving are important to our own sense of balance and well-being. An attitude of thanksgiving in turn affects all our relationships—those with each other; those with our animal, flying, and other relatives in the world around us; and even those with our enemies. Even today, anyone asking for special ceremonies for help or healing is obliged to have a follow-up ceremony in the ensuing year as a thank you to the spirits for any help received. Most Indian nations, like those of the Iroquois Confederacy, had an annual ceremony for marking the new year and giving the community a special moment to give its thanks for the year past.[14]

Place and Spatiality

Spatiality is a characteristic feature of American Indian religious traditions clearly identified and described by Deloria.[15] Thus, while amer-european religious traditions generally build around temporal categories like the seven-day week, Indian ceremonial life and all of Indian existence is rooted in a profound notion of space and place. The spatial layout for any ceremony then becomes of paramount importance. Like the structure of the Osage village, most Osage ceremonials are also structured around a north-south, Sky-Earth division, with openings to the east and west. In similar manner, the structure for a Green Corn Ceremony (Muskogee, Uchi), the subterranean location of a kiva (Pueblo, Hopi), the design of a sweat lodge, or the direction one turns in a pipe ceremony all have tribally specific cosmic representational value that reflect the spiritual relationship of a particular people with the spatial world around them. This understanding of the importance of spatiality emerges in another critical aspect, namely, in the long-standing identification of places that are known to a tribe to be particularly powerful spiritually. For most Indian communities, there are several such places that have been long identified as especially powerful: the Black Hills and Bear Butte for the Lakota

Nation; Blue Lake for Taos Pueblo; Mt. Graham for the San Carlos Apaches; the mountains that mark territorial boundaries in the four directions for the Navahos or any Pueblo community. These are just a few examples.

This is to say that Indian peoples tend to locate power and the sacred spatially—in terms of places or in terms of spatial configuration. This is in stark distinction to european and amer-european religious traditions which tend to express spirituality in terms of time: a regular hour on Sundays and a seasonal liturgical calendar that is more and more distanced from any sense of the actual flow of seasons in particular places. In the southern hemisphere, for instance, Christians celebrate something called Lent or Lententide (named for springtime and the "lengthening" of the days) along with Easter in the fall of their year. I would not want to argue that Indian peoples have no sense of time or that european folk have no sense of space. Rather, spatiality is the dominant category for Native Americans while time is a subordinate category of existence. Just the opposite is generally true for european peoples.

That Indian traditions are fundamentally spatial by nature and in configuration makes them peculiarly difficult for temporally oriented peoples to understand. Because of these cross-cultural misunderstandings, modern distortions are now threatening Native American religious traditions on several fronts. Many Native American religious traditions are undergoing a transformative change under intense pressure from new age would-be adherents. The modern amer-european appropriation of native traditions is introducing a mutation that is now shaping those traditions after the image of european individualism. Moreover, the systemic pressures of the colonial experience which have worked variously to eradicate or suppress or at least erode Native American religious traditions continue today in the legal and economic motives of corporate and government interests. The lack of legal recourse for protecting places of traditional spiritual value would be one important example of these pressures. Yet the religious traditions and indeed the cultural whole of many Indian peoples continues today to give their peoples hope and life.

Thus liberation (or rather, freedom) has to do not with the freedom to move about the continent or the world as the spirit or career opportunity strikes the individual. Rather, freedom has to do with Indian communities having our own place (space) in the world as integral indigenous cultural communities, as genuine Indian nations. Freedom

is having our own land and the ability to govern that land and our communities without interference from outside of the community. Liberation is freedom from the implicit forces and explicit coercions of the modern state apparatus that intends to stifle our cultural difference in favor of advancing the state's own interests in co-opting our natural and cultural resources and thwarting any intention Indian people might have of reclaiming any part of our lands that were taken from us.

Sacred Places and Animism

The identification of places of particular spiritual power raises yet another important aspect of Indian religious traditions. That is, these places are experienced as powerful because they are experienced as alive, not only sentient but as intelligent manifestations of that cosmic power we call *wako^{n}da*. This Power, sometimes simplistically and badly translated as "the Great Spirit," is typically experienced first of all as a Great Unknown. Yet this Unknown becomes Known as it is manifest to humans spatially: as the Power Above and Power Below; as the Powers of the Four Directions; as the Power in its self-manifestation in a particular place, in a particular occurrence, in an astronomical constellation, or in an artifact, such as a feather. All of the created world is, in turn, seen as alive, sentient, and filled with spiritual power, including each human being. The sense of interrelationship of all of creation, of all two-leggeds, all four-leggeds, all wingeds, and all other "living, moving" things (from fish and rivers, to rocks, trees, and mountains) may be the most important contribution of Indian peoples to the science and spirituality of the modern (i.e., euro-western) world.[16]

Euro-western missionaries, of course, interpreted the Indian sense of the world as alive and filled with the power of *wako^{n}da* to their own advantage as a bondage of fear. Indian people, these missionaries argued (and still argue), walked constantly in fear of angering animistic spirits, of making a mistake. Indian people, on the other hand, saw the power of *wako^{n}da* as a constant presence and resource in their midst. Rather than sensing some unknown animistic power in all things around them in the world, Indian people recognized all around them in the world as alive and in close kinship with themselves. Thus, trees and animals, birds and mountains all deserved the same respect from human beings that we expect from each other. Moreover, all these relatives have the same sort of spiritual power deriving from *wako^{n}da*

inherent in them as we humans have. That spiritual energy, humans discovered, can be called upon for assistance, but this has to be done in particular ways and with utmost respect. This is not fear and bondage. It is a powerful and liberating resource for living life.

Ceremonies as Community-Based

Perhaps the single most important aspect of American Indian religious traditions is the extent to which they are wholly community-based and have no real meaning outside of the specific community in which the acts are regularly performed, stories told, songs sung, and ceremonies engaged. Unlike the voluntary religious traditions of amer-european folk, Indian people do not choose which tribal religious traditions they will practice. One does not convert to Hopi. Rather, one is born into the community and their particular ceremonial life.

While this is a fact that fits with what we have already said about the communitarian nature of Indian cultures and its continued resistance to euro-western radical individualism, it is little understood by non-Natives. Deloria described the communitarian foundations of American Indian existence in his 1973 book *God Is Red* (revised and reissued in 2003). The point is that ceremonies are engaged not primarily for personal benefit but rather for the benefit of an entire community or nation of people. The most common saying around the Lakota Sun Dance is: "That the people might live!" This becomes the overriding reason for and purpose of this ceremony. Likewise, violations of the sacred become threatening to the whole of a community and not merely to the one who commits the error. This sense of the communitarian nature of Indian ceremonies begins to demonstrate a key distinction from modern amer-european new age spirituality and its radical individualism.

Conclusion

If American Indian peoples were to adopt the fashionable language of liberation, for us it would have to name our clear challenge to the american status quo; our resistance to the imposition of cultural sameness; and a challenge to euro-western heteropatriarchy and heteropatriarchal structures of power. In the modern world of colonial conquest and the resulting history of internment on reservations, with their significantly reduced economies, liberation takes on a new sense

of immediacy as a need for freedom of Indian and other indigenous communities in all parts of the world from the colonial control of these newly organized and highly artificial nation-state governments like the United States.

Indian people increasingly are looking to their traditional ceremonial life and traditional cultural values in order to express their resistance toward euro-western mass consumption society and its value system of radical individualism. Increasingly, Indian people see their participation in their traditional ceremonies as an expression of communal freedom from the shackles of individualist bondage to the needs of corporate America and the ever-growing global monstrosity of multinational capitalism. It is in these traditional ceremonies that Indian communities will restore the balance and harmony that we once had before the european colonial onslaught. Freedom, liberation, is only possible for Indian peoples when we are able to restore the balance and harmony of our world, the world that has been so disrupted by colonial imposition.

EPILOGUE

—Miguel A. De La Torre

I consider myself a man of faith. The rituals I participate in, and the doctrinal beliefs I hold, are very important to me. They give my life meaning and purpose. With all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength I believe that my particular faith tradition holds truths that are crucial for my life and the life of my faith community. Yet, there are those who would argue that all religions are basically the same. No doubt you heard some well-meaning person claim something like, "All religions are the same in their core belief: treat others as you would want to be treated." A colleague, who is a Buddhist, was told this very thing by one of his Christian students. His response: "No, I'm a Buddhist and not a Christian because I'm right and Christians are wrong." His answer, although blunt, gets to the core of any honest discussion that can ever take place among believers of different faith traditions.

Although dialogue among different belief systems is crucial for any hope of working together against global injustices, one's convictions need not be sacrificed. When it comes to the core tenets of our faith, there is much on which to disagree. I am a Christian because I do not believe what my Buddhist colleague believes—or for that matter, what my Jewish, Muslim, Native American, or any other non-Christian colleague believes. And I have no doubt that for most of the writers in this book, they feel as passionate about their beliefs and worldviews as I feel about my own. In a very similar fashion, their religious identity is formed by their rejection of my understanding of Christianity in favor of their own faith tradition.

This reality is uncomfortable for those who believe that salvation can only be obtained if everyone else in the world believes exactly the same way I do, or you do, or they do. But if we humble ourselves and realize that if any one person could claim to have all the correct answers about truth, or lack thereof, that person would have to be a god. Fortunately, none of the authors within this book have made any such claims to divinity, therefore much room exists for disagreement on our understanding of the spiritual and/or the religious realm.

It was never the goal of this book to essentialize all religions by attempting to find some basic common denominator we can all agree upon, even when that denominator is a noble concept like liberation. We reject the liberal project of finding some pan-world monolithic religiosity that reduces the faith of different people groups to a few common social actions. Different persons believe in different faiths, or lack thereof, for multiple reasons. And while our task was not to figure out why, nor was it to convince the reader about the "truth" of one particular religious tradition, the book did turn to the faiths of the world, as diverse as they are, to learn how different religions understand and seek their own liberationist project. And while disagreement may exist when approaching our faiths theologically, we might find more common ground among different faith traditions when we approach them from the perspective of ethics. Maybe our shared commitment to justice can serve as the entry point to interreligious dialogue. Maybe in working together against the forces of global evils, working together in developing liberative praxis, we can learn more from and about each other.

As explained in the introduction, I believe that the globalization of the economy, in the form of neoliberalism, and its cultural representation to the world operates much the same way as a religion—a false religion that leaves death, misery, and destitution in its wake. I also believe that presently no viable global challenge exists that can motivate and unite the world's marginalized in dealing with the destructive consequences of neoliberalism. Furthermore, I believe that the faith of the people, specifically the most marginalized among us, is a potent reality that can bring about positive changes in the world that sacrifices the many to secure the economic salvation of the few. For this reason the book concentrated on a multitude of faith traditions not only to discover how different religions seek, find, and understand liberation from within their own context, but also, what different faiths can learn from each other in a common struggle to provide justice for

its most disenfranchised members. Hopefully, a book such as this will spark a new discourse within interreligious dialogues.

Without question, our differences keep us apart, preventing dialogue from taking place concerning the common dire situations we face due to the neoliberal expansion. In a very real sense, it benefits the world's elite that we fight among ourselves (at times violently) over doctrinal issues (orthodoxy), ignoring how much we may have in common concerning issues revolving around justice. As long as the world's masses remain divided, the world's elite can continue to profit. If one of the primary acts (orthopraxis) of any liberationist perspective is the quest for justice, specifically through the dismantling of social mechanisms that benefit one elite group, then a crucial act of resistance to the global structures of oppression must be the establishment of religious dialogue among the disenfranchised located across different faith traditions. When separate marginalized groups within different faith traditions look within their own religions for teachings on how to accompany each other toward justice, the hold the world's elites have upon global resources might be effectively challenged.

Yes, we believe different things, and yes, we will never all convert to just one doctrine. In fact, I would rather work with a Hindu, an Orisha worshipper, a Confucianist, or Taoist who strongly believes in the justice teachings of their faith than with a fellow Christian who fuses global capitalism with the message of Christ. I find that I have more in common with committed believers of other religions than with those within my own faith who spiritually justify oppressive sociopolitical structures and actions. Because the world's disenfranchised have much in common in their suffering, solidarity with the least of these means struggling with them for justice from within their own— our own spiritual realm.

NOTES

Introduction

1 Rachel L. Swarns, "Lack of Basics Threatens World's Poor," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2002.

2 Neoliberalism is a relatively new economic term, coined in the late 1990s to describe the social and moral implications of global market liberalism (capitalism) and its free-trade policies revived (hence "neo") since the collapse of the Eastern bloc.

3 Prosperity theology, like neoliberalism, plays on the greed of people. God, the abundant giver, will provide a life free of sickness and poverty for those whose faith is strong as manifested by how much they give to the church. The popularity of prosperity theology among the poor of the world is based on the belief that poverty can be eradicated for the individual, inconsequential to the global causes of poverty.

4 Nations starving for credit but unable to compete in the global marketplace, can turn to international financial institutions, specifically the World Bank and the IMF, for help. These institutions represent the economic interests of First World nations, reflecting its foreign policy (specifically that of the United States) by making loans contingent on "structural adjustments" (here understood as cuts in health, education, and social services) for member states. The main goal of structural adjustments is to open markets to the centers of financial capital, specifically by turning national enterprises over to private international investors (usually from the First World). Privatization of national economies shifts the global emphasis from achieving social goals to profit-making at the expense

of workers who faced massive wage cuts and layoffs as private owners seek to improve their bottom line by cutting labor costs. The impact of structural adjustments is the reversal of the sovereign nation task of setting economic and development policies. Now it is the market that dictates how the state is to be run. And what if nations refuse to open their markets? Then "hostile takeovers"—read military operations conducted covertly or overtly—become justified (De La Torre, 2004a:81–82).

Chapter 1

1 See Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, 1973.
2 The most denunciatory Vatican document was *Libertatis Nuntius*, 1984. Vatican documents in 1986 are more conciliatory. See Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 1990. Juan Luis Segundo responded with a book-length critique of the 1984 Vatican encyclical: see his *Theology and the Church*, 1985.
3 See Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff,* 1988.
4 Among Protestants that early contributed to liberation theology are Rubem Alves, whose *Theology of Human Hope* appeared in 1969; Julio de Santa Ana, and José Miguez Bonino.
5 For the critique of these claims of the "death" of liberation theology from the radical orthodoxy movement, see specifically Finnish student of liberation theology Elina Vuola, "Radical Eurocentrism," *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 2006:57–75.
6 For a good account of Ellacuría's life and thought and the effects of his death on forcing an end to the civil war, see Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 1994.
7 For Ellacuría's Zibirian philosophy of liberation, see the article by Gandolfo, "Ignacio Ellacuría," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.edu/e/ellacuria.
8 The English translation of this essay is found in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 1993a:580–603.
9 The concept of the Reign of God is basic to Ellacuría's theology; for discussion of it see "Utopia y Profetismo desde América Latina," *Escritos Teológicos*, vol. 2, 2001g:234–35; also "El Desafio cristiano de la teología de Liberación," *Escritos Teológicos*, vol. 1, 2001a:23–24.
10 In April 15, 1990, Mirian Davidson wrote in her review of Paul Sigmund's *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, that "Fr. Ellacuría was one of several Central American theologians who advocated revolutionary counter-violence to the poor and oppressed of El Salvador" (Whitfield, 1994:454n67).
11 The English translation is found in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 1993b:289–328.

12 It was published in English as *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* and in Spanish as *El Rostro Oculto del Mal: Una Teología desde la experiencia de las mujeres*.

13 Speaking from daily life or *lo cotidiano*, is a typical theme in Gebara and in Latin American feminism generally; see her *Intuiciones ecofeministas*, 2000a:38–42.

14 For Gebara's views on God, see *Longing for Running Water*, 1999:101–35; also *Intuiciones ecofeministas*, 2000a:133–49; and *El Rostro Oculto del Mal*, 2000b:185–220.

15 See also *Teología a Ritmo de Mujer,* 1995b:109–56. A long version of this essay on the Trinity was published in Portuguese as *Trinidade*, 1994b.

16 Gebara is much influenced and follows the perspective of Swimme and Berry's *New Universe Story*, 1994.

17 Gebara explores this theme in "Las causas profundas del prejuicio en relación con la mujer" in the essay, "Las incómodas hijas de Eva," in *Levánte y Anda*, 1995a:52–59.

18 This view of fragile and partial goods shared in the midst of ambiguous life is found throughout Gebara's writing. See her chapter on "la experiencia de salvación de las mujeres," in *El Rostro Oculo del Mal,* 2000b:145–83.

Chapter 2

1 Cone first introduces the term in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970

2 See Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 1972.

3 See Gutiérrez, *Teologia de la liberación*, 1971; English translation: *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973.

4 The first organized encounter of these various approaches took place in the Theology of the Americas Conference in Detroit, 1975. The emerging challenges and questions are recorded in Torres and Eagleson, *Theology in the Americas*, 1976.

5 This is true more or less for most of the great modern Protestant theologians, including Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Bultmann in Germany, and Paul Tillich and the Niebuhrs in the United States. The German Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner also deserves mention.

6 Alves analyzes the role which Protestantism plays in creating and stabilizing systems of oppression. He critiques the problem of "Right Doctrine Protestantism" which claims absolute ownership of the truth, and he emphasizes a different aspect of the Protestant heritage when he argues for a more open attitude that continues to search for truth but does not claim to possess it once and for all. See Alves, *Protestantism and Repression*, 1985. Míguez Bonino discusses three forms of Protestantism: Liberal, Evangelical, and Pentecostal, and refocuses them in terms

of the Protestant emphasis on mission which is rooted in the work of the triune God. See Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, 1997.

7   An early example is Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, 1972; one of the key insights is that black music presents the Holy Spirit "who moves people toward unity and self-determination" (6).

8   See for example, Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 2000.

9   Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 1993; Rodríguez and Martell-Otero, *Teología en Conjunto*, 1997; and Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez, *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 2002.

10 See for instance, González, *Mañana*, 1990. See also Maldonado, *Protestantes/Protestants*, 1999.

11 Song Choan-Seng, *Third Eye Theology,* 1991.

12 Many of the Protestant liberation theologians mentioned in this chapter have their own complex relationship to the work of Reformed Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who has emphasized the holiness and otherness of God, not in the sense of God's otherworldliness but in the sense of God's solidarity with others (on this interpretation of Barth see Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 2001:chap. 2).

13 A recent reference to this focus can be found in Gutiérrez, "The Situation and Tasks of Liberation Theology Today," in *Opting for the Margins,* 2003:102.

14 See Herzog, *God Walk*, 1988.

15 See McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, 1994.

16 This is one of the fundamental issues for contemporary theology; see Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 2001.

17 These contemporary challenges to liberation theologies are addressed, for instance, in the essays in Rieger, *Opting for the Margins*, 2003.

18 See Keller, *God and Power*, 2005.

19 See Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 2007.

20 See Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 2006.

21 See Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *A Native American Theology,* 2001.

22 See Duchrow, *Global Economy*, 1987; the more recent books of Duchrow keep this insight alive. For the position of the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches on this matter see http://warc.ch/where/22gc/study/13.html.

23 See, for instance, the essays in Rieger, ed., *Liberating the Future*, 1998a.

Chapter 3

1   Debate and critique over the course of centuries has given particular shapes and patterns of development to theological discourse in the West, and much of what emerged was framed by a commitment to articulating the significance of a Christian response to the existential circumstances

of life. This is certainly the case with liberal theology, an orientation that held the attention of many from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century. Committed to a synergy between the Enlightenment—particularly its move against modes of authority grown out of scripture and unquestioned tradition—liberal theology is significant in that it provides intellectual backdrop for the two modalities of theologically articulated humanism present within African American communities. Although African American humanist orientations are not accurately understood as a simple outgrowth of Enlightenment-based theologies, because its existential sensibilities emerge within a context of oppression generated within the modern period's political-economic and cultural developments, some of their vocabulary and grammar is drawn (both explicitly and implicitly) from earlier modalities of liberal theologies framed by the Enlightenment.

2   For a good introduction to this debate see: Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 1972.

3   The number of scholarly treatments of the megachurch phenomenon is increasing. See as examples of this development: Lee, *T. D. Jakes*, 2005; and Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 2005.

4   This is most evident with respect to black Christianity's perspective on other traditions. It is typically the case that black Christians in general and black theologians in particular give light consideration to the reasonableness and importance of what are commonly called "non-Christian" traditions.

5   The "Death-of-God" Movement revolves around two primary figures: William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer. Much of its platform is outlined in: Altizer and Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, 1966.

6   See for example: *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, 1988; Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 1995; Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 1994.

7   Although it is possible that Christianity was replaced by another theistic orientation in the life of this young man, it remains clear that he brings into question certain modalities of Christian expression and, in this way, supports modalities of humanism (whether theistic or not).

8   Here and elsewhere I understand religion to mean the quest for complex subjectivity, and theology is the exploration (celebration and critique) of this quest. For more information on this theory of religion, see: Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 2003.

9   For examples of this see: Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries,* 1985; and Morrison, *To Die for the People*, 1995.

10 Wright, *The Outsider,* 1991b. Also see Wright, *Black Boy,* 1991b. See Pinn, *African American Humanist Principles*, 2005; Pinn, *By These Hands*, 2001; and Allen, *African American Humanism*, 1991.

11 Quoted in Pinn, *African American Humanist Principles*, 2005:19.

12 As readers might assume, for African American members of the UUA, the above call for justice is given a concrete context in which issues of racism are given significance. It was this demand for explicit attention to racism as a requirement for justice (or what is called liberation in other contexts) that marked the greatest period of stress within the UUA, when African Americans in the 1970s called for greater participation in the pressing sociopolitical drama of the United States through a purging of the association's own racism. See UUA, *Empowerment,* 1993.

13 Unitarian Universalist Association, "About the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations," http://www.uua.org/aboutuua/principles.html, accessed May 2007.

14 Unitarian Universalist Association, www.uua.org.

15 I provide an outline of an African American humanist theology in *African American Humanist Principles*, 2005: chap. 8. The information presented in that short discussion will not be presented explicitly in this essay.

16 See Kaufman, *God the Problem*, 1972; *Theological Imagination*, 1981; and *In Face of Mystery*, 2004.

17 I am working currently on a full explication of humanist theology that will provide a more substantive apology related to this topic.

Chapter 4

1 For a fascinating discussion of importance of the Holocaust in Jewish life as it emerged historically, see Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 1999.

2 Fackenheim develops this understanding of the Holocaust as a *novum* in history in *To Mend the World*, 1994.

3 See Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 1966.

4 Though Rubenstein and Wiesel agreed on some aspects of post-Holocaust life, their differences are also important. See Rubenstein and Wiesel, "An Exchange," in *Holocaust*, 1989:349–70.

5 Irving Greenberg first sounded this alarm about the danger of triumphalism and the use of power in his essay "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," in *Auschwitz*, 1977.

6 For more extended discussions of these themes over the years, see my third edition of *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 2004b.

7 For my commentary on Wiesel and the Palestinians see *Beyond Innocence and Redemption*, 1990:110–12.

8 For a discussion of the Jewish tradition of dissent regarding Zionism and Israel see Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption*, 1990:57–133.

9 The discussion of the "new" anti-Semitism can be found in the first edition of my book *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 1987:37–39.

For an example of the revival of this literature in the post-September 11 period see Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism*, 2003.

10 For an extended discussion of the coming of Constantinian Judaism, see the third edition of my book *Toward a Jewish Theology*, 2004b:227–34.

11 All of these editions had their context. The first edition was published in 1987 as the occupation deepened, the second in 1989 as a response to the Palestinian uprising, and third in the wake of the Palestinian uprising in 2000.

12 The post-2000 literature of Jewish dissent is formidable. Especially heartening and powerful is Israeli dissent. For one of many examples, see Kimmerling, *Politicide*, 2003. Also see Segal and Weizman, *A Civilian Occupation*, 2003.

13 Meron Benvenisti makes this provocative assertion in his *Sacred Landscapes*, 2000.

14 With reference to Job and de las Casas, see Gutiérrez, *On Job,* 1987; and *Las Casas*, 1993.

Chapter 5

1 See for example, Thomas Kamm, "Clash of Cultures: Rise of Islam in France Rattles the Populace and Stirs a Backlash," *Wall Street Journal,* January 5, 1995; Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic Monthly* 226 (September 1990); and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). Huntington's thesis further clarifies this view by way of his very feeble analysis of history as the struggle between ideologies/cultures as opposed to class/ethnicity. Huntington's essay was followed by his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, 1996, which generated much debate on the issue. A vast majority of intellectuals, not surprisingly, debunked Huntington's thesis of an impending "clash." However, in the post-September 11 world, things have moved at a much faster pace. From a simplistic perspective, the Huntington prophecy seems to be coming true at least with regard to "Islam" and the "West." But as many analysts and scholars have argued, this view ultimately suffers from a fundamental lack of understanding both of the West as well as of Islam. For an excellent analysis, see Qureshi and Sells, *The New Crusades*, 2003. For the downward trend in protecting civil rights of Muslims in the United States, see Hagopian, *Civil Rights in Peril*, 2004; and Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*, 2006.

2 Notable examples of such are the remarks made by Rev. Franklin Graham, who is known to be quite close to President George W. Bush. His disparaging remarks regarding Islam's alleged alien God who is not the same as a Christian God, and his assertion that "They've . . . taken excerpts out of the Old Testament and New Testament, and thrown it into the Qur'an, to sprinkle a few Bible verses throughout to give it validity" display an

unfortunate level of ignorance as well as intolerance. See http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week549/news.html. There have been numerous high profile incidents like this in recent years. For an account of these, see the Web site of a prominent American Muslim civil rights group, CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) which seeks to monitor incidents of Islamophobia: http://www.cair-net.org/.

3   Besides the two thinkers included here, there are a number of other contemporary Muslim thinkers who write within a framework similar to Latin American Christian liberation theologians. Two younger scholars are the British author Akhtar, *The Final Imperative*, 1991, and the South African author Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 1997. There are scores of other Muslim theologians, scholars, and interpreters engaged in expanding the ever widening scope of discourse on liberative themes in the Muslim world.

4   It has been said that Islam is an "orthopraxy" rather than orthodoxy because there is less emphasis on dogma and more on works.

5   Here I am reminded of Cornel West's attempt to converge/combine the prophetic Christian and progressive Marxist traditions in order to create a balance between the "heavens" and the earth, so to speak; between the metaphysical hopes for the afterlife and the human condition here and now. See West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 1982. The Islamic tradition also puts emphasis upon maintaining a balanced posture in the world as essential to the public good. The concern for the afterlife is important but it does not imply neglect of one's earthly responsibilities. There are many examples of this in both legal and folk aspects of the Islamic tradition. In fact, Muslim concerns for the afterlife are as much, if not more, meant to establish responsible ethical behavior in this life. See Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 2002.

6   Professor Asghar Ali Engineer is an influential thinker and well-known Muslim theologian-activist based in India. His many published writings refer to the various reformist ideas regarding poverty, women's rights in Muslim societies, and *jihad*. His theory and praxis both directly speak to themes of liberation within Islam.

7   See Engineer, *The Origin and Development of Islam*, 1980.

8   In chapter 3, titled "Hermeneutical Keys," of his seminal work, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, Farid Esack attempts to lay out the workings of the "qur'anic hermeneutics of liberation . . . with its continuous shift between text and context and the ongoing reflections on their implications for each other" (1997:86).

9   All Qur'an translations in this essay are taken from Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 2004, with minor modifications in some instances.

10 See his numerous writings translated from the speeches he gave at the Husayniyah-i Irshad, "an institution which played a central part in

Shari'ati's development as an independent Muslim thinker" (Sachedina, 1983:195).

11 Asghar Ali Engineer, "What I believe" found on the Web site of his Institute of Islamic Studies: http://ecumene.org/IIS/csss16.htm.

12 Compare Cornel West's "radical egalitarian idea" wherein he locates Christianity's essence. West claims to practice a "progressive Marxist social analysis and political praxis." There he focuses on what he calls the "Prophetic Christianity," which in his view is responsible for the awareness of the individual's right to equality in all matters including those of salvation. Thus any such religio-social system would be based upon the belief in "a transcendent God before whom all persons are equal [who in turn] endows the well-being and ultimate salvation of each with equal value and significance" (1982:16).

13 See Khan, *Mazhab aur sains*, 1984.

14 See Kottukapally, *The Hope We Share,* 1983. For Islamic opposition to Marxism and other Western "isms" of the twentieth century, see Shari'ati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, 1980.

15 *Jihad* is often equated with violence; however, etymologically it means "struggle" by which is meant "spiritual struggle," as with one's own self. It is primarily moral struggle against one's own lower self. In social terms, it means to stand up for human rights and it is in this context that it may also include taking up arms to defend the rights of self and others. Taking up arms is strictly regulated in the classical Islamic tradition and is prescribed only as a last resort. What is important to remember is that the notion of *jihad* denotes much more than just "armed struggle."

16 *Sirah ibn Hisham*—one of the earliest sources for understanding Prophet Muhammad's teachings and that of many of his close companions (Engineer, 1990:7).

17 Dr. Ali Shari'ati, the Iranian thinker and activist, was a liberation theologian in every sense of the term. His writings inspired many thousands of people, young and old, before, and even after the 1979 "Islamic" revolution, a major social and political transformation in Iran. Thus Shari'ati is regarded by many prominent thinkers as one of the main "ideologues" of the Islamic revolution (Sachedina, 1983:191–213).

18 See Yadegari, "Liberation Theology and Islamic Revivalism," 1986–1987:38–50. As Yadegari points out, they may have been influenced by some common streams of thought that prevailed in the French intellectual circles during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This information is further confirmed by the present author in speaking with Dr. Dussel during the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion held in Philadelphia, November 1995. Dr. Dussel not only remembered being acquainted with Ali Shari'ati in their student days at the University of Paris, but he also recalled a few instances of Shari'ati's involvement

in the "anti-Iranian government" activities. He remembered him as an "organic" intellectual who wanted to stay close to the "realities on the ground" so to speak.

19 Shari'ati argues that Marx's criticism of religion does not apply to all religions. Especially it does not apply to the "Eastern" religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and insofar as Islam at least culturally belongs largely to the East, Marx's criticism does not apply to Islam either. Marx's knowledge of religion per se seems to have been limited to Western European understandings and descriptions of God. Marx annuls the traditional status of religion simply by rejecting the history of religious involvement in the production of social inequities. With all his scientific methodological capabilities, Marx could not distinguish between the "intellectual and scientific facts concerning religion with the historical and social role of the religious minded" (1980:59).

20 See Shari'ati, *Man and Islam*, 1981; cf. Haq, 1991:90.

21 Mohammad Yadegari compares Islamic revivalism with how the struggle for economic independence is defined in Christian liberation theology.

22 See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1990.

23 See Soroush, *Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam*, 2000.

Chapter 6

1 See Engineer, *Religion in South Asia*, 2005.

2 There are notable exceptions. See, e.g., Agnivesh, *Religion, Spirituality, and Social Action*, 2003.

3 The caste system is a hierarchical social order consisting of four main groups. At the apex of the hierarchy are the *brahmins* (priests and teachers). Following the *brahmins* are the *kshatriyas* (warriors and political rulers), the *vaishyas* (merchants and farmers) and the *shudras* (laborers), who are expected to serve the first three groups. The system is rendered more complicated by its subdivision into thousands of subcastes (*jatis*). Those who, for one reason or another, do not belong to one of the four castes are regarded as outcastes or untouchables and denied the rights and privileges accorded to the upper castes. The caste system has implications for religious practice. The first three castes are regarded as twice-born (*dvijas*) and are alone entitled to study the Vedas. It is a remarkably resilient system, even though changes are occurring as a consequence of legislation, democracy, and urbanization.

4 For a brief discussion of the four goals see Smith, *The World's Religions,* 1994:18–25. In outlining the central elements of a Hindu theology of liberation, I rely particularly on the teachings of Advaita (Nondual) tradition. Systematized by the theologian Shankara (ca. 700 C.E.), Advaita characterizes the relationship between God (*brahman*), the world (*jagat*), and the human being (*jiva*) negatively as not-two, while indirectly affirming

an ultimate ontological non-difference among all three. God constitutes the true being, the ultimate selfhood of the world, and the human being. See Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 2006.

5   Rama is identified by Tulasidasa with God and presented as a divine incarnation (*avatara*).

6   Translation modified. The rod is a traditional symbol of punishment. Ascetics keep a rod as a symbol of renunciation.

7   See *Sri Bhagavadgita*, 1993.

Chapter 7

1   In contrast to a monotheist religion like Christianity or a polytheist religion like Hinduism, Buddhism is classified as atheistic as its devotees believe in no god. Literally, the term "theology" cannot be applied to Buddhism, but for the sake of convenience and for the common purpose of this book, I will use "Buddhist liberation theology" as a provocative term for Buddhist social ethics leading to social liberation.

2   Although prostitution and the transnational sex industry exploit adults and children of both sexes, the vast majority of prostitutes in Thailand are women and girls.

3   Young women make up about 80 percent of Thailand's low-wage factory workforce. The fire on May 10, 1993, at Kader Industrial (Thailand) Co. Ltd., a factory in the Phuttamonthon area fifteen miles west of Bangkok, which killed at least 213 and injured 500 workers—most of whom were young women—revealed what the working conditions and safety standards in factories are like for most rural women. The blaze may have been the deadliest factory fire in history, far surpassing the 146 killed on March 25, 1911, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. factory in New York City (*Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 12, 1993).

4   For more details about the AIDS crisis in Thailand, see Bonacci, *Senseless Casualties*, 1992.

5   For a Thai feminist view of prostitution, see Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 1991.

6   The term *Sangha* means "community of monastics." *Bhikkhuni* means "Buddhist nun" whereas *Samaneri* means "Buddhist female novice." So *Bhikkhuni Sangha* means "community of Buddhist nuns."

7   I have refrained from defining "Buddhist-based communities" in hopes that this concept, conveying the notion of a community of study and praxis, will be more adequately explicated by the examples in this section. The term itself is obviously one adapted from the concept of Christian-based communities in Latin America.

8   In Thai Buddhism there is a tradition that if a monk no longer chooses to live a monastic life, he can disrobe and become a layman. The status of monkhood does not follow him after he disrobes.

9   *Pah* is the Thai word for "forest."

10 In the past, Buddhist monks in Thailand who were arrested by the police were forced to first disrobe before being put in jail. Most of them wore white robes to defend themselves and their status.

11 See Phra Prachak Khuttacitto, "Luangpoh Prachak Khuttacitto: A Conservation Monk Whose Determination Has Never Changed," *Krungthep-Thurakit* (*Bangkok Business News*), January 22, 1994.

12 The data in this section is based on my visit to the Thamkaenchan community and my interview with the people there.

13 Formerly Bodhiraksa was entitled by the term *Phra* which means "Buddhist monk." After renouncing the Thai Sangha Hierarchy (*Maha-thera-samakom*), he and his clergy disciples are referred to as *Samana* which means "religious clergy."

14 There are two *nikaya* (orders) in Thai Buddhism: *Thammayutika Nikaya* and *Maha Nikaya*. The *Thammayutika Nikaya* was established by King Mongkut (Rama IV) in his attempt to reform Thai Buddhism. It is believed that the minority *Thammayut* monks (approximately 10 percent) are stricter in *vinaya* (discipline) than the majority order of *Maha Nikaya* monks in the Thai Sangha.

15 For more details on Santi Asoke, see Sangsehanat, *Integrated Wisdom on Buddhist Philosophy*, 2006.

16 The term *Buddha* refers to the Buddha—the founder of Buddhism. *Kasetra* means "agriculture." Thus *Buddha-Kasetra* literally means the "Buddha's way of agriculture."

17 The data in this section is based on my visit to the Buddha-Kasetra communities and my interview with the people there.

18 PLWHA stands for "People Living with HIV/AIDS."

19 This section is based on the field research by Laura Hollinger whose project I joined as an adviser.

20 The name was changed by the government of Phibun Songkhram, shortly after he became prime minister at the end of December 1938.

21 In the Theravada Buddhist tradition it is very common to list these three defilements together when describing the condition of the common man or woman.

22 Praves Wasi was the chairman of the Committee of Democratic Development that set the concepts and agendas for Thailand's political reform supported by Thai intellectuals and the middle class. For more details, see the Committee of Democratic Development, *The Political Reform of Thailand*, 1995.

23 For more details on interreligious dialogue, see Swidler, *After the Absolute*, 1990.

24 See Fernando and Swidler, *Buddhism Made Plain*, 1986.

Chapter 8

1 See Lopez and Rockefeller, *Christ and the Bodhisattva*, 1987.
2 See Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 1991.
3 See McCrae, *Seeing Through Zen,* 2003.
4 See Yamada, *The Gateless Gate*, 2004.
5 See Kirchner, *Entangling Vines*, 2004.
6 Queen and King, *Engaged Buddhism*, 1996.
7 See Loy, *A Buddhist History of the West*, 2002; and *The Great Awakening*, 2003.
8 See Habito, *Healing Breath*, 2006.

Chapter 9

1 For an extended period of Chinese history, only high-ranking officials or people related to the emperor had a comfortable life in the society. The majority of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture.
2 There remains dispute regarding the origins of Daoism in China, as some argue the religion is as old as the Confucian tradition, while others argue that Daoism was a response to the introduction of Buddhism. In addition, there is also dispute about the unity of one, single "Daoism" as a religion. These disputes, however, are not central to the subject matter of this chapter.
3 The *Dao De Jing* we have now was not written by a single hand; it was edited during the second half of the third century B.C.E.
4 Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi Yulu* (*Dialogues of Zhuxi*), 2.42.2.
5 Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi Yulu* (*Dialogues of Zhuxi*), 32.13.36.
6 Huang Zongxi, ed., *Mingru xue'an* (*Study-records of the Ming Confucians*) "Chongren xue'an" ("Study Records of Those who Revered Humaneness"), 1.24.
7 "In the original text above, *Shuxiu* refers to a private tutor's remuneration or emolument, usually a bundle of dried meat prepared in honor of the tutor" (*Analects of Confucius*, 1994:107).
8 The six arts were the traditional education of the elite, i.e., music, the rites, archery, carriage driving, classic books, and arithmetic.
9 Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi Yulu* (*Dialogues of Zhuxi*), 34.16.19, "Shu'er" ("On Transmitting"), "Zhi yu dao" (Setting One's Heart on the Way)."
10 Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi Yulu* (*Dialogues of Zhuxi*), 23.5.24, "Wei zheng: Dao zhi yi zheng" ("On Governance: Section on Guiding through Governance").
11 The examination was also abolished by some dynasties because some rulers had chosen to simply sell off high-ranking positions, which led to corruption and a strong decline in morale.
12 The original local covenant (sometimes referred to as Lu's *xiangyue*) of the Song dynasty became difficult to carry out with only the principle of

voluntary participation. However during the Ming (1368–1644 C.E.) and Qing (1644–1912 C.E.) dynasties this original local covenant flourished again.

13 Huang Zongxi, ed., "Records of the Righteousness Fields," from "Gaoping xue'an" ("Study Records of those of High Calibre"), in *Songru xue'an* (*Study-records of the Song Confucians*), 3.8.

14 "Shenxian" ("Transcendents"), trans. by Michael Stanley-Baker from *Taiping guangji*.10.20.4 in *Siku quanshu zongmu*.

15 Ge Hong of the Eastern Jin (284–364 C.E.), best known for his interest in techniques of longevity, took the benefit of the people and performance of virtuous acts to be the most essential criteria for ascending to transcendence. Qiu Chuji (1148–1227), was a famous Quanzhen Daoist who was invited to advise Genghis Khan for his expertise on longevity and Daoist philosophy. Qiu Chuji ceaselessly encouraged people to perform good deeds and study the Way (Dao). He asked people to perform good deeds early on. The accrual of small virtues can become a great virtue; the accrual of small merits can become great merit. As soon as one achieves great merit, then one can realize the Way (Dao) in an instant. He also said: "Although those who tire themselves in the accumulation of merit who have not yet attained the Way (Dao), the root of their virtue is deep and heavy. In this life or the next, they will associate with sages and worthies" (Tang Daijian, 2003:402, 407–8).

16 *Zuo Zhuan* (*The Duke of Zhao*), 782.

17 A red-tally order can mean red lacquer. It might just simply refer to a kind of order, sent on red bamboo-slips. Michael Stanley-Baker, interviewed y the author, October, 15, 2006.

18 *Zuo Zhuan* (*The Duke of Zhao*), 782.

19 This theory originated from the ancient Chinese Book of *Changes* (*Yi Jing*). The *Yin-Yang* theory is very widely applied in both Daoism and Confucianism.

20 Father Fang Zhirong is the first person to mention this idea. (Vu Kim Chinh, 1993:312–15).

21 Huang and Quan. "Gulingsi xiansheng xue'an" ("Study records of the Four Brilliant Teachers"), *Songru xue'an* (*Study-records of the Song and Yuan Confucians*), 5.90.

22 Lin Anwu, professor. National Normal University in Taiwan, interviewed by the author, June 9, 2006.

23 Southern Taiwan was colonized by Holland for thirty-eight years starting in 1604. Northern Taiwan was colonized by Spain for seventeen years beginning in 1662. They succeeded in converting many native inhabitants to Christianity. In 1895, Japan and Taiwan were bound in a war treaty that gave Japan control over Taiwan for thirty-five years. The Taiwanese aboriginal people also considered themselves colonized by the Qing dynasty and Guoming Dang (Iskakafutet, 1998:10–31).

24 Only 3.3 percent of Taiwan's population is Christian and 60 percent of the 3.3 percent are Catholic. Tong, 2004:45.

Chapter 10

Koreans write their names in different ways. Usually they use three words, but sometime they use only two. The first word is usually the family name. The second and third words are the person's given name. There are also different ways of writing one's given name in English. Some people hyphenate the second and third words. Others do not. Some people capitalize only the first letter of their given name. In order to honor this diversity and approaches, in this paper, I will list names in the way they are published. Therefore, some names appear with/without hyphens and others appear with/without capital letters. Nevertheless, I will always list the family names first.

1 This is Hyun Young-hak's interpretation of Han Wan-Sang's definition. See Commission on Theological Concerns, *Minjung Theology*, 1981:xvii. Han Wan-Sang was a sociology professor at Seoul National University and served as president of three universities: Sangji University, Korean National Open University, and Hansung University. He was vice prime minister in charge of Unification Ministry in 1993 and of Education Ministry in 2001. His academic and practical interests include church, broadcasting, education, and the civil rights movement. Currently he serves as the President of the Republic of Korea National Red Cross.

2 See Commission on Theological Concerns, *Minjung Theology*, 1981.

3 *Laos* indicates the people of Israel as the people of God. Ahn Byung-mu uses Herman Strathmann's interpretation. See Strathmann, *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 1954:29–34.

4 "Some time ago in Seoul, very strange bumping sounds could often be heard. When people with money and power heard the sound they would tremble like aspen leaves and break out into a cold sweat. The sound originated in the following manner. There was a fellow called Ando. He came as an aspiring young man to the city. . . . Unfortunately, nothing he did was ever successful. It is not known whether it was bad fortune related to his previous birth or his ill fortune to have an evil spirit. When he attempted to stand up with his two feet on the ground, immediately he would be bombarded with endless visions of crimes no one had ever heard, seen, or thought of, so he could not help but run all the time, day and night, all the year round. Even if he earned 10 won, he would lose 100 won; if he borrowed 100 won, 1,000 won would be taken away . . . he became tired. He was starving and near crazy. So on an evening when there was a beautiful sunset, he stood up with his two feet on the ground and said, "Damn! This is a doglike world!" Because of this word of damnation about the world, he was immediately taken away, beaten up,

then taken to the court and found guilty of having spread a false rumor and of slandering the regime. His head and legs were chopped off, so that only the trunk of his body was left. He was put into a cell for a five-hundred-year imprisonment. "Why, what is this? I did not say a word even though I was naked, starving, being worked to death, beaten, and oppressed. What is this? You will know my mind, you flying wild goose. Ah! Mother! I'm coming home. I'm going home through the wall, over the wall. I'm going home over the red brick wall as a grieving ghost." He would hit the walls of the cell by rolling the trunk of his body, shouting in a soundless cry. Every time he did it, it made a bumping sound which made people shiver, and those with money and power tremble" (Suh Nam-dong, 1981:60).

5   Noh Jung-Sun defined minjung theologians for three generations. The first generation (1970s) developed minjung theology and the second generation (1980s) adopted a more radical method and worked for and with minjung directly. The third generation (1990s) was not formally trained in theology but practiced minjung theology as activists (Noh, 1994:22).

6   Ham Sok-han was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize and is often called the "Gandhi of Korea." As one of Asia's most significant voices, he proclaimed democracy and nonviolence during the Korean colonial and postcolonial periods of the twentieth century. With a provocative knowledge of philosophy, he brought a unique understanding of Korean religions, especially Korean Christianity, within sociopolitical, philosophical, and multireligious contexts. His profound philosophical theological thoughts have deeply influenced many founders of Korean minjung theologians.

7   Ahn Byung-mu was one of the most influential scholars and writers in minjung theology. He provided a significant hermeneutical work of the relation between the Jesus-Event and the minjung's reality of Korea. He was the former Professor of New Testament at HanShin University (Seoul, Korea) and the Director of Theological Institute (Seoul, Korea).

8   Suh Nam-dong was the former Professor of Systematic Theology at Yonsei University (Seoul, Korea) and Director of the Institute for Mission-Education (Seoul, Korea). He was one of the best minjung theologians who embraced minjung's theological understandings in conjunction with Korean sociopolitical colonial history and indigenous culture.

9   Hyun Young-hak was the former Professor of Christian Ethics at Ewha Women's University (Seoul, Korea) and one of the leading minjung theologians in Korea. He contributed a unique and significant understanding of minjung theology in relation to other multireligious cultures and Korean native oral traditions.

10 Kim Yong-bock was formerly co-director for Research, Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (Seoul, Korea) and former President of Hanil University and Theological Seminary (Jeonju, Korea).

He has been actively involved in Korean reunification movements and has been a prolific writer and important figure in minjung theology.

11 Suh Kwang-sun David was the former professor of Theology and Philosophy at Ewha Women's University (Seoul, Korea). A founding member of minjung theology, he has been one of the well-known international theologians who published his work in both Korean and English. Currently he is working for the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.

12 Kim Chi-ha is one of the leading poets and writers in Korean literature and has been a devoted activist for democracy. Through his poetry and stories, his countless struggles under dictatorial Korean military government made a remarkable testimony for the oppressed and the powerless. His works have been used as resources of minjung's reality by many minjung theologians. He has received numerous awards such as the Lotus Prize (1975), the Isan Literature Prize (1993), and the Chiyong Literature Prize (2002). He was recognized for his achievements by Poetry International in 1981.

13 In shamanistic sense, omnipresence and omnipotence are different from those concepts of Western theology. Because shamanism has many divine figures, spirits are everywhere and powerful depending on those divine figures' roles and functions within different contexts.

14 The premise "Minjung is Messiah" has raised a lot of discussions in minjung theological circles. Many first and second generations of minjung theologians have different understandings of this notion. However, many of them identify minjung with Jesus in various ways and provide a new interpretation for this claim (Song Ki-duk, 1997:181–211).

15 One of the criticisms I have is that minjung theology has not dealt enough with women's han. Even though several minjung theologians mentioned women's stories to explain what han is, they do not give any specific intentions to analyze and understand women's issues and their social political situations in Korean patriarchy. They ignore the significance of women's minjungness and their herstory.

Chapter 11

1 The oldest evidence of African religious expression is found on rock painting in southern Namibia in the Apollo XI cave dated some twenty-eight thousand years ago (Maret, 1994:186).

2 The African concept of God has been the object of countless publications. We offer here a synthesis inspired by various works published in French, Italian, and English. Suffice it here to mention among the most significant works: Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 1970; *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1990; *Introduction to African Religion*, 1991; Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology,* 1996; Mulago,

"La concepion de Dieu dans la tradition Bantu," *Revue du Clerge Afric-ain*, 1967; "Elements fondamentaux de la religion africaine," *Religion africaine et Christianisme*, 1978.

3   On the concept of *Bumuntu* in West Africa, see Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 1995.

Chapter 12

1   See for example the works of Warner Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns*, 1991, and Cabrera, *El Monte*, 1968, who interviewed devotees to African-de-rived religions in Cuba and Trinidad claiming mixed ethnic African heri-tages. Isabella Castellanos translated one such testimony from Cabrera's *El Monte*: "When I arrived from school, I would leave the 'Cristo ABC' . . . [words that began the . . . primer], and my father who was a Musunde mayombero [a Congo priest] and my mother who was an iyalocha [a Lucumí priestess] would wait for me with the other primer . . . the one from over there, from Akú and Kunansiá. . . . At home I had to speak Yeza and Congo, and just as I would learn the catechism and the prayers, I would also learn how to pray, salute, and worship in lengua (an African language). . . . One would master that which was proper here, but knowl-edge about 'over there' was also required" (1996:44). Also see Barnes, *Africa's Ogun*, 1997.

2   Extensive demographic data on devotees to African-derived religions are not readily available. These estimates were cited from http://www.adherents.com/Na/Na_671.html and might be grossly understated. See for example the homepage of the International Congress of Orisa Tradi-tion and Culture at http://www.orisaworld.org which states that "Orisa Tradition and Culture [plays] a central role in the day-to-day lives of over 100 million people."

3   See for example Schuler, *Alas, Alas, Kongo*, 1980; Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 2003; Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 1972; Matory, "Surpassing 'Survival,'" 2001; and Kamari Clark, *Mapping Yoruba Networks*, 2004.

4   The (spoken word) lyrics are as follows: ". . . Now do they call you daughter to the spinning pulsar / Or maybe queen of the two thousand moons / Sister to the distant yet rising star / Is your name Yemaya? / Awe, hell no! It's got to be Oshun!" See track one, "Brother to the Night (A Blues for Nina)," written by Reginald Gibson, performed by Larenz Tate, *Love Jones* (audio CD), Sony, 1997.

5   The Orisa World Congress was founded in 1981. For the most updated information on the Congress, see the official Web site at http://www.orisaworld.org.

6   Given the overlapping identities of persons of African descent in the United States and Latin America, I will employ variations of the terms

"African North America" and African U.S. Americans when referring to black people descended from Africans enslaved in the United States.

7   See *Nyabingi Movement*, 1991; Weigert, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, 1995; Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya*, 1993; Rotberg and Mazuri, *Protest and Power in Black Africa,* 1970.

8   Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust,* A Geechee Girls Production, 1991; Haile Gerima*, Sankofa,* Mypheduh Films Inc., 1993.

9   See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1990.

10 See, e.g., Brandon, *Santería from Africa to the New World*, 1993; De La Torre, *Santería*, 2004b; Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 1995; Houk, *Spirits, Blood, and Drums*, 1993; and Lindsay, *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, 1996.

11 One often hears Orisha devotees claiming one Orisha as the owner of their head and a second as the owner of their feet or a maternal and a paternal Orisha. Although in theory there are 400+1 Orisha, most diasporic pantheons tend to acknowledge no more than 50 Orisha.

12 Olodumare is often conceived of as male in diasporic Orisha lineages. Olodumare is also referred to as the Creator God, but that title is not exclusive; for other Orisha such as Ogun and Obatala are cited in the Ifa corpus as participating in the creation of humanity. For this reason, I accept Kola Abimbola's preference for the terminology "high" or "representative" god as a referent for Olodumare. See Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture*, 2006.

13 See Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 1994; Brown, *Santería Enthroned,* 2003; Lindsay, *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art,* 1996.

14 For a fascinating and extensive analysis of the denigration of Vodoun in the American press/media see Bartkowski "Claims-Making and Typifications of Voodoo as a Deviant Religion," 1998.

15 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 2005; Hucks and Stewart, "Authenticity and Authority in the Shaping of Trinidad Orisha Identity," 2003; McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola,* 1991; Métreaux, *Voodoo in Haiti,* 1959; and Aiyejina and Gibbons, "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad," 1999.

16 Most treatments of Orisha traditions interpret them as New World syncretic religions forged from two Old World traditions. I see the logic for such an argument, but in the end I respectfully disagree with this conceptualization.

17 Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons, "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad," 42.

18 Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2004. For an earlier Native American treatment of biblical election and American Christianity see Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 1989.

19 Also see Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 1995; and Fandrich, "Defiant African Sisterhoods," 2005.

20 See Tracey Hucks, "Approaching the African God: An Examination of African American Yoruba History from 1959 to the Present," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998.

21 Oyotunji Village. "About Us." See http://www.oyotunjiafricanvillage.org/about.htm.

22 Roots and Rooted. "A Debt Paid in Full: Latin & African-American Relations within the Orisa Community." See http://rootsandrooted.org/afam-latin-relations.htm.

23 Other traditions wielding influence over Orisha practice in Trinidad include rituals locally attributed to the "Kabbalah" tradition and Hinduism.

24 See Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad*, 2003. For critical commentary on the Brazilian government's racist appropriation of Candomblé, Umbanda, and other African-derived Brazilian religions as a means of containing and depoliticizing the black masses, see Ferreira Da Silva, 2005:32–51; do Nascimento, *Brazil*, 1979; and Lopes, 2004:838–60.

25 Wande Abimbola has described the Yoruba/Orisha tradition as a broken calabash with scattered pieces across Africa and the African diaspora. See his *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World* (Roxbury, Mass.: Aim, 1997).

26 See Settles, 2006:191–207; Clark, *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule*, 2005; and Conner, 2005:143–66.

27 For sources on the African U.S. American independent church movement and abolitionist activism, see Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 1972; Cone, *For My People*, 1984; and Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 2004.

28 Reis concedes that the 1826 revolt "provides . . . the only explicit evidence of [the connection between African religion/Candomblé and slave uprisings] in a period when, conversely, Muslim slaves and libertos rebelled several times" (2001:130).

29 This image of Shango is conspicuously embraced by devotees in the Trinidadian Orisha community.

30 Roots and Rooted. "Poll." http://www.rootsandrooted.org/poll001.htm.

31 Daniele Mezzana identifies with precision the ideological bias at work in reductionistic representations of African Religion. According to Mezzana, ". . . there has always been a widespread tendency to interpret and assess African traditional religions starting from 'local,' or specific, practices, which are then generalized without a valid reason. This is the case with certain magical rites—which, incidentally, many such religions are opposed to—and of figures such as the feticheurs. Something no one would dream of doing with other religions; no one, for example, would

define the essence of Christianity by the excessive devotional practices towards a given saint found in rural areas or—to mention a recent case —by the holy water jinx which the trainer of the Italian football team performed for the whole world to see on television. Nevertheless, this is what has happened, and continues to happen, with regard to African traditional religions." See Mezzana, *African Traditional Religions and Modernity: The End of a Stigma*, http://www.africansocieties.org/n3/ eng_dic2002/religionitrad.htm, accessed August 4, 2007.

32 Roots and Rooted. "Poll." http://www.rootsandrooted.org/poll001.htm.

33 Important examples from the most popular deities include Olokun, Ochosi, Obatala. And Olodumare. See Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture*, 2006.

34 See Settles, "The Sweet Fire of Honey," 2006. Also see De La Torre, "Ochun," 2001:837–61.

35 See Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 2001; Olupona, *Kingship, Religion and Rituals in a Nigerian Community*, 1991; Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual,* 1992; and Murphy and Sanford, *Osun Across the Waters*, 2001.

36 The Orisha Ibeji represents the phenomenon of twins/twinning.

Chapter 13

1 There is considerable, if conflictive, evidence that *amerika*, or some version of the word (*amerrique*) was already long in use by indigenous peoples of Central America prior to Columbus's and Vespucci's voyages from Europe. See the fascinating essay by Jonathan Cohen, "The Naming of America: Fragments We've Shored Against Ourselves," http:// www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/america.html. Version e-published in 2005 or 2006.

2 My use of the lower case for such adjectives as "english," "christian," and "biblical" is intentional. While nouns naming religious groups might be capitalized out of respect for each Christian—as for each Muslim or Buddhist—using the lowercase "christian" or "biblical" for adjectives allows readers to avoid unnecessary normativizing or universalizing of the principal institutional religious quotient of the Euro-west. Likewise, I avoid capitalizing such national or regional adjectives such as ameri-can, amer-european, european, and euro-western. I also refer to north America. It is important to my argumentation that people recognize the historical artificiality of modern regional and nation-state social con-structions. For instance, who decides where the "continent" of Europe ends and that of Asia begins? Similarly, who designates the western half of north America as a separate continent clearly divided by the Missis-sippi River, or alternatively the Rocky Mountains? My initial reasoning

extends to other adjectival categories and even some nominal categories, such as euro, and political designations like the right and the left and regional designations like the west. Quite paradoxically, I know, I insist on capitalizing White (adjective or noun) to indicate a clear cultural pattern invested in Whiteness that is all too often overlooked or even denied by american Whites. Moreover, this brings parity to the insistence of African Americans on the capitalization of the word Black in reference to their own community (in contradistinction to *The New York Times* usage). Likewise, I always capitalize Indian and American Indian.

3 My use of religious traditions here instead of Indian "religions" is also intentional. Most American Indian traditional people have characteristically denied that their people ever had or engaged in any religion at all! Rather, these spokespeople would insist that their whole culture and social structure was and is infused with a spirituality that cannot be separated from the rest of the community's life at any point. Green Corn Ceremony, Snake Dance, Kachinas, Sun Dance, sweat lodge ceremonies, and the pipe are not the religions of various tribes but rather these are specific ceremonial aspects of a world that includes countless ceremonies in any given tribal context, ceremonies performed by whole communities, clans, families, or individuals on a daily, periodic, seasonal, or occasional basis. While outsiders may identify a single main ceremony as the "religion" of a particular people, those people will likely see that ceremony as merely one extension of their day-to-day existence, all of which is experienced within ceremonial parameters and should be seen as "religious."

4 See Mann, *Iroquois Women*, 2000, in this regard. One needs to remember that nearly 40 percent of english women who were taken captive in wars with Indian peoples in New England declined repatriation when the opportunity arose. That is, they chose to remain in those Indian communities and in the relationships they had developed. See also Namias, *White Captives*, 1993; and Smith, *Conquest*, 2005:20.

5 Specifically, Smith argues: "The challenge brought forth by Native scholars/activists to other liberation theologians would be, even if we distinguish the 'liberation' church from mainstream churches, can any church escape complicity in Christian imperialism? Deloria in particular raises the challenge that Christianity, because it is temporally rather than a spatially based tradition (that is, it is not tied to a particular landbase, but can seek converts from any landbase), it is necessarily a religion tied to imperialism because it will never be content to remain within a particular place or community. Rather, adherents of temporal-based religions will try to convince other peoples of the veracity of their religious truth claims." She concludes by quoting Deloria: "Once religion becomes specific to a group, its nature also appears to change, being

directed to the internal mechanics of the group, not to grandiose schemes of world conquest" (2003:296–97).

6   This essay is, in large part, a critique of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez's volume, which insists that liberation theology is the attempt to reassert and reestablish the personhood of every individual in a world of alienation, alienation particularly of the poor and which leads to what he calls the "non-person." As noble as this sentiment is, American Indians are looking toward the reestablishment of their people-hood, that is, of the acknowledged status of our communities as nations in the eyes of the rest of the world. See Gutierrez, "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation," in *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith*, 1974:69.

7   See my essay "American Indian Traditions," in *Handbook of U.S. Liberation Theologies*, 2004a:330–46. The classic liberationist radical interpretation of Jesus fails to work for Indian people simply because historically the proclamation of Jesus came as an integral part of the colonial conquest that included the total displacing of centuries-old religious and cultural traditions and the replacing of those traditions with the imposition of a one-size-fits-all euro-western Jesus. Thus, historically, Jesus has always meant bondage for Indian peoples and not liberation; Jesus has meant personal separation from the traditions of the ancestors and most often division within the community as people are now forced to choose between traditional culture and some version of missionary culture and beliefs. Apart from the history of tensions with euro-Christians, one need remember, as Robert Warrior has urged, that the Exodus story of Israel and the Canaanites was already a conquest of indigenous peoples (the Canaanites). In the minds of the Puritans the Exodus story was being replayed in north America with Indians in the role of the Canaanites and the Puritans as the grateful recipients of the new promised land. This has made it very difficult or even impossible for Indians to redeem this story as liberatory. See Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians," in *Christianity and Crisis*, 1989:261–65. Warrior's essay was a response to the patently marxist interpretation of the hebrew scriptures of Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, 1979. See also the response to Warrior by Baldridge, "Native American Theology," in *Christianity and Crisis*, 1990:180–81.

8   For instance, no Osage act of war was completed without the enactment of the peace/village reentry component of the ceremony, which included weeping for a slain enemy combatant. See La Flesche, *War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians*, 1939.

9   See the very informative volume by Mann, *1491*, 2005.

10   The neoliberal perspective is only slightly different. They expect Indians to live up to their vision of us. Particularly, they expect all Indians to reflect back some sort of 1870s Lakota persona.

11 Note, for example, Bishop, "Western Mathematics," in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader,* 1995:71–76.

12 In this multi-day ceremony, men will dance typically for four days in the sun with no nourishment or water, sacrificing themselves vicariously for the health and well-being of the community. At some point, usually on the last day of dancing, the men will offer their own flesh as a further sacrifice. Allowing the flesh of their chest to be pierced and a peg inserted and tied to a rope, they will dance pulling against the rope, attached to a tree in the center, until the skin of the chest finally breaks free. Unfortunately, in our colonial dysfunctionality, it has become a great tourist attraction.

13 See Owen Dorsey, "Osage Traditions," in *Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of American Ethnography: 6th Annual Report* (U.S. Government, 1888): 377; La Flesche describes the process of collecting goods associated with the initiation of a non'honzhinga into the rite of vigil. See La Flesche, "The Osage Tribe," in *Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of American Ethnography: 39th Annual Report* (U.S. Government, 1925): 44.

14 Tooker gives a couple of examples for the Iroquois. See Tooker, 1979:55–68.

15 *God Is Red*, 2003, for example, chap. 4, "Thinking in Time and Space"; chap. 6, "The Concept of History"; chap. 7, "The Spatial Problem of History"; chap. 16, "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility."

16 See Tinker, "'The Stones Shall Cry Out,'" *Wicazo Sa Review*, 2004b:105–25.

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

CHOI, HEE AN is a lecturer and the director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University, School of Theology. She is author of *Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multi-Religious Colonial Context* (2005) and co-editor of *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women* (2006).

DE LA TORRE, MIGUEL A. is associate professor of social ethics and director of the Justice and Peace Institute at Iliff School of Theology. He has authored or edited over thirteen books, including the award-winning: *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (2002); *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (2004); and *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* (2004).

ELLIS, MARC H. is university professor and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University. He is the author and editor of more than twenty books including *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time, Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation,* and *Reading the Torah Out Loud: A Journey of Lament and Hope*.

HABITO, RUBEN L. F. is professor of world religions and spirituality at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. He is the author of over fifteen books, in Japanese, and in English, including *Living Zen, Loving God* (2004), *Experiencing Buddhism: Ways of*

Wisdom and Compassion (2005), and *Healing Breath: Zen for Buddhists and Christians in a Wounded World* (2006).

HO, WAN-LI is a senior lecturer of Chinese and Chinese religion at Emory University. She has coauthored *The Tao of Jesus: An Experiment in Inter-Religious Understanding* (1998) and numerous articles. Her research interests include Chinese religion and comparative thought, Asian studies, and comparative ecofeminism. She specializes in Chinese religious women and social activism.

NKULU-N'SENGHA, MUTOMBO is a native of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is an assistant professor at California State University Northridge where he is also the director of the "Global Village Forum." An associate editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (*JES*), he has published extensively in the areas of "Bumuntu Philosophy" and "Bumuntu Theology."

OMAR, IRFAN A. is assistant professor of Islam and world religions in the department of theology at Marquette University. He is the editor of *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub* (2007) and *Islam and Other Religions: Pathways to Dialogue* (2006). In 2006 he was the recipient of a U.S. Fulbright Senior Scholar Award for lecturing in Indonesia.

PINN, ANTHONY B. is Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities and Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University. He is the author/editor of seventeen books, including *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (2003); *African American Humanist Principles: Living and Thinking Like the Children of Nimrod* (2004); and *The African American Religious Experience in America* (2005).

PUNTARIGVIVAT, TAVIVAT is the director of the Institute of Research and Development at the World Buddhist University and the editor-in-chief of the *WFB Review* published by the World Fellowship of Buddhists. He has authored over ten books, including *Dependency Theory and Liberation Theology* (2001), *Religion and Philosophy in China and Japan* (2002), and *Dynamic Meditation of Luangpor Teean* (2003).

RAMBACHAN, ANANT is professor of religion at Saint Olaf College. His books include *Accomplishing the Accomplished, The Limits of Scripture,* and *The Advaita World View*.

RIEGER, JOERG is professor of systematic theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. His books include *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (2007), *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology* (2001), and *Remember the Poor: The Challenge to Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (1998).

RUETHER, ROSEMARY is the Carpenter Professor emerita at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and presently teaches at the Claremont Graduate University and Claremont School of Theology. She is author or editor of forty-five books on theology and social justice.

STEWART, DIANNE M. is associate professor of religion and African American studies at Emory University. She is the author of *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (2005) and she has published a number of articles and essays on theologies and religious practices of the African diaspora with emphases on black/womanist theologies and African-Caribbean religions.

TINKER, GEORGE E. "Tink" is a citizen of the *wazhazhe* (Osage) nation. He is professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. He has written extensively and is most recently the author of *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (2004).

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