

The Liberated Pastor and His People

ADELAIDE PASTORS SCHOOL 1990

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And Are We Yet Alive

And are we yet alive,
And see each other's face?
Glory and praise to Jesus give
For His redeeming grace!

Preserved by power divine
To full salvation here,
Again in Jesu's praise we join,
And in His sight appear.

What troubles have we seen,
What conflicts have we passed,
Fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last!

But out of all the Lord
Hath brought us by His love;
And still He doth His help afford,
And hides our life above.

Then let us make our boast
Of His redeeming power,
Which saves us to the uttermost,
Till we can sin no more:

Let us take up the cross,
Till we the crown obtain;
And gladly reckon all things loss,
So we may Jesus gain.

Charles Wesley, 1707-88

Introduction to the Theme

PERFECT FREEDOM



(Geoffrey Bingham)

ULTIMATE FREEDOM

Freedom, we say, is eschatological. No matter how rich freedom is in this world, Romans 8:18-25 shows us we look for a freedom beyond the best of present freedom-God-given as it may be. The ultimate liberty is ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). From passages such as I Corinthians 2:6-10, 13:8-13, II Corinthians 5:7 and I John 3:1-3 we know that we only have a foretaste of what is to come, so we do not fully know what is ‘the liberty of the glory’. What we do know is that we are children of God, that we shall be totally conformed to the image of the Son so that as his liberty is with the Father and the Spirit, so shall ours be. We shall be inducted into the mystery of the Godhead, shall have full fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (I John 1:3), and shall be partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). All of this, of course, without becoming divine. If we wish to pursue this line further then it will take us into the area of our heritage, our being raised, glorified, made a kingdom of priests unto God, and of our reigning for ever.

It is this hope which is so powerful to sustain us when we find our present freedom in Christ contested by the world, the flesh and the devil. Hope is a marvellous constraint.

SOME OF THE ELEMENTS WE WILL FACE IN THIS SCHOOL

We will see a number of things. Deane Meatheringham's studies will take us through the bondage of man through the Fall and the enemies which seek to hold fallen man in thrall. We will also see the way out of human bondage by the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ. We will see that freedom is so highly prized that man is occupied with coming into freedom. Don Priest's workshop on the alternative gospel will show us the secular drive today for freedom, whilst Ian Pennicook's studies on Liberation Theology will show us both the doctrine and praxis of a theology which has its roots deeply into Old Testament and New Testament teaching of God as the Liberator of Israel, and the Liberator of modern man. Noel Due's studies on II Corinthians 3 and on conscience will show us God's dispensations of law and grace, and the liberation of the conscience. Much in the same area, Jim Chaousis' Seminar on the gospel and guilty man will help us pastorally to see the principles and praxis of guilt and grace. Martin Bleby's studies on the freedom that can be known in worship will also be pastorally valuable. My own workshop on liberating counselling will get to the heart of practical healing by the wisdom of God. Ray Kidneys seminar regarding prisoners who are liberated will be based on Christian liberation. Deane Carters work-shop on confession will get to the heart of a problem long with us in the Christian church. Surgeon Neil McIntosh's experience of people who face death through sickness will be greatly helpful. My own four studies on the apocalyptic in which we live, and the great hope of ultimate freedom which it promises should also be valuable pastorally.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

FACING PRESENT BONDAGES AND PROMISES OF FREEDOM

Pastorally we are continually in the crisis of human bondage. We ourselves and our people need to see the elements of liberation, i.e. freedom from the penalty, pollution and power of sin, freedom to obey without legalistic pressure, freedom by walking in the law of Christ, freedom to serve God and man in love, being free not to do the things we are free to do, especially in relationship to the brother who is weaker in faith and conscience. Only when we have that kind of freedom will we be free to minister pastorally to others. Even there we need to be free from having dominion over the faith and lives of others (II Cor. 1:24), allowing men and women to know Christ before they know us (I Tim. 2:3), and so to be led and assisted by this ‘Wonderful Counsellor’.

THE PASTOR LIVING IN ESCHATOLOGICAL FREEDOM

Only the person who lives proleptically-by hope-can have a sensible view and experience of present freedom in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These Three-this Triune Godhead-dwell in us, and bring to us the freedom wrought by grace, the freedom sustained by grace, and the freedom which lies ahead of us-‘the grace that is coming to [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ’ (I Pet. 1:13). Their indwelling is their communication of Their own freedom. Christ in us now is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). If we live in bondage to pride, ambition, idolatry, fear of death, fear of people and a hopeless view of the future, then we will minimize the present freedom which is ours and which we must proclaim to people in an age that knows little genuine freedom. For this reason we must have a full and rich view of the liberation of the Cross. Knowing what is eschatological we can live freely now, even in the

face of all that would bring us back into bondage and subvert our true freedom.

STUDY ONE

Man in Bondage



(Deane Meatheringham)

In the experience of his alienation from God man does not see the veracity of liberation, nor the gravity of his bondage. Oppression, enslavement, exploitation, poverty, powerlessness, revolution and domination are the human condition whether lived under totalitarian or democratic systems. But as our bondage puts chains of distortion on our reasoning, the understanding of our condition can only be proximate. Our evaluation of ourselves and our condition will be the opposite from God's.

We are speaking in these studies of man's liberation before God, and of his being set free under the judgement of God. Likewise we are speaking of man in bondage to the power of his sin against God. In Romans 3:9 'sin' (singular) is almost hypostatized as the power which holds the human race under its unbreakable tyranny, imprisoning man in his unbelief which is the source for spawning multiple bondages (Rom. 3:9-20).

THE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM

Freedom for man the creature, made in God's image, is realized in his being what God made him to be-in the serenity of his dependency

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upon God's goodness, the security of God's Word, and the adventurous joy of obedience. This is freedom before God. Here man's heart beats in rhythm with the heart of God. His freedom is not in his choice to serve or not to serve, for that would be to read our situation back into it, and so distort it and paralyse it. Yet as long as man lives here he is unconscious of himself, for he only sees God and he only knows good.

From the start we need to say that man's revolt is a self-contradiction. It is the absurdity of the creature asserting itself to the place of the Divine. The quest for autonomy presumes that man has sufficient power within himself to control himself and to make God his servant. It also assumes that he has enough freedom to make the right choices for his best interests and his well-being. (We see this expressed in some forms of educational psychology, and the assumption of moral progress in a democracy.)

Now man must live for himself (II Cor. 5:14-15). There comes the self-fulfilment binge, the drive for self-realization, ambition, individualism, power politics and men like Cain become theologians and career clergymen, and we even get the idea that we can 'make love'. (No one has ever been able to 'make' love, although in loving and by living in love we might be made.)

'Whoever seeks to save his own life will lose it,' says Jesus. The sinner, according to Luther, is one who is curled in upon himself. 'One feeds on one's own self and all that is created and enjoys that which lets itself be used, and so one becomes necessarily vain' (Luther).

This freedom is a curse. It is self-suffocating. It is self-destructive. And it becomes the hell of endless self.

I will mention two tyrants which contribute to man's bondage:

1. MAN'S DELUDED BLINDNESS

Romans 3:11 says 'no one understands, no one seeks for God'. Egocentric man now begins his reasoning from his own self-

understanding. Having redefined himself he seeks to redefine God. But how can a man know himself apart from God? The deceitfulness of sin blinds him to the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20ff.). His guilty conscience gives him a distorted and hard view of God and his corruption turns his mind into a 'sea of lies' (Titus 1:15; Isa. 57:20; Matt. 7:22f.). In this condition man perpetually turns the truth of God into a lie so that as a maladjusted existent in the creation, his life is lived in bondage to a lie (Rom. 1:18ff.).

2. THE SLAVERY OF WRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Having bought Satan's lie and rejected the truth of God, man is now bound to the god of this world whose media continually expose and condemn the corruption of our lives (Gen. 3:5; John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-4; Heb. 2:14f.; I John 3:8; 4:19).

Forced by emotional need and the craving for security, man seeks to save himself and advance himself in the idols he spawns from his corrupt imagination. These range from the worship of the creation to the building of status empires, to an affiliation with the orthodox Christian god whom he makes to be his highest good in order to serve his needs (Rom. 1:18-2:29).

SIN'S POWER LIES IN ITS GUILT

The sinner is in debt to sin and is its bondsman (John 8:34; Rom. 6:16; 8:5-8; contrast Rom. 8:12). Romans 3:9 says man is driven by sin, so that the catena of the Old Testament in verses 10-18 does not discriminate between the world and the Church.

Sin not only grips its servants because they choose it, but the servant of sin now resents the one against whom he has rebelled. Guilt and the apprehension of judgement conjoined with the certainty of death stirs up the egotist to deny the reality of death, forces

him to find relief in more sin or pressures him to atone for his sins. The slave usually vacillates between both. But either way the person in this state adds sin to sin (Rom. 1:32; 5:12; 6:23; Heb. 9:27; I Cor. 15:56; Heb. 2:14f.; I John 4:18).

THE RELIGIOUS ROAD BLOCK

Someone has said that religion is the loftiest summit in the land of sin. Religious man leaves the region of mere worldliness and uses the law to ascend to the summit. Under religion we should subsume the whole realm of persistence, endurance, commitment and the deepest self of people as well as that function which organizes human groups to move upward towards God.

Once I have surrendered to this pilgrimage the law exposes my failure to live up to my ideals and what the law commands. Again, the guilt entailed by the action of the law inflames the smouldering corruption into a raging fire. Religion now overwhelms me and imprisons me and becomes the grand inquisitor (Rom. 3:19f.; 4:15; 5:20f.; 7:7-13; Gal. 3:19-29).

Like Marcion of old there are those who wave the flag against the law, the Church, theology and religion. But it is naive to think that we can escape from bondage or sin by removing ourselves from religion and taking up with some superior thing, even if that were possible. The new thing we set up has its alternative law, becomes the new religion, and the new bondage. 'All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.'

There is no escape. All are under the condemnation of the law. Neither religion nor irreligion is any advantage. For man there is no way he can ever be free. But there is grace. The unimaginable, unexpected, unmanageable, incredible grace of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:20).

STUDY 2

Liberation Theology-I



(Rev. Ian Pennicook)

Liberation theology is an approach to the understanding and practice of the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed.

In the language of Gustavo Gutierrez (b. 1928), 'The starting point of liberation theology is commitment to the poor, the 'non-person'. Its ideas come from the victim.' Two Brazilian priests, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, speak of it as a kind of 'chemical reaction': faith + oppression → liberation theology.¹

While having its primary focus on Latin America, Liberation Theology has affected theological action in other contexts, e.g. 'Black theologies' which are concerned with racist oppression, and other movements concerned to correct what are regarded as manifest injustices.

Some of its criticisms of the behaviour of much of our 'Western' approach to theology strike home with great accuracy and power. For example, liberation theologians stress that theology is not

¹ H. M. Conn, *Liberation Theology*, 'New Dictionary of Theology', Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988, p. 388.

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something upon which we merely meditate, or about which we write; it is what we must do (cf. James 2:1-7, 14-17; I John 3:17-18). It also exposes the way we can actually use our theological rationalizations to avoid dealing with the obvious needs of men and women around us. If nothing else, Liberation Theology appears to take seriously the problems faced by men and women living in what is so often a world of oppression and suffering.

Generally Liberation Theology refers to the social and ecclesiastical contexts of Latin America. David Kingdom² lists a number of elements contributing to the rise of Liberation Theology. First there was the growing realization that the post-colonial era did not issue in the promised freedom for the masses. Associated with this was the fact that the expectations of the poor had been dramatically raised, particularly as a result of the communication explosion which followed the Second World War. Then it became clear that the developments in modern technology, and especially in modern medicine, were rapidly destroying the notion that semi-starvation, the ravages of epidemics, etc. were (are) inevitable.

The end of the Second World War also saw the strengthening of Marxism as a dominant ideology, and the Latin American world was also strongly affected by the social analysis of the Marxists. The church (meaning principally the Roman Catholic Church) was not exempt from this influence. One critic of Liberation Theology³ argues that Liberation Theology grew out of an already deficient Christianity in Latin America. Roman Catholicism was substantially pagan, having absorbed and having been absorbed into the previously dominant pagan religions/cultures. While Latin America was, and is, nominally Christian, there arose the question of how the church could accomplish change, first in the light of what has been described as 'the institutionalized violence' which prevails

² The Gospel of Violence, Carey Publications, n.d.

³ Russell Shedd, Sin and Salvation in Latin America, Theological Fraternity Bulletin, No. 4, 1980.

throughout Latin America⁴, and then in the light of its previous failure, and yet still retain its position of dominance. (It should be stressed that Liberation Theology is by no means the exclusive domain of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵) Elsewhere, Marxism had meant the often violent suppression of the church(es).

Padilla lists four factors contributing to the change in thinking in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America.⁶ The first was the entry of a number of progressive Roman Catholic organizations into Latin America and the issuing of 'certain Papal Encyclicals' which encouraged a significant degree of 'ferment and discussion'. Padilla observes:

Then we have the famous encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. If you want to see the beginnings of liberation theology in some ways you can find them there in that encyclical which came out in 1967.

Second was the meeting of bishops from all over Latin America at Medellin in 1968. There the bishops began to speak in terms of 'international monetary imperialism', etc., with the result that the gathering

allows us to begin to think differently...Beyond 'developmentalism' a new posture is to be found which rapidly influences theology and creates a new language, a whole new economic, political and of course theological interpretation of liberation.

Another writer has documented the conclusion of the Medellin assembly:

The Church's mission, Medellin proclaimed, was, in obedience to Christ's command, 'liberation of the poor':

⁴ Rene Padilla, *Liberation Theology*, 'Interchange', No. 28, 1980, p. 32.

⁵ Pope John Paul II has repeatedly spoken against priests holding political office. He has also spoken very firmly against Marxist Liberation Theology, provoking significant opposition in some situations. The result has often been a division between the Marxists (including liberation theologians) and the Church; see Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1987, p. 287, etc.; also Conn, p. 388f.

⁶ *op. cit.*, p. 32ff.

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‘Through defective structures in industry and agriculture, in the national and international economy, in political and cultural life, whole populations lack the barest necessities and live in such a state of dependence that all initiative and responsibility are denied them....This situation demands global changes....It is not surprising that the temptation to violence should appear in Latin America. It is wrong to lay such burdens on the people’s patience.’⁷

The *third* factor, he suggests, was the deterioration of the situation in Latin America in the 1960s. U.S. aid to Latin America, ostensibly given to contain Marxism, was seen by many to be merely helping the rich get richer while the poor got poorer. This resulted in people becoming more radical. Initially, especially among the Protestants, the thinking, he says, was ‘very Biblical, and there was very little attempt, if any, to relate the gospel to Marxist ideology’. But in the years following, the worsening social situation led to a more radical shift towards the Marxist solution that major structural changes were needed in society, even to the possibility of the overthrow of governments. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic thinking was converging at this point. Of course Liberation Theology finds such things as denominational distinctives as an abstract diversion from the real issues.

The *fourth* factor was the influence of a number of European theologians, such as Jurgen Moltmann and others who developed ‘the so-called political theology in Europe’, even though liberation theologians tend to have a very negative attitude towards them. The chief reason why they are so critical is that ‘its proponents are not committed in practice to changing society, only to explaining and criticizing it’, whereas Liberation Theology is defined by Gustavo Gutierrez as ‘critical reflection on historical praxis in the light of the Faith’. Liberation theologians ‘insist that theirs is a new way of doing theology’. This is why Miguez calls his book *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Age*.

⁷ Robert White, *God and Caesar in Latin America*, 'Interchange' No. 22, 1977, p. 120.

It has sometimes been assumed that Liberation Theology is merely religious Marxism. Thus, one Mexican theologian, Jose Miranda, has said, ‘We are all riding on Marx’s shoulders’.⁸ However, many liberation theologians argue strongly that they use

‘Marxism purely as an instrument’.....They ‘maintain a decidedly critical stance in relation to Marxism. Marx (like any other Marxist) can be a companion on the way..... but he can never be the guide because ‘You have only one teacher, the Christ’ (Matt. 23:10). This being so, Marxist materialism and atheism do not even constitute a temptation for liberation theologians’.⁹

Under the heading ‘Marxism and Liberation Theology’, Geoffrey Bingham lists five suggested answers to the question, ‘What is to be done about [the tragedies in the world]?’¹⁰ The first is a form of passive optimism: ‘Submit to what is, i.e. the status quo, and God will work it all out’. The second, described as ‘an ethical cop-out’, is that of ‘eschatological cynicism, ‘The world is sinful. It brings its own misery upon itself. Things will get worse and worse....and this portends the end. We must not interfere with God’s judgements’’. The third is that of ‘gradualism’, working within the system to accomplish change, or at least the offering of only passive resistance. The fourth answer is that of revolution, the sweeping away of the present system and its replacement with a better system. The fifth answer rejects all the above and looks to the Marxist analysis for the solution.

Speaking of the way in which ‘gradualism’ (i.e. the process of gradual change) seems so useless in solving the problems of men and women¹¹, David Kingdom¹² says:

⁸ Conn, art. cit. p. 389.

⁹ L. & C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, New York, 1987, p. 28. The manifest failure of structural Marxism, as distinct from Marxist analysis, need not make major differences in Liberation Theology.

¹⁰ *The Christian Revolution: Liberation Theology*, (Living Faith Studies, vol. 5) NCPI, 1981, p. 59.

¹¹ According to the Boff brothers, the answer to the problems of the poor is not ‘aid’, but the enabling of the oppressed ‘to become their own liberators....Reformism seeks to improve the situation of the poor, but always within existing social relationships and the basic structuring of society, which rules out greater participation by all and the diminution in the privileges enjoyed by the ruling classes’ (op. cit., p. 5). They point out that development in the Brazilian economy actually made things worse for the poor.

¹² op. cit., p. 5.

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Now we are in a position to appreciate why Christians involved in the revolutionary struggle in South America are so powerfully attracted to Marxism. It provides them both with a theoretical tool which helps them to understand their situation from a revolutionary standpoint, and it offers them a programme for radical structural change in the direction of a truly new society. Marxism, although not accepted uncritically, does appear to offer what neither capitalism nor liberal reformism is able to do: Justice for the poor in a radically new society. So, to quote a Chilean Marxist Christian, 'Our socialist conviction is the product of our reformist experience; Capitalism, modernized with some elements of agrarian reform, proved unable to obtain growth. At the same time, we come to understand that a socialist perspective cannot be built except in the complete social and political unity of the working people.

The Marxist analysis of society made prominent a number of factors which are now generally taken for granted, such as alienation, exploitation and oppression. We will see how these elements feature strongly in the way that Liberation Theology views itself. However, Liberation Theology claims to be motivated and directed, not by these Marxist categories, but by the discovery of Biblical models of revolution which allow the development of a theology of revolution.

It is at this point that we are placed in a dilemma. The Biblical language of the liberation theologian and the Biblical language which we use, although sounding the same, are actually vastly different. It is also important to note that, while we may be initially confronted by the explanations offered by Latin American theologians, their approach to the Scriptures has been adopted (absorbed) by a large element of the church in the West and, for us, in particular, in Australia. Terms such as the poor, salvation, the Kingdom of God, etc. do not mean to them what they mean to us. That assumes, of

course, that we ourselves really do know what they mean. Part of the problem in Latin America was a church adrift from a clear Biblical understanding of God, man, sin and salvation¹³ and so open to some other understanding which could give content to the traditional language. This is not so very different in essence, even if it is in scale, to the dangers faced in Australia and elsewhere today.

Besides this, Padilla reminds us that much of our theology may also be the result of our own ideological context. For example, we may be theologically conservative not because we are first and foremost convinced that this is the true Biblical position, but simply because we are ourselves conservative.¹⁴ The next step may well be that our conservative theology actually reinforces our conservatism and our lack of praxis.

As an example of the differences in language we may take the category, the poor. Luke's 'Blessed are the poor' (6:20) is expressed by Matthew as 'blessed are the poor in spirit' (5:3), referring to those who counted themselves as nothing and so those who could know the presence and the blessing of God.¹⁵ Against this, the Boff brothers tell us that

By 'poor' we do not mean the poor individual who knocks on the door asking for alms. We mean a collective poor, the 'popular classes'....the poor are also the workers exploited by the capitalist system; the underemployed, those pushed aside by the production process--a reserve army always at hand to take the place of the employed; they are the labourers of the countryside; and migrant workers with only seasonal work'.¹⁶

¹³ Karl Barth has said that theology is the church examining its own message: 'As a theological discipline, dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God' (Church Dogmatics, vol. i, Part 1, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1975, p. 3). In other words, we must not presume that our theological language is correct or that the people in the church are actually hearing what we say in the way that we understand it. There must be constant disciplined labour in the Scriptures. In this, Liberation Theology has its own explicit hermeneutic; see below on note 15.

¹⁴ Padilla, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁵ See Ian Pennicook, *Living in the Kingdom*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985, p. 8.

¹⁶ Boff, op. cit., p. 3.

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Preaching the gospel is, then, taken to mean that

We have to tell poor persons....that God loves them in a special way whatever moral or personal situation they find themselves in, because God in Jesus established solidarity with the poor, especially in his passion and death: For this reason alone, the poor merit preferential attention.... They are preferred by God and by Christ not because they are good, but because they are poor and wronged. God does not will the poverty they suffer.¹⁷

The theological reasons for focussing on the poor are said to be (i) the theological motivation, i.e. the character of God especially as demonstrated in the Exodus (see also Jer. 22:16, etc); (ii) the Christological motivation, i.e. Christ made the poor his first option; also his death and resurrection are to be regarded as revolutionary suffering, to be endured as the way to the goal, viz. the resurrection of a better society. Easter is seen by some as 'dying as members of the educated and privileged middle classes in order to be resurrected on the side of the oppressed'¹⁸ Again, Jesus is seen as a Zealot, or at least a sympathizer, committed to the overthrow of the Roman oppressor;¹⁹ (iii) the eschatological motivation:

The gospel of Jesus is quite clear on this point: at the supreme moment of history, when our eternal salvation or damnation will be decided, what will count will be our attitude of acceptance or rejection of the poor (Matt. 25:31-46)...Only those who commune in his history with the poor and needy, who are Christ's sacraments, will commune definitively with Christ.²⁰

¹⁷ op. cit., pp. 47, 48.

¹⁸ Kingdom, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹ Quite apart from questions of exegesis, this is an inaccurate view of the history of the period.

²⁰ Boff, op. cit., p. 45. This links with the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, 'who sees Christian hope in worldly terms...(quoting Moltmann's *Revolution and the Future*). The resurrection of Christ opens to us an earthly future, for a messianic stream of renewal runs through history from the Christ of God who died in this world and was raised into the coming new world of God's righteousness. In him there are, and always were found, not only the inner repentance and liberation of the heart, but also the reformation, renaissances and revolutions of external conditions' (Kingdom, op. cit., p. 9).

and (iv) the ecclesiastical motivation, i.e. the attitude and action of the early church. These elements, it is argued, demand that the doing of justice requires structural change and not merely an interpersonal relationship with God. In 1973, the World Council of Churches meeting in Bangkok declared:

- (a) Salvation works in the struggle for economic justice against the exploitation of people by people;
- (b) ...in the struggle for human dignity against political oppression of human beings by their fellow men;
- (c) ...in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person;
- (d) ...in the struggle for hope against despair in personal life.

Liberation theologians do not claim that theirs is the only way to read the Scriptures, although they do claim that theirs is the most relevant to the poor in their situation of oppression.²¹ In language (at least) superficially reminiscent of some 'process theology', the Boff brothers say that

The God who pitied the down-trodden and the Christ who came to set prisoners free proclaim themselves with a new face and in a new image today. The eternal salvation they offer is mediated by the historical liberations that dignify the children of God and render credible the coming utopia of the kingdom of freedom, justice, love and peace, the kingdom of God in the midst of human kind.²²

While we may find it necessary to criticize the language and the presuppositions of the liberation theologians (indeed, it has been repeatedly said that 'adjectival theology' is always a distortion, because, at best, it 'absolutizes' some element²³), in general we do

²¹ They refer to the 'Hermeneutic of Liberation'.

²² Boff, *op. cit.*, p. 8f.

²³ The same applies to Black and Feminist theologies, etc., as well as Wombat Theology.

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well to heed their conclusion that an understanding of Liberation Theology requires active participation in the process:

The criticisms made of liberation theology by those who judge it on a purely conceptual level must be seen as radically irrelevant. Liberation theology responds to such criticisms with just one question: What part have you played in the effective and integral liberation of the oppressed?²⁴

While this rejection of criticism is possibly as ‘obscurantist’ as that which they accuse others of holding, there is a sense in which criticism of which they speak is truly irrelevant.

²⁴ Boff, op. cit., p. 9.

STUDY THREE

The Freedom of Worship-I



(Martin Bleby)

Numbers 7: A sample of near-perfect worship. (A long chapter, with much repetition. Gordon J. Wenham, ‘much redundant repetition--? Good News Bible summarizes in list form. But the original Hebrew was written out in full, in a document that is very economical in its use of words. I Timothy 4:13, ‘attend to the public reading of scripture-, i.e. aloud.)

Note the Lord’s acceptance of the offering of each tribe, His appreciation of its every detail, as ordained by Him. Each offering is full and complete. Every tribe is fully represented.

This is but the beginning, the dedication of the altar, the inauguration of ‘the worship- (Rom. 9:4), under the Old Covenant. And at the end of this, Moses ‘heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat- (v. 89).

If that happens at this point, what must it be like once the perfect offering has been made (Heb. 9:14)? And what must it signify concerning the ultimate outcome, when ‘the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved- (Rom. 11:25-26; see Rev. 7)!

These are the perimeters of our liberated worship.

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What are some of the constraints ('restrictions-?') we experience in our practice of worship and ministry, and how are we to view them?

For example:

Repetition-'do not heap up empty phrases [AV 'vain repetitions-) as the heathen do- (Matt. 6:7). But do not forbear to heap up full repetitions! (See I Tim. 4:6-11; II Tim. 4:1-5; Col. 3:16; Acts 20:18-32.) But not repetitiousness.

Time Scales-see Revelation 6:9-11 (cf. Heb. 12:4), Revelation 13:5-10. (See Geoffrey Bingham, *The Way and Wonder of Worship*, p. 317f.)

Imperfection-our own and other people's! (See Rom. 8:22-23; II Cor. 5:2-7.)

The basis of all our approach to worship is our justification. But it is not our justification, but God-s justification of us, and of Himself. (See Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*, p. 147.)

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, 'because the lord loves you'.

STUDY FOUR

Liberty In Apocalypse-I



(Geoffrey Bingham)

THE FREEDOM REVELATION BRINGS

INTRODUCTION-APOCALYPSIS AND FREEDOM

We discuss the nature and modes of apocalypse in our next section but the question is, ‘What does apocalypse have to do with freedom?’ The answer lies in a number of things, primarily that we can be free from fear and anxiety when we understand the sovereignty of God. When we know He is constantly working in the universe, then we have no need for fear. In the midst of difficult matters we can know all things are being worked together for our good by God. Though we suffer for the Gospel and by our fellowship in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:35-36; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24), yet we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37-39). There is nothing we cannot overcome, even if it means our death. We have the assurance a true theodicy brings. We-the members of Christ’s church-can go about life calmly. As Pastors we must be able to convey this to our flocks.

THE NATURE AND MODES OF APOCALYPSIS

What is apocalypse? It is simply ‘revelation’ or ‘unveiling’. There are many ways in which God brings revelation through the media such as creation, the law, the prophets, theophanies, dreams and visions, Christ, the Spirit and the church, but this particular mode of revelation in the Old and the New Testaments is known to readers of the Scriptures. We find its origins in the prophetic Books, especially those of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and some minor prophets, whilst there are elements of it in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The Book of the Revelation is soaked through with references from the Old Testament. In this Book which has 404 verses, 518 references are from the Old Testament. The substance of apocalyptic literature is God, who He is, what He does, and the action of God’s plan and His people. The writing is in cryptic form, i.e. it is describing things under language of a symbolic nature, under other figures, and so disguising them, and yet at the same time revealing them to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. This kind of writing employs symbols, images and pictures which are generally fantastic, i.e. not literal, even though they are actual. This has led readers to think that all apocalyptic writing is coded-discover the code and you will unveil the mystery. This is not the case.

For example, we read of a ‘bottomless pit’, but by nature of the case there can be no such thing. Even so, everyone has had one experience or another of a ‘bottomless pit’ even in one’s own stomach! Thus such a pit can actually exist even though it cannot be literally-i.e. literalistically-in existence.

The Substance of Apocalyptic Literature

If we take the Books mentioned above and read their apocalyptic passages we find images and symbols that would make nonsense if they were literally as described. Literal description would also demand literal geographical and time placement and alter the whole

purpose and intent of apocalyptic. In fact literalistic interpretation has brought many problems in its wake. In Daniel 7 we have ‘dreams and visions’ which Daniel had in his head, by night. These concern ‘the four winds of heaven’ which ‘stir up the great sea’ and produce ‘four great beasts from the sea’. The beasts arise from ‘the beastliness’ of the nations and are themselves nations. In the Book of the Revelation there are also two significant beasts, one arising from the sea, and one from the earth, and they oppose God and His people. All these things happen in history, happen in time and space, and are communicated prophetically. Without apocalyptic we would not really know what happens in the world apart from our sight and hearing which are then interpreted by our intelligence, and since hearing and intelligence are not sufficient we would not understand what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine ourselves without such apocalypsis.

UNDERSTANDING APOCALYPSIS

The first thing we should do in order to comprehend this kind of writing is to see that it is from God, through prophetic utterance, and so is a direct communication rather than one which gives us reasoned conclusions. That is why we should read and re-read these prophecies. We will soon find they have symbols which are quite intelligible and which are-for the most part-common to the whole Bible. Since apocalyptic is not a code we will not need to decode. We can let the principles stand in themselves-the principles which are communicated to us. The picture will generally emerge of itself, or it will imprint its message inwardly as one which we cannot always articulate. If we look at some of the phrases and terms following we may realize we have already incorporated these into our thinking, even though we cannot point to them literally in history—‘the woman who was to bring forth the child’, ‘the great

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red dragon’, ‘the beast’, ‘the man of sin’, ‘the mystery of lawlessness’, ‘the sign of the Son of man’, ‘a thousand years’, ‘the false prophet’, ‘the antichrist’, ‘the battle of Armageddon’, ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, ‘the holy city’, ‘the marriage of the bride and the Lamb’.

FREEDOM IN APOCALYPSIS

The four studies we are having on this theme show us that when we know apocalypsis as planned and fulfilled by God then we are assured of His sovereignty. We are convinced that from beginning to end God is active, and working out His own will-in the face of opposition by rebellious angels and fallen human beings. We are assured that the creation is not the plaything of alien forces, and we are assured that judgements will come to evil forces, and that redemption will come to the penitent. We are assured of true theodicy-God working properly in a world in which evil exists and emerging as righteous in His judgements and His actions.

Pastorally all of this is immensely important and valuable. Without such a background of thinking, our preaching is out of context. Without personal assurance of God’s sovereignty we are at the hands of accusing enemies and we cannot speak authentic ‘Peace!’ to our people. They themselves are not properly oriented to history, to the acts of the living God and to the glorious promises which will eventuate in the ultimate inheritance, and appropriate rewards.

STUDY FIVE

The Liberating Ministry-1



(Grant Thorpe)

INTRODUCTION

My focus is on the person who brings liberation to others by his or her ministry.

This ministry assumes that we ourselves are not encumbered by guilt or shame, secret sins or idols, or the condemnation or self-righteousness of the law. It presumes that we are not seduced by Babylon (come out from among them!). It requires that we are not fearful of public opinion, suffering, deprivation, the practicality of our wives, the needs of our parishioners, our vocational needs, or of not accomplishing all there is to do.

The meaning of being free is to have no masters but God.

There is no programme or structure which can ensure liberty, only Christ speaking to and personally present to persons. This is what we read in Acts concerning the early days of the church.

In communication terms, the medium is the message. Therefore, the messengers of liberation must themselves be free (cf. Phil. 1:28).

LUKE 4:14-30

Christ knew that the ministry of Israel to the nations was now focussed in him as the Servant of God. We, the church, know that our ministry is the continuance of all that Jesus began to do and to teach. In seeing Christ going about his liberating ministry, we know what we are to be about and how we are to attend to it.

Jesus was anointed with the Spirit, to preach good news. We likewise, have been anointed (John 20:21-23; Luke 24:46-49). Therefore, there is nothing uncertain about our ministry.

Jesus ministered to the poor (cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20; Isa. 66:2), and the brokenhearted, the oppressed-to comfort all who mourn, etc. He saw himself setting Israel free from a Babylonian captivity-as in Isaiah 61:1-4. We need to be familiar with the ubiquity of ‘Babylon’, and of ‘Babylon’ as a surrogate mother city, as also, the place to which God delivers us up when we refuse his covenant provisions. We then know from what captors we and our people need to be set free.

Note the way in which Paul brought this freedom to his people at Corinth (II Cor. 6:17).

Jesus opened the eyes of the blind (cf. John 9:39), along with numerous other physical cures and spiritual kindnesses which were indicative of the day of favour (Matt. 11:4-6).

He saw himself *announcing the beginning of the year of Jubilee* (Lev. 25:8-10), the time when those who had become poor and sold themselves and/or their lands were reinstated. This, then, is the freedom we announce, no matter what misdemeanours have brought people to their present plight.

Jesus would have known the wider context in Isaiah-that those whom he liberated would be established in righteousness and would minister to the nations. That is, the freedom Christ came to bring to Israel was to re-establish their persons by his blessing, and the nation in its vocation of bringing light to the world.

The Scripture Jesus read was fulfilled before their eyes. The

actions of his ministry were evidence that he was the Servant of the Lord (Luke 7:22-23). While they could retain their domestic understanding of everything, their hostility was concealed. But now the liberating Servant was before them, and the resulting confrontation could not be avoided.

Jesus was gracious in his speech. Elsewhere, people could not but remark on his wisdom (Matt. 13:54).

He understood their hostility ('...do your works here!'), and put it in a biblical context.

Is the source of their hostility that a local could 'get ahead' of them-i.e. envy? (cf. I Sam. 17:28). Or is it envy that other towns received his favours before they did?

Christ shows that their presumption of favours for 'locals' was misplaced, particularly now that the Messianic age had arrived. In fact the Scripture indicated that they should delight in God's favours to the nations.

The ministry that presumes to set people free encounters the already established 'freedoms' (as also in John 8:31-59), self-justifications, etc., and is greeted with hostility-as in the case of Cain. The sight of a free man or woman is offensive to those entrapped in another system-and all must have some system of justification. We should not be frightened by this arousal of jealousy concerning Christian freedom. Compare with Paul, who made much of his ministry to the Gentiles in order to arouse the Jews to jealousy (Rom. 11:13-14).

The townspeople treated Jesus as a false prophet (Deut. 13:1-5). But the Lord kept his Son from their malice until his 'hour' had come.

We may ask if we are ready for a ministry of liberation. It is a word that is sweet to taste but bitter as we encounter its rejection by those who could be free. But we are preserved to give our testimony until our testimony is complete (Rev. 10-11).

STUDY SIX

The Liberating Action of Christ



(Deane Meatheringham)

LIBERATION IS THROUGH THE SAVING HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Romans 4:23-25 says that in the ledger of life entries are transferred from God's account to man's account so that God credits those who believe that he raised Jesus from the dead, with his righteousness. It is Jesus the man who is made Lord through his atoning death and the conquest of that death.

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 seems to be in Paul's mind here; the Servant who so identifies with his people that he bears their sin by becoming their sin. On their behalf the Servant intercedes for them and through his knowledge of God (fulfilled through his experience of suffering) many others will participate in his righteousness.

Our justification is directly linked with the resurrection of Jesus the Lord in Romans 4:23-25. The Cross and the Resurrection are all one work so that without the Cross, the Resurrection could not save, for sin as sin would not have been put to death, and if there

was no resurrection sin would have vindicated itself. Therefore, if there was no resurrection there is no justification.

But the resurrection of Jesus for our justification seems to mean more. John Calvin's comment on Romans 4:25 is, 'The power of justification, therefore, which overcame death is ascribed to His resurrection, not because the sacrifice of the cross, by which we are reconciled to God, has in no way contributed to our justification, but because the perfection of this grace is revealed more clearly in His new life.' His new life is the glorified life of the incarnate Son of God who joined himself to our humanity and who joined our humanity to God. Christology alone protects the doctrine of justification from misunderstanding. The resurrection of Jesus affirms our humanity before God telling us that we share in his new humanity and in his righteousness, his sonship, etc. (Rom. 5:9, 18; 6:4, 10; Gal. 2:20; etc.).

CHRISTUS VICTOR

As he was created, man was ordained to reign over the creation, and as a son of God was called to bring creation to its goal. By revolt and in selling his birthright man was doomed to death, became captive to the devil's power, and a slave to the tyrants of this evil age. In becoming man Jesus the incarnate Son of God defeats the tyrants and gaolers, crushing them when he overcomes them in his victorious death. Jesus Christ tramples our sins in the winepress of God's wrath, thereby breaking the hold which the powers have by reason of our guilty fear. The cheering cry of the prisoners is 'Jesus is risen! Jesus is Lord!' (Rom. 4:24-25; 10:9ff.; I Cor. 8:6; II Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:3-5; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 1:13f.; 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15; I John 3:8).

God's righteousness is his personal power which puts what is wrong in the right, or in the truth. It is the grace which pulls sin up by the roots and judges every perversion of the good. It is by

condemning evil that God righteously saves us from it (Isa. 46:12f.; 45:8; Hosea 2:19f.; Rom. 1:16f.). God reveals his eschatological righteousness in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21ff.). This is his saving judgement of the world; God's victory amid the opposition of the world. All human insubordination and self-righteousness come to destruction in the cross of Christ and God's sovereign power reclaims the world.

The present reign of Jesus Christ as Lord of history is in continuity with his resurrection. What was a final and decisive moral conquest in Jesus' death and resurrection is continuing as rebels capitulate to his love, and as he continues to save his people by his intervening life (Rom. 5:10; 8:34; Heb. 4:14-16).

JUSTIFIED BY THE FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

The forensic meaning of the word 'justify' is to 'condemn' as well as 'vindicate'. Thus if a person is guilty they are put right by being condemned, because justification always involves the fulfilling of righteousness, or the enacting of the truth. If a person is innocent he is put in the right by being judged guiltless, and is set free.

But the justification of God is a personal, relational matter, so that when the Lord credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness it meant that Abraham was in a true relationship with God (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). With this new status there is a perfecting of the relationship between God and man. To be justified by God is to be 'righteoused' by him, and as righteousness and justice are personal attributes of God they are modes of relationship.

So, according to Romans 4:1-8, the justified man has had the debt of his sin cancelled. For the ungodly to be justified is astonishing for it means that he is no longer offensive to God, he now has God's approval and participates in God's righteousness (Jer. 23:5-6).

For the ungodly to be made righteous in truth can only become a concrete reality in Jesus Christ. God's righteousness is revealed through 'the faithfulness of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe' (Rom. 3:22). Jesus is our kinsman redeemer who liberates his people from their debts and their bondage which in this case is the condemnation and bondage of sin (Lev. 25:24-28, 47-54; Ruth 4:1-6; Rom. 3:24; cf. Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 1:18f.; Rev. 5:9).

By his incarnation the Son of God joined himself to our human flesh. He becomes our kinsman, our brother, bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh (John 1:14; Heb. 2:10-18). Faithfully Jesus does the Father's will, he worships, serves, loves, and gives himself for us and on our behalf. Jesus' solidarity with us as our fraternal brother means that he not only shares in the family shame but he submits to the judgement of the Father upon our sin which he assumed in our humanity (Gal. 4:4-5; Phil. 2:8; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 2:24; Isa. 52:13-53:12). According to Romans 3:25 it is in Christ's solidarity with us that he experiences the inferno of our sins in making atonement (cf. Lev.16:1-34).

The ungodly are justified by being condemned; they are acquitted by being judged; they are not saved by escaping judgement but by going through the judgement (John 5:24; Rom. 6:6f.; II Cor. 5:14f.; Gal. 2:19-20). The ungodly are freed from the condemnation of the law, the gaoler no longer can hold them prisoner: the idols, the tyrants and sin itself are stripped of their power (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1-4; Heb. 2:14-15; I John 4:18; Gal. 1:4; 6:14; Rom. 6:14).

What we must not lose sight of is that God justifies us in the Son of God whom he sent as our human high priest (Heb. 3:1). Justification is not a legal transaction as such, even though it is in accord with the law, but is realized in the person of Jesus Christ. Neither must we teach that justification is a process of development which requires the mediatorial priesthood of any human being. Christ is our only human mediator (I Tim. 2:5). Our justification is a once for all gift of grace (Rom. 3:28).

JUSTIFICATION IS A BESTOWAL OF POSITIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

In our union with Jesus Christ, his obedience, his sonship and his righteousness become ours. In his Name we come into the presence of the Father (II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:6). Therefore our liberation is not only the acquittal of all our sins through Christ, but the positive sharing in his divine-human righteousness. We are liberated not only by the death which he died for our sakes but by the life he lived for our sakes in his flesh, which God raised from the dead so that we might participate in it through the Holy Spirit. 'Justification is not the beginning of a new self-righteousness, but the perpetual end of it, for it is a perpetual living in Christ, from a centre and source beyond us. To be justified is to be lifted up above and beyond ourselves to live out of the risen and ascended Christ, and not out of ourselves' (T. F. Torrance, *Theology Of Reconstruction*, SCM, p. 152).

For Jesus our Lord to be put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification, has great power for the Pastor who has discovered some sin in himself and has lost sight of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; and for our work and ministry it lifts us out of the weariness of humanistic endeavour to know that the whole of our service reposes in the living Lord. It is Christ himself who has us in him, and our ministry, with our deficiencies, is whole and right and true in Christ.

STUDY SEVEN

Liberty in Apocalypse-II



© (Geoffrey Bingham)

THE FREEDOM OF HOPE: HOPE AND APOCALYPSIS

In eschatology we have a number of things to consider. The eschaton is the last age in which all things are fulfilled, but then in one sense there has been eschatological expectation and action since Genesis 3:15 (cf. Heb. 11-39). The telos is the goal of that eschatological promise and action. The things of the telos are the resurrection, the judgements, the glorification of the body, eternal life, the inheritance, the fulfilment of the elect as the sons of God, their being made ‘a kingdom and priests’ to God and the creation, their reigning upon the earth, and their reigning forever.

Not one of these things can happen unless planned and promised by God. If promised then they must come to pass. Apocalypse is the unveiling of the processes by which the eschatological is being brought to fulfilment. These elements of revelation are indispensable to the believer so that he knows what has happened, is happening, and will happen, and so see his own life, vocation and participation

in that action. This is all based on the fact that God is the living God, i.e. always working, always fulfilling His plan. In other words, apocalypse makes no real sense except in the processes of salvation history. We must, then, understand what is salvation history. We must see history as planned by God the First Cause, the Prime Mover, and the purposeful One. All history relates to the salvation of creation and so to its ultimate renewal and triumph.

Note: If our people do not have an understanding of salvation history, then they are ignorant of the truth which can shape their proper thinking. See Jonathan Edwards, *The History of Redemption* (Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.), and my *Salvation History* (NCPI, n.d.).

GOD-WHO WAS, AND IS, AND IS TO COME

For ‘was, and is, and is to come’, see Revelation 1:4, 8, 17; 2:8; 4:8; 22:13; cf. 17:7-14. It may be axiomatic to think of God as always having been, being, and as being in the future, and as acting in all these times and tenses, but that is saying very little. It is what God is to His creation which matters, and how He acts towards it from beginning to the end which is significant, and which affects our thinking, our faith, our hope and what we ourselves do in our actions. What God ‘was’ and did during that period is basic for us now, and basic for what God ‘is’ and is doing now, as well as for what He ‘will be’ and so will do in the future (cf. Isa. 46:8-11; 48:3-8, 12-13). If we are historicist or futurist in our interpretation of apocalypse then it will be of little value to us in the present. The main point is this-God is working now, and His promises are being fulfilled now, and we are participating in apocalypse now! Without such an understanding and participation the congregation will be uninvolved in salvation history. It will recede into itself and be static, simply concerned with its-but unrelated-entity.

WHAT GOD AND HIS CHURCH ARE DOING NOW, WITHIN SALVATION HISTORY AND ITS APOCALYPSIS

The endings of the four Gospels with what are called their ‘great commission’ passages (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:19-23) with Acts 1:8 (cf. Acts 26:16-18) tell us what the church is about. I Corinthians 15:24-28 tells us what Christ is about now, which is what the church is about, which is the conquest of the nations as set out in Genesis 49:10; Psalm 2; 110; with Romans 1:5; 15:18-19; 16:25-26; cf. Revelation 7:9-15. Another way of saying this is that Christ is unifying all things (Eph. 1:9-10), reconciling all things (Col. 1:19-21) and filling up all things (Eph. 4:10), and is doing this out of his own fullness (pleroma) which is the church, his body (Eph. 1:23). We will see in our next two studies, the events of I Corinthians 15:24-28 are virtually those of the Book of the Revelation, and as such are the events in which we are involved.

PRESENT FREEDOM IN APOCALYPTIC RECOGNITION, ACTION AND PARTICIPATION

It stands to reason that functional freedom happens when man is doing the will of God. Soteriological freedom (freedom from sin’s bondage) comes through the Atonement, experiential freedom comes through obeying the law of Christ and this is linked with participation in his plan-God’s salvation history. Only when our people are acquainted with the life and work of the church as sharing in Christ’s mission can there be functional freedom within the congregation. It is our duty to teach this reality and draw out genuine participation.

STUDY EIGHT

The Dispensation of Liberty

(II Cor. 3)



(Noel Due)

INTRODUCTION

For a more detailed exegesis of this section, and other key passages in II Corinthians, see the notes for the Pastors' School of 1987. Some of the material which follows has been reproduced from there.

Paul came to Corinth with nothing to preach but Christ crucified (I Cor. 2:2) and he shared the Gospel with integrity of heart and method (I Cor. 1:17; 2:1; cf. Acts 20:22ff.; I Thess. 2:1-12; etc.). He thus laid a pure foundation upon which others were to build (I Cor. 3:10f.; cf. II Cor. 11:1ff.), the 'others' probably including Peter and Apollos (I Cor. 1:10ff.). After remaining at Corinth for at least 18 months (Acts 18:1-11), he was forced by circumstances to leave the city, ultimately to arrive at Ephesus (Acts 18:18ff.).

While at Ephesus Paul kept in touch with the state of the Corinthian church through letters and messengers. It is clear from I Corinthians 5:9 that he had written a letter to the church

(‘Corinthians A’) which is now lost. Members of the church had visited Paul (I Cor. 1:11; cf. the official party of I Cor. 16:17ff.), probably delivering to him the letter mentioned in I Corinthians 7:1. The reply to this letter is our I Corinthians.

The problems existing in the church are well known. Party spirit, immorality, litigations, abuses of the Lord’s Supper, abuses of the gifts, disagreements about marriage and food offered to idols, as well as theological anomalies regarding the teaching on the resurrection, all appear in the letter. However, the point that is of primary relevance to us is the questioning of Paul’s apostleship (I Cor. 4:3, 15; 9:1f.) and the attitude of spiritual ‘arrogance’ associated with this (cf. I Cor. 4:6ff.; 4:18f.; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4f.; II Cor. 12:20).

Though the historical reconstructions of the sequence of events following the delivery of I Corinthians to the church are quite varied¹, it would seem that Paul wrote at least one more letter to the Corinthian Christians that has been lost to us (‘Corinthians C’). Our II Corinthians is thus probably the fourth letter of Paul’s to the church in Corinth. Sometime after I Corinthians had been written (though this is an argument from silence) the Corinthian church was assailed by a group of persons who represented themselves as servants of Christ in the apostolic sense, i.e. they were claiming to be apostles of Christ with an authority rivalling that of Paul. Clearly many of the members of the church were convinced of their genuineness and were swayed by their arguments.

What was the identity of these false teachers? From II Corinthians 11:22, 23 we can gather that they were Judaizing Jews from Jerusalem who were claiming to be servants of Christ. Their message was in some ways very similar to the Gospel that Paul preached (11:4; cf. 11:13; 15). They sought to commend themselves (cf. 11:18) and they also came with and sought letters of

¹ For an excellent discussion of the issues involved, and for a reasonable reconstruction of events, see C. K. Barrett’s Introduction in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*.

commendation (3:1). Judging from verses such as 5:12 they took pride in appearance, but doubtless this means not so much one's physical form, but rather the appearance of being wise and spiritually powerful (5:13; 12:1; cf. Col. 2:18). Their boasting was in keeping with the prevailing Graeco-Roman social morals but well out of touch with the ethics of the Kingdom (cf. Mark 10:35ff.; Phil. 2: 1-11; etc.).

What they were saying about Paul can be fairly deduced from the way he writes. It seems that they were accusing him of being powerless (3:5), foolish (11:1, 16; etc.) and weak (10:1): a coward whose 'letters are weighty but [whose] bodily presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible' (10:10). Paul's Gospel appeared to them to be veiled, obscure and secretive (4:1ff.), and moreover it was preached by a man who did not love the Corinthians because he did not let them contribute to his personal needs (11:6ff.). Paul was worldly (10:3-6), having nothing of the numinous about him and not exuding charisma. Furthermore he operated in an underhanded way by craftiness and deceit (12:16) so that, all in all, he is not to be trusted and his Gospel is not to be adhered to. On the contrary *they* were **Úperlian apostoloi** (11:5; 12:11). Paul's coined word appears only here in the New Testament, though the use of the word **Úper** is common throughout II Corinthians 10-12 (e.g. 10:14; 12:7).

II Corinthians 3 thus forms part of Paul's apostolic defence. Of key importance, according to his argument in this chapter, is that he is the minister of the New Covenant, and as such the Gospel that he preaches brings men and women into liberty. This is something that the Old Covenant did not do, and indeed it could not. One must therefore hear and judge the message of the false apostles by the relationship it has to the law. Does their gospel, so-called, bring life or death? Is it the agent of liberty or slavery? Does it bring the unfading glory of righteousness, or does it minister condemnation? In short, despite whatever appearances may say, is it truly of the Spirit or is it not?

II CORINTHIANS 3:1-18

3:1. Having made the assertion that he does not carry on his ministry in impurity or deceit (2:14ff.), Paul is aware that his opponents at Corinth are likely to seize it as an opportunity to twist his words into a representation of Paul's self-adulation. Possibly they would have already picked up some earlier statements (e.g. I Cor. 4:16; 11:1) in order to condemn Paul on this score.² His point here is to affirm that his authority is not linked to earthly letters of commendation, but is from God.

3:2-3. Paul's letter of commendation is the church itself, as carried in his heart (cf. 6:11-13; 7:2f.). This internal letter is 'known and read by all men'. There is nothing hidden or esoteric about Paul's ministry. There is no need for confidential letters of commendation, that are read only by a few. Rather there is the open statement of the truth in the life of Paul himself.

This internal letter on Paul's heart has been manifest in the existence of the church at Corinth. As such it is Christ's letter of commendation. The congregation has been cared for by Paul (cf. 11:2ff.; I Thess. 2:11; I Cor. 4:15), but its existence is Christ's testimony to Paul's apostolic ministry. Since the church is not of human derivation it can be spoken of as having been written not with ink, 'but with the Spirit of the living God' (cf. Titus 3:4ff.; I Cor. 12:13; John 3:1-8; etc.). Moreover, this imperishable writing material has been used on 'hearts of flesh' not 'tablets of stone' (cf. Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:31ff.). Paul's allusion to the New Covenant passages will lead later in the chapter to the consideration of the nature of his ministry under the New Covenant. His mention of it here is preparatory to that

² 'Self-defence is almost impossible without self-commendation. S. Paul's opponents at Corinth made the former necessary, and then blamed him for the latter.' Quoted in Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.106.

discussion, but also to point the Corinthians to the fact that their experience of the Gospel has been inward. It has brought a change of heart and thus does not need external commendation (cf. the way Paul uses the experience of the Galatian converts in Gal. 3:1ff.). The tablets of flesh stand in contrast to the Mosaic tablets of stone, and this is one of the building blocks to Paul's larger argument in the chapter.

3:4. The authority for Paul's claim (that they are themselves all the commendation that Paul needs and that this commendation is linked to the ushering in of the New Covenant) is 'through Christ before God', i.e. there is no self-confidence on his part, as is made plain in the verses which follow.

3:5-6. Paul's adequacy is from God. There is no other basis for ministry (cf. I Cor. 15:10) and thus in the face of the great triumphalism of the false apostles, Paul is at pains to witness to his own weakness (cf. 4:7ff.; 5:18f.; 6:4ff.; 7:5f.; 11:23ff.; 12:9f.; 13:3f.). Nothing in Paul's ministry stands to its own credit, rather it is all to the credit of God who has made Paul³ the 'servant of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit' (in contrast to the false teachers who are by implication still ministering under the Old). Only the ministry of the Spirit in the New Covenant can bring life, for the Old 'kills' (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 7:9-11; Gal. 3:23ff.).

3:7-9. The ministry of the Old Covenant, Paul calls the 'ministry of death'. Through the Law, I died to the Law, he says elsewhere (cf. Deut. 27:26; 30:17-18; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 7:5; 7:9-11; etc.). This ministry of death, which comes through the commandment, was glorious in its inception, and Moses' face was aglow with the glory of God (cf. Exod. 34:29-35). By the argument of the lesser to the greater, the question naturally follows, 'how shall the ministry of

³ See Acts 9:3ff.; 26:16-18; 22:14f.; cf. I Tim. 1:12.

the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?’ The law was given for the purpose of grace. It was given under the covenant of promise, and to serve the covenant of promise. But it was not the covenant of promise, of itself. The one was a ‘ministry of condemnation’, the other is a ‘ministry of righteousness’. It is, in fact, the ministry of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 3:1ff.; 5:16). It is fading in comparison to the light of the glory of the Gospel that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The one was the shadow and the other is the substance.

3:10-11. The ministry of the law, which ‘had glory’ has now no glory ‘on account of the glory that surpasses it’. The old ministry had glory, even though it was ‘that which fades’, how much more, then, will glory attach to ‘that which remains’? (cf. I Cor. 3:10-15). In the context of Paul’s argument, however, that glory is not seen to be so by those whose eyes are still on the Old. In fact, Paul seems to be the most ‘unglorious’ of creatures (cf. I Cor. 4:6-13). But then, the Lord of Glory was not recognized when He came (I Cor. 2:8), so we must not look on the things which are seen (II Cor. 4:18). Here is the great difference between the true ministry of the Gospel and the false. The true lives in and by the exaltation of grace through faith. It is not related to sight, except of that which is set before it in hope. Where faith (so-called) has sight as its object, it is ministering condemnation, not liberty.

3:12-13. In the light of the surpassing excellence of the new ministry, and in the light of its abiding nature (i.e. ‘having such a hope’), Paul says ‘we use great boldness in our speech’ (cf. Acts 4:13, 29; II Cor. 7:4; Eph. 6:19; I Thess. 2:2; etc). This boldness, says Paul, is in contrast to Moses, who used to cover his face with a veil (cf. Exod. 34:33f.) Does this impugn Moses ministry? No, the fault is not in Moses, but in the covenant of which he was the minister. He had to cover his face, ‘that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away’.

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In this regard the word *telos* here is important. It can mean either terminus or goal (cf. Rom. 10:4). They could not see that which was to be revealed in Christ (cf. Eph. 3:5). Moses, by virtue of his office, had to speak in parables and types, to set forth the truth in various rituals and divine ceremonies.⁴

3:14. But the veil which was over Moses still remains, allegorically over the sons of Israel. Paul's conclusion is that 'their minds were hardened' (cf. Rom. 11:7; John 12:40), 'for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ'. An alternative translation of this sentence is '...the veil remains, it not being revealed that it is done away in Christ'. In either case the thrust is the same. The door has been opened to the Gentiles, as in accord with Paul's argument in Romans 9-11.

3:14-15. The conclusion is now strongly drawn. The reading of Moses is not able to remove the veil, which is removed only in Christ.

3:17-18. Now, 'the Lord is the Spirit' and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'. The liberty is from the Law on the one hand, but more positively, to behold the face of God with our own 'unveiled face'. We see it, as in a mirror, i.e. not directly, but we do see it! Moreover, we who behold the face of the Lord 'are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit'. Note that the transformation is expressed as a first person plural present passive participle.

⁴ See Hodge, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Geneva Commentary Series, p. 65.

STUDY NINE

The Freedom of Worship-II



(Martin Bleby)

WHERE DOES TRUE WORSHIP COME FROM?

God is the Giver of all, ‘No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven’ (John 3:27). This is the truth. He is unstinting in His giving, ‘it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit’ (John 3:34).

‘The worship’ is part of the gift (Rom. 9:4-5). To participate in worship is to participate gladly in the gift given. This is the only way it can ever truly be, ‘All things come from you, and of your own have we given to you’ (I Chron. 29:14). Hence ‘we never give in order to earn or pay back God’s blessing. We simply join Him in what He is doing. God loves and so we love. God gives, and we give too’ (God’s Money at St. Andrews Church).

This is particularly true of the Old Testament sacrifices, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls’ (Lev. 17:11).

So Jesus says, ‘the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth’-in the truth of God as the One from whom all

things come, in the Spirit from God that is poured out without measure. Jesus says, 'for such the Father seeks to worship him'-the initiative is His. And He says, 'the hour is coming, and now is' when this shall be so (John 4:23).

The liberated children of God are the ones who know this in practice (Matt. 17:24-27; cf. Exod. 30:11-16). 'The sons are free'. And who is paying in full? The Father, by a wonderful pro-vision.

LET US NOW COME TO THE HEART OF LIBERATED WORSHIP

John 2:13-22. First He clears away the rubbish: any notion of the temple as an 'emporium' (v. 16), a place of buying and selling, a place where we can barter for God's favours. Also as a 'den of robbers' (Mark 11:17; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11), those who operate worship as something of themselves and so rob God of His glory as Giver of all, and stand in the way of His purpose of blessing the nations by His grace.

With this also He removes the whole Old Testament system of worship to replace it with that which it truly signifies (Heb. 8-10; e.g. 10:1).

He undertakes to engage in the titanic struggle for the true glory of God against the self-propping detractors and mis-appropriators of that glory (John 2:17; see the whole of Ps. 69, N.B. v. 9, 3-4, 19-21, 22-28, 29!, 30-36).

So he points to the temple of His body-the place where the Father effects His cleansing fiery redemption of His children, the place where He manifests His glory, the place where He is truly honoured and worshipped as Father of all, in the Son.

This is the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1; 21:22), which is what all the ages and all eternity is all about (Rev. 5:13-14).

TRUE WORSHIP IS IN THE FATHER AND THE SON (I JOHN 1:3)

Long-term research on the children of divorced parents confirms that our viability as human beings depends not on our having a one-to-one relationship, but on being able to live and relate out of the security of the relationship of those from whom we have our origin.

We relate to neither the Father nor the Son nor the Spirit as monads, but are taken up by the Spirit into the dynamics of the Father-Son relationship.

See Galatians 1:11-16: v. 12, ‘a revelation of Jesus Christ’. Where? ‘in me’ (v. 16). Where from? The Father of grace (v. 15). The content? ‘his Son’ (v. 16). Best commentary on Galatians is John. See John 6:44 (cf. Matt. 16:17); 14:9-10; 17:3 (Paul knows the Father-Son!); 14:23; I John 5:9-12.

This is the work of the Spirit: I Corinthians 12:3, ‘Jesus is Lord’=Messiah=Son! Romans 8:15-16, ‘Abba! Father!’-’the spirit [Spirit] of sonship’!

Worship in practice: in the Trinity.

STUDY TEN

Liberation Theology-II



(Rev. Ian Pennicook)

The liberation theologian goes to the Scriptures bearing the whole weight of the problems, sorrows and hopes of the poor, seeking light and inspiration from the divine word. This is a new way of reading the Bible; the hermeneutics of liberation.¹

That evening they brought to [Jesus] many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases' (Matt. 8:16-17).

There can be little doubt that liberation theologians are concerned with compassion. Both in Latin America (the descriptions they provide of individual suffering are heart rending² -deliberately so) and in Australia there is no shortage of injustice or inhumanity to be seen.

¹ L. & C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, New York, 1987, p. 93.

² For a more analytical and statistical view, see Geoffrey Bingham, *The Christian Revolution: Liberation Theology*, (Living Faith Studies, vol. 5), NCPI, 1981, p. 58f. The practice of graphically presenting suffering to the public in order to obtain a response is well known, especially amongst Christian aid groups and their advertising agencies, as well as among many popular preachers who appeal to their audience's own sense that they are themselves the victims of injustice.

In this country, most public figures claim to be concerned for the plight of the disadvantaged. Not all are agreed that their compassion is totally altruistic.

The question we must face is, how does the church function compassionately? Is it sufficient simply to set out to meet the needs which are presented to us, or is it incumbent upon us to see things in a far broader context and to respond in the light of that?

To a certain extent it can be said that Liberation Theology fails to see the eschatological nature of the Kingdom, in spite of the dire eschatological warnings which it issues. Its solutions are not simply concerned with the present but are actually limited to it. The limitation may, of course, have been forced upon it by others who do not appreciate the broader perspective. The church has focussed on the here and now because it has compromised its initial mandate under pressure. But in some places Liberation Theology has in fact become a tool of those with more strictly political ambitions. Charles Colson reports one Nicaraguan theologian/politician as saying ‘The revolution and the Kingdom of heaven mentioned in the Gospel are the same thing. A Christian should embrace Marxism if he wants to be with God and all men,’ and describes a revolutionary poster in that country saying, ‘Faith without revolution is dead’. He then adds:

This line of thinking guts the gospel. If a Christian should embrace Marxism and revolution to do God’s will, then something was lacking in the atonement and revelation of Jesus Christ.³

It is no doubt also true that many evangelical Christians have failed to see the effect of being people of the Kingdom in the present. They have found security in Bible Studies while equally studiously ignoring the suffering world around them. However, we know that much of the social work undertaken by the state was in fact commenced by the Christian church-and then gradually

³ Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1987, p. 201.

absorbed into the state system! Too often the church, by depending upon the state for its resources, has become a tool of the state.

True compassion must take into account the Biblical data concerning the human condition. The liberation theologian prefers to function with a Marxist view of man as

alienated within his society. The economic forces at work have dehumanized him. They have used him for their own ends. In this sense man ceases to be man. To give him the personal gospel of liberation within his context is one thing. To change that context and make it viable for him for a life of practical human freedom is another.⁴

It is certainly true that man is alienated within society. However, what it is also necessary to note is that the Scriptures describe the causes of man's alienation as being not merely (e.g.) capitalist exploitation but the fundamental alienation of man from God, resulting not merely in social, but also in personal and also environmental alienation. The Marxist evaluation of the problem in terms of class struggle is clearly deficient. But whenever the Biblical data is ignored or even rejected the result will be the assumption that we ourselves have a correct perception of the needs of men and women or of society. This is nothing more than a variation on the sin of Adam and Eve. Besides this, it generally fails to see that our own perceptions are often the product of the expressed desires of others. In the end we may become little more than people who spend our lives patching up the latest 'need'.

In reply to those who say that in order to change society we should change men (i.e. by 'regeneration'), Liberation Theology asks 'where are the changes promised by this means?'⁵. We may

⁴ Bingham, op. cit., p. 56.

⁵ Bingham, op. cit., p. 59.

observe that in our own society a radical change in thinking and action took place in the early seventies when the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney so stung the government with his observations concerning poverty in this country, that the Henderson Commission was set up and the whole approach to the elimination of poverty, so common now, was initiated. Also we would do well to recall the social 'needs' of eighteenth century England and the way George Whitefield, the Wesley brothers and others set about meeting the need.⁶ Liberation Theology, devoid of the Biblical basis of Whitefield and the Wesleys, has attempted to impose its own solution to the problems of society.

Liberation Theology sees itself as

a theology that leads to practical results because today, in the world of the 'wretched of the earth' the true form of faith is 'political love' or 'macro-charity'. Among the poorest of the third world, faith is not only 'also' political, but above all else political.⁷

⁶ Nowhere was the nation's weakness more evident than in the Gin Craze every sixth house in London had become a gin shop and the nation was in an uncontrollable orgy of gin drinking. We shall need to remember that it was among a people broken by gin that Whitefield and the Wesleys went about in the nobility of their ministries, and that there was a triumphant meaning to Charles Wesley's lines on the deliverance effected by the Gospel:

Hear Him ye deaf! His praise ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind behold your Saviour come,
And leap ye lame for joy!

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free!
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me!

The effect [of the Gospel] has been described in the words: '...a religious revival burst forth which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.' (Arnold Dallimore, George Whitfield, Vol. 1, Banner of Truth, London, 1970, pp. 25, 32, emphasis mine.)

⁷ Boff, op. cit., p. 39.

It argues that the need is for the poor to work out a strategy better able to change social conditions:

a strategy of liberation. In liberation, the oppressed come together to understand their situation through the process of conscientization,⁸ discover the causes of their oppression, organize themselves into movements, and act in a co-ordinated fashion. First, they claim everything that the existing system can give: better wages, working conditions, health care, education, housing, and so forth; then they work towards the transformation of present society in the direction of a new society characterized by widespread participation, a better and more just balance among social classes and more worthy ways of life.⁹

For some liberation theologians it is only a short step from this to the use of violence to achieve the goals. Geoffrey Bingham points out¹⁰ that

the current liberation theology is a theology of revolution. Although it comes in varying forms, the basic idea at heart is that man must be liberated not only from sin and the moral enemies by which he is beset but from practical, political and economic oppression. This oppression may take many forms such as racial, classist and sexual oppression. It may involve the oppression of people by multi-national corporations, or it may involve forms of oppression which spring from pluralist societies. Pluralism must give way to egalitarian freedom. Basic liberation theology has no time for the changes of gradualism. The whole structure of society must be changed in order to free people on the one hand from oppressive exploitive capitalism, and on the other from totalitarianism such as is found in Russian and Chinese Communism. Whilst espousing the economic principle of Marxism, it rejects the form in which communism has emerged. It claims the Marxist analysis of history to be a correct one, and claims that Christian Marxism would transform society and liberate society from the various forms of oppression from which it suffers.

Impatience with the speed of change would lead some, but by no means all, to attempt to bring in the desired goal by violence. There

⁸ Conscientization-helping people to become aware of their situation.

⁹ Boff, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 55f.

may well be a certain dangerous naïveté in espousing violence. The violent are themselves open to further exploitation by others with other goals. This can be seen in the discarding of leaders of the earlier stages of revolution by those who want to take advantage of their gains. This is simply the failure to be able to control revolution. Furthermore, some say that the means do determine much of the ends and so violence ought to be rejected. Others say that the need must not be ignored because of a possible danger. And even if killing is wrong, they would argue that in some cases it is lesser evil.

Of course, while we can examine the Biblical basis for revolution and the possible use of violence,¹¹ Liberation Theology argues that there is a Biblical basis for its revolutionary action, in particular in the Exodus and related topics such as Isaiah 58:1-10. But as mentioned earlier, the scientific exegesis and Biblical theology of the ‘western’ evangelical church is generally rejected by the liberation theologians. The need determines the way the Scriptures are used. Since the hermeneutic framework is largely Marxist:

a personalistic Gospel and salvation is virtually rejected. The personal notions of sin give way to community concepts. Man is liberated as a society, and only in that sense is a person liberated, for his context is the community. Likewise his liberation is not simply to spiritual or moral freedom, but to freedom to enjoy equally the gifts of the universe. Oppressions of sex, race, class etc. are removed, and he discovers what true human living really is. The idea of ‘pie in the sky when you die’ is rejected for ‘pie on the earth from your birth’. The concept of this world and life being some kind of developmental place for moral growth and ultimate (spiritual) maturation is unacceptable. The here and the now is what matters, and that men use the gifts given them in creation and redemption to effect liberation of the oppressed is what matters. Hence Ernest Bloch sums up Thomas Munzer...in the sentence, ‘You be man and God will be God’. That is man must not relate to apocalyptic by waiting for God to act, but man is the instrument for the apocalyptic action, the attainment of

¹¹ Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

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the true eschaton of the human race, the emergence of the class (sic) society, and the true kingdom.¹²

It is clear that, in practice, Liberation Theology sees no place for the direct action of God. Marxism places the whole obligation upon men and women to accomplish the desired goal. Christian Marxism retains the language of God but ignores the implications. Redemption in the above quotation does not mean a personal experience of forgiveness and liberation from personal moral bondage. Indeed it would argue that traditional theology is incapable of providing genuine liberation. The gifts of redemption are essentially political and communal.

While we must agree that theology must be practical, we must still ask whether that practice must be along the lines dictated by the Marxist analysis. This is particularly significant since the collapse of many of the systems based on Marxism in the last few months. Even such a bastion of Marxist Liberation Theology as Nicaragua has recently abandoned its Marxist regime in favour of a western democratic society. But as was said earlier, the failure of structural Marxism need make no major difference once the theology has a life of its own. It is this stress on action-praxis-which lifts Liberation Theology out of such theoretical analysis. And in societies such as ours, where political Marxism is not strongly represented, Liberation Theology continues to make inroads albeit often with other or more than economic liberation in mind.

¹² Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

STUDY ELEVEN

The Liberating Ministry-II



(Grant Thorpe)

In my previous study I talked about the strength of life necessary to being a servant of liberty. In this study I am talking about the pastoral responsibilities associated with other people being liberated. The love and the patience and the self-effacement necessary to this exercise may often place us in a seemingly weak position (e.g. II Cor. 11:28-29).

INSISTING ON JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD

If freedom is belonging directly to God (Matt. 17:26), the ministry of freedom is to enable people to stand directly before God. This we may do by the preaching of the Gospel and bringing every human thought captive to Christ.

People must be freed from the enemies of sin (Rom. 6:18, 22; Matt. 6:13; Rom. 11:26f.), death (Heb. 2:15), this present evil age (Gal. 1:4) or the

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dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13), and this body of death (Rom. 7:24), and corruption (II Pet. 2:19; with Jude 23).

Bringing freedom to others is also to set them free from intermediaries such as legalism and idols (the *stoicheia*). Therefore we may need to engage the entrappers (as in Rom. 3:19-28; Gal. 5:1-11; 6:12f.; Col. 2:10-23; Phil. 3:2-3).

We will need to preach the same things again and again when they are not understood on the first occasion (e.g. II Cor. 5:16-21).

The pastoral difficulties Paul encountered, from Jews and Gentiles and from teachers of strange syncretisms, all became the canvas on which he painted-in different styles and colours-the truth of the Gospel (e.g. I Cor.).

INSISTING ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

Christian liberty is not recognized by the amount of libido manifested in persons but the God-directedness of their life-its break with sin and flesh and the old 'I', and its focus on God.

Peter knew that false 'freedoms' needed to be directly opposed (II Pet. 2:17-19).

If legalism is one enemy of freedom, licence is another (F. F. Bruce in New Dictionary of Theology, p. 265).

Righteousness is the way of life, and its patterns and certainty are the way of liberty.

For him who acknowledges [God's] sovereignty, freedom has commenced, freedom which is not just a defensive reaction against circumstances (individualism, assertiveness compensating for subconscious inferiority) nor contempt for the world, but the law of a new creature whom his Creator has taken in hand again (Von-Allmen, Vocabulary of the Bible, p. 130).

His advent replaces God in the life of men, driving out false masters (the forgiveness of sins, the liberation of the demon-possessed) and at the same time restoring to man his solemn responsibility before God and his unhopd-for dignity amongst his fellows (ibid, p. 130).

This insistence on practical righteousness is not a legalistic application of discipline but the action of love eager to reinstate the one who is compromised (Matt. 18). It is not a bringing of the person under law but under the Gospel. Paul was only interested in restraining behaviour which was not consistent with ‘sound doctrine’ (Rom. 16:17; I Tim. 1:10-11), which grieved the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), or did not comport with the life of Christ by which they now lived (Eph. 4:20-21). Therefore his insistence on good works was not a reversion to law but a securing of people under the Gospel.

Is this the difference between keeping watch over people’s souls (Heb. 13:17) and lording over their faith (II Cor. 1:24)?

Our teaching should be dogmatic only when central truths of the Gospel are at stake, e.g. Galatians.

INSISTING ON FREEDOM FOR ALL

The early debate over meat offered to idols showed that the greatest freedom is to act in a manner that encourages others to live in freedom (I Cor. 9:19, 22f.). Not everything is expedient (I Cor. 8:10; Rom. 14:15; I Cor. 2:5-9).

Paul noted that Christ became a ‘servant’ to the circumcision (Rom. 15:8). He himself became a ‘slave’ to the Gentiles (I Cor. 9:19-23), ‘all things to all men’ including weak to those who were weak. That is, he submitted himself to the necessities of the situations of other people in order to communicate his message clearly to his hearers.

THE MODE OF MINISTRY MUST REFLECT THE GOAL

The importance of liberty working out in practice is shown in the Jerusalem church not putting additional burdens onto Gentile converts (Acts 15).

Paul made his Gospel free of charge (I Cor. 9:18). He freely gave of himself (II Cor. 8:3). He loved his converts freely (I Thess. 2:7-8). All elders should give themselves willingly to their task (I Pet. 5:2).

The liberating nature of ministry is shown in the way Paul believed in the competence of Christians to minister to one another (Rom. 15:14); his confidence that God would clarify a point for his readers which was otherwise unclear (Phil. 3:15).

Paul preferred for the Corinthians to discipline one of their own members (I Cor. 5:5). He withheld necessary discipline for a time hoping that his 'last word' as an apostle would be unnecessary (II Cor. 10:5-6). He was prepared to endure all the unfinished business and untidiness which this generated (II Cor. 12:11-13:4). Those who want things all tidied up must work by law, but they will not produce love and will not lead others to freedom. The aim of our ministry is love (I Tim. 1:3-7).

STUDY TWELVE

Liberty in Apocalypsis-III



(Geoffrey Bingham)

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND APOCALYPSIS

KNOWING THE ACTION OF ALL HISTORY

It may seem a high demand to make of members of the local church to understand their history. Not at all: we have evidence that the members of Israel knew their origins, and life lay in the first Exodus-salvation from Egypt, remarkable journeyings in the Wilderness, and entrance into, and possession of, the Promised Land. This saga was indelibly imprinted in their memories, and produced the true knowledge of God by which-ideally speaking-they lived. All of this history was salvation history beginning with Abraham, and is the basic history of the Christian church. Of course, to it has been added the Second Exodus, the New Covenant, the liberation from sin by the Covenant-Mediator, Christ. The final Promised Land is yet to be entered but hope makes that certain. Israel lived always by the promises of God made to the Patriarchs,

as well as the part-fulfilment of those which had come through Moses, Joshua and David. There were yet promises to be fulfilled in the Davidic Kingdom (coming), Messiah (coming), Son of man (coming), the Suffering Servant (coming)-and so on. These are promises which have been fulfilled in Christ, are part of the thinking and life of the local church. The local church still has promises made by God which are to be fulfilled. That fulfilment process is now in operation, and in this the church shares. Sharing in this action it knows present freedom from fear of an unknown history, unknown alien forces working in it-and so on. The church is confident in its Lord who is King over all (Eph. 1:19-23).

A guide-of sorts-is here given of the Book of the Revelation so that this can be shared with the congregation. It also gives us a picture of apocalyptic 'history'.

REVELATION AND THE APOCALYPTIC ACTION

- (i) Chapter 1 in which John introduces himself and the prophecy, following which he describes his vision of Christ-the natural setting to the whole prophecy.
- (ii) Chapters 2 and 3 constitute letters which the Lord writes to his churches, and which are messages from the Holy Spirit. The churches being sevenfold represent the people of God in this age, even if different churches portray certain aspects which are found reproduced in churches throughout the church age.
- (iii) Chapter 4 in which the throne of God is a most important feature, and forms the basis of the whole prophecy. God is worshipped by the celestial family for the elements of (a) His eternity, (b) His holiness, and (c) His Creatorhood.
- (iv) Chapter 5 introduces the matter of the seven-sealed book, the discovery of the only one who can open it, i.e. the Lamb, and then the praise of the Lamb by the celestial and other redeemed creatures.

- (v) Chapter 6 deals with the opening of the first six seals, and the devastation they bring about.
- (vi) Chapter 7 introduces the people of God (a) as the 144,000, and (b) as the countless multitude of the redeemed.
- (vii) Chapters 8 and 9 introduce the power of the prayers of the saints, and then by the opening of the seventh seal introduce and execute the first six trumpets, describing the even wider devastation of their actions.
- (viii) Chapter 10 introduces an interlude in which an angel prophesies that the seventh trumpet will complete 'the mystery of God', i.e. God's plan for history (cf. Eph. 1:9-11; 3:1-11).
- (ix) Chapter 11 is to do with the measuring (protecting) of the temple-shrine, the actions of two prophetic witnesses, and the dynamic blowing of the seventh trumpet which issues in the kingdom coming in fullness.
- (x) Chapters 12 to 19 cover the first phase of the battle of Satan against God: in chapter 12 Satan seeks to destroy the child of the woman, fails to do so, and in a battle of angels is cast out of heaven, and coming to earth, seeks to destroy the woman and then her children, the church. The church overcomes Satan and is to a degree protected in the wilderness. In chapter 13 there is the spawning by Satan of two beasts-the latter called 'the false prophet'. These two set up a deadly system, conscripting mankind into a conspiracy against God. In 14 and 15, both chapters open with a sight of the triumphant people of God. In 14:6-20 certain woes are pronounced and two visions of harvests made by two angels are described, the latter ending in the trampling of the winepress of God's wrath. In chapter 15 the faithful redeemed give praise to God for His holiness and judgements, and then preparation is made to commission the seven angels who have the bowls of the wrath of God.
- (xi) Chapter 16 continues the battle between God and Satan: the seven bowls of wrath are poured out on humanity, who are

THE LIBERATED PASTOR AND HIS PEOPLE

the worse for the terrible experience. His judgements are horrific, but God does not suspend them. The dragon, the beast and the false prophets emit from their mouths three unclean spirits who seek to recruit the kings of the earth against God in order to fight Him at Armageddon.

- (xii) Chapter 17 has to do with Babylon, the city or mother of harlots, and the nature of the city is discussed, and its link with the kings of the earth who oppose God.
- (xiii) Chapter 18 describes the destruction of Babylon, the dismay of kings and people, and the doom of Babylon pronounced by a mighty angel.
- (xiv) Chapter 19 commences with the praises of a great multitude, firstly for the destruction of Babylon and secondly for the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Then a great Warrior who is the Lamb leads the heavenly armies into battle against the beast and the false beast and their human aides. The hosts of the beast are defeated, the beast and the false prophet being captured, and thrown into the lake of fire.
- (xv) The twentieth chapter concerns the matter of the millennium, the release of Satan from the abyss, following the closure of the millennium, and then the gathering of Gog and Magog-incited by the devil-but the defeat of Gog and Magog and the devil concludes the battle of Satan and his hosts against God. In the same chapter the final judgement of all creatures takes place, the devil and his followers being cast into the lake of fire.
- (xvi) The final two chapters (21 and 22) are given over to the new heavens and the new earth and the holy city, the last chapter closing with beatitudes for the elect, and a curse for the unredeemed and finally impenitent.

It can be seen, then, that a very clear pattern exists in this Book and it will repay constant attention if given to it by both Pastor and people. The more the Book is read the more it will be seen that this

could be the only pattern it could really take.

We pause, then, to ask whether this sort of material is constantly taught, and taught intelligently and with relevance to our present world situation. Secondly, we need to notice the way in which certain elements are introduced before they are fully met in their action. For example, in 11:7 the beast is first mentioned and is only fully met in 13:1ff. Likewise in 14:8 the doom of Babylon is pronounced although Babylon is only fully met in chapter 17. Both the beast and Babylon must be fully known by all of us because of the evil work they do in our world.

Note: To this apocalypse must be added the apocalyptic passages of both the Gospels and the Epistles which are quite considerable in their content, but they are one with that of the Book of the Revelation.

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STUDY THIRTEEN

The Liberating Work of The Spirit



(Deane Meatheringham)

THE FREEDOM SPIRIT

‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (II Cor. 3:17). The Spirit of the Lord is the freedom Spirit, for the Holy Spirit who was the Source and power of all Christ’s liberating work apprehends us like the impetuous roaring of heaven and we know that we are in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:2; cf. Acts 2:1ff.). ‘The law of sin and death’ is that condemnation which operates when sin uses the law to justify itself only to extend itself and compound our death. The Spirit applies to us the liberating work which he accomplished in Christ (II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 7:6; Luke 4:16-21; Matt. 12:28; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 9:14; I Pet. 3:18; Rom. 1:4). By the Spirit we participate in Christ and have the same Spirit of freedom as he did.

To speak of the freedom Spirit is also to say that he is not at the beck and call of man, for out of his freedom the Spirit gives himself freely and not in order to reciprocate our virtue, or to obey our

commands (Heb. 10:29; John 3:5-8; 6:63; Acts 8:9-24; 11:17f.).

There is still a more profound dimension of the freedom Spirit. Geoffrey Bingham has shown (NCTM Pastors' Monday Morning Group 4th June 1990) that in the Divine family of the Triune Godhead the three persons are 'other-person centred'. They give to, honour, and serve each other (Matt. 11:27; John 5:26-27; 3:35; 13:3; 17:1-26; 14:15-20; 16:12-15). All of this pertains to true unity and love. Each gives to the other, each is in the other, and each receives from the other. This 'PERICHORESIS' is the abiding life of perfect freedom. Thus we speak of the freedom Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son to freely liberate us so that by the Spirit we participate in the Son and in the Father. We enter the perfect freedom of the Godhead by the Spirit, and as we love God's freedom is perfected in us (I John 4:12, 17-19; Eph. 3:14-19).

THE SPIRIT OF THE CROSS

'The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' The Spirit is so intimately identified with Christ in his person and work that only he can directly reveal and apply the redemption which Christ accomplished in his death and resurrection (II Cor. 3:16; 13:14). By 'the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' the dynamic impact of being free of all condemnation comes to us (Rom. 8:1-4, 9-11). What this means is that the Spirit first conveniently convicts those who are dead in their sins through the proclamation of the Word of the Gospel (Eph. 2:1ff.; John 16:8-11; Acts 2:37). He shows us the love of God as it is revealed in the Cross at a time when of ourselves we were beyond responding to the Gospel. The Spirit reveals these things in us so that our wills are gripped with the love which justifies sinners, and on receiving the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection our hearts are flooded with God's love (Rom. 5:1, 5-10; Gal. 5:6).

The Spirit, then, enables the blind and the deaf to see that they are

acquitted of all their guilt, and brings them into the life of freedom by reversing the results of the Fall (Gal. 3:1-5, 13-14; Acts 15:8-9; I Cor. 6:7-11; Titus 3:5). By the fullness of the Spirit the believer participates in the life of Christ, in his righteousness, his obedience, his Lordship, his Sonship and his fullness of the Deity (John 14:23; 17:26; Eph. 3:14-21; II Cor. 5:17, 21; Gal. 4:6; Col. 2:9f.).

THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP

Man was created a son who was to know freedom as he knew the good will of God. With his heart beating in rhythm with the heart of God, his freedom was realized as he did the will of God. With his rejection of God's will his greatest difficulties will be experienced in the making of his choices. While he is in this frame the law of God will of necessity be external to him and any such law always makes man guilty. But where the Spirit works a radical change in the attitude of man through justification and cleansing, and where the love of God has been flooded into his stony heart, in the same way the law of God is written in his heart (Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; Heb. 10:14-18; Rom. 6:17). The law is summed up in love so that, in the intimacy of the relationship renewed with God by the Spirit, he obeys the law of the Spirit of freedom (Rom. 13:8-10; Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 7:6; II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 8:2). Here is the flow of love which links up with what was said earlier (Perichoresis) and is the life of perfect freedom (I John 4:12, 17-19).

Examples of this can be seen in the Book of Acts: the unity, love, generosity, serving, worship, witness, etc. (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32f.; 6:7; 8:4; 13:1-4).

But all of this must be linked with the Spirit of Sonship (Rom. 8:12-17; Gal. 4:6). The Spirit of the Son cries, 'Abba! Father!' and our spirits make the same cry. The sons have the freedom of the Son and they have the same intimacy with the Father as the Son has, for they are in him. As the Son was dependent upon, and was lead by

the Spirit in all of his ministry, so too are the sons. The sons live by the Spirit and they proceed under the Spirit's control (Gal. 5:16, 25). In this fellowship of the Spirit the harvest of the Gospel grows, which is really the fruit of grace and the life of abiding in Christ, or the life of obedience to the law of the Spirit, the law of God, and the new commandment of Christ.

CONCLUSION

First, a warning! Galatians 5:1ff. tells us to stand fast in our freedom. We are not to reject the freedom of grace by reverting to any law apart from that which we have in the fellowship of the Spirit. It is the letter of the law which kills and condemns and severs us from the intimacy of Christ. This also happens when we construct a means to the Spirit other than the Spirit himself.

Second, where we have grieved the Spirit and dried up through reverting to the flesh, then the way to the Spirit's fullness is in recalling that we were first set free, not by anything we did, but by the grace of God through the Spirit (Gal. 3:1-5). The Spirit has set us free from condemnation in Christ Jesus. In faith we come back to that freedom. By the Spirit we have a union with Christ and with the Father, and we have this by faith. In faith we must rise up to what is so, and then we can go on continuously being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

STUDY 14

Liberation Theology-III



(Rev. Ian Pennicook)

It is a matter of observation that Evangelical thinking has changed over the last ten years or so. ¹ Issues that were once the province of ‘social gospel’ activists are now prominent on the evangelical agenda. But while all agree that social justice is an imperative, there is no widespread agreement as to its place in Christian priorities. Whereas in the past it was often ignored as a topic, now some see it as a necessary concomitant to the gospel proclamation, while others argue that the gospel without social action is no gospel at all. The place of social action in the life and proclamation of the church has become a fiercely divisive issue.² But the issue needs to be faced and a conclusion reached, especially since the principles noted in Liberation Theology are increasingly being taken as axiomatic. Dr. Alan Cole has put it:

¹ It should be observed that it is not only evangelicals who have changed. In Australia, even in the purely political realm, great changes have been seen, especially as the more conservative wing has rapidly adopted as its platform what was once a radical left wing social welfare attitude, while a large part of ‘the left’ has drifted more and more to ‘the right’.

² I have seen some delegates to an Evangelical congress livid as their particular slant on this subject was criticized.

What kind of kingdom did Jesus come to establish? Was he primarily a political and social reformer, however limited by circumstances? Or was he a religious teacher? Or both? And when will God's kingdom be established -in time and space, within this world, or at the last day and out of this world? And who will establish it-God, or we, or both? The nature of the kingdom is all important for it defines the nature of the salvation that Jesus came to bring and the Gospel that we are, therefore, called to preach. Is it a spiritual salvation, or spiritual? Or both? If it is both, then in what relationship do they stand to each other? To put the same question from the other side, more negatively: What is the 'lostness' of mankind from which it must be redeemed? It is no longer a question of the right balance between the preaching of the Gospel and social (or political) action. That was a question of our forefathers, but the times are too urgent for that. Our question is: What Gospel do we preach at two minutes to midnight on the Doomsday scale? What is most important?³

Much of the answer to these questions will depend upon our understanding of the nature of man, and some mention of this has been made already. It should be noted the man to be liberated in the Marxist/liberation theological schema is, in practice if not always in theory, regarded as essentially good. It is society, and in particular the class system, especially as represented by capitalism, which has repressed him and stifled his true being. What is required is, then, the change of the social structures for man to be truly fulfilled.

Marx, drawing on Hegel, although rejecting Hegel's idealism⁴, saw the solution to man's alienation as being that of dialectic materialism. By materialism he did not mean (over) attachment to things, but that the forces which control history were essentially economic, arising from the productivity of labour, in contrast to Hegel's understanding that the forces were 'ideas'. But both agreed that history is to be seen as an upward spiral, or dialectic, with 'each turn of the spiral having three phases. The first is the thesis, the estrangement [alienation] is the antithesis, and the return to itself is

³ Alan Cole, *The Gospel and the Kingdom: What are They?* in 'Agenda for a Biblical Church' Vol. 1, A.I.O. Sydney, 1981, p. 32f.

⁴ Harold Faulding, *Marx and Human Nature*, 'Interchange', Vol. 22, 1977, p. 71.

the synthesis....There is an inevitable self-correcting trend that resolves life's imperfections in the long run.'⁵

Marx concentrated his attention on the particular alienation experienced under capitalism. He concluded

that man's alienation lies in three main forms. First he is alienated from the product of his own labour because in industrial society it does not belong to him. The more value he creates, the more valueless he becomes. He works for the gain of others and his products become symbols of his slavery. Secondly, man is alienated from his work because of industrialisation....the division of labour leading to various forms of specialization degrades man, making him a servant. Thirdly, because of the capitalist system the worker is alienated within a 'class' society; a society dominated by the idols of money and possessions in which the worker, without whom wealth would be impossible, has but a tiny share.⁶

To Marx, it was not only the workers who were alienated within society. The capitalists themselves were equally self-alienated,⁷ and so men are alienated from each other. Marx's solution to this situation would be

that profit-producing property should be appropriated collectively. [Workers] would organize politically to bring this about, and, if necessary, wrest the means of production from the capitalists by violent revolution. Yet violent revolution was not entirely essential. What was essential was that a line of struggle should develop between the propertied and unpropertied classes. Since there was no way to impose social order except by dominance, the proletariat will come out of this struggle by establishing a dictatorship. But in time this will wither away and men will eventually live without government altogether.⁸

Marx added that alienated man develops his religious ideas as a solution to their alienation, not recognizing that the religious ideas are actually, then, a hindrance to his breaking out of his alienation.

⁵ Faulding, art. cit., p. 68.

⁶ George Carey, *I Believe in Man*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1977, p. 121.

⁷ And so, no doubt, the later objects of re-education.

⁸ Faulding, art. cit., p. 69.

Man's religions were a wish fulfilment. Once true socialism was established, and man was no longer alienated, the need for religion would naturally evaporate.⁹

It is plain that recent events have shown Marx's programme to be utopian. Not only has capitalism survived,¹⁰ but socialism has collapsed in many places only to be deliberately replaced, in varying degrees, with Western (i.e. capitalist) democracy. Yet Marxism is deeply entrenched in the programmes of Liberation Theology. If only the structures can be changed, all will be well. Or at least better.

It remains for others to argue whether Marxist analysis is self-consistent.¹¹ But it is clear that one cannot embrace the Marxist view of man and his problems and hold to the Biblical view of man as totally depraved and his problems as being the expression of his alienation from God. The two are mutually incompatible, a point often more noticed by Marxists than by some Christians.¹²

Marx's view of man was essentially narrow and one-dimensional. It concentrates almost exclusively on the economic elements of life. Marx approved Feuerbach's contribution as

⁹ Faulding, art. cit., p. 70.

¹⁰ This is not to imply that Western capitalism deserves to survive. That is another subject entirely; see Rev. 18.

¹¹ Bertrand Russell's comment was, 'Marx professed himself an atheist, but retained a cosmic optimism which only theism could justify. [This may account for Marxism's ready acceptance by liberation theology?]' Broadly speaking, all the elements in Marx's philosophy which are derived from Hegel are unscientific, in the sense that there is no reason whatsoever to suppose them true' (History of Western Philosophy, quoted in Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, Tyndale Press, London, 1969, p. 137).

¹² Marx saw religion 'as the enemy of all progress. Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness as long as he has not found his feet in the universe. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the world of men, the State and society. This State, the society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world....Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of an oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion, as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness' (Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844, quoted in Brown, op. cit., p. 136).

‘making the social relationship of “man to man” the basic principle of his theory’¹³ In contrast, and it is sharp contrast, the Scriptures identify man as multi-dimensional. They do not deny the social deprivation which Marx observed, but insist that that problem was itself caused by a deeper and more insidious one, viz. man’s moral alienation from God. Hence the needs of man must be seen in this light. Man’s needs will, therefore, never truly be met on the social and economic levels.

The problems identified by the liberation theologians are real; the oppression and the suffering are real and no doubt very often the social structures are corrupt. But we cannot avoid Alan Cole’s question, ‘What Gospel do we preach at two minutes to midnight on the Doomsday scale?’

The answer to this is not a simplistic retreat to established jargon. Indeed, the problem faced by evangelicals is that often both sides of the argument mentioned above draw on the same jargon. Both appeal to the Scriptures. Where others either explicitly or implicitly reject the authority of the Scriptures, the lines are more clearly drawn.

Generally, the debate centres around a select number of Biblical passages, in particular the Exodus, parts of the prophets and, in the New Testament, parts of the Gospel of Luke, viz. the Magnificat, the ‘Nazareth Manifesto’ and the Beatitudes. Before dealing with these passages, Cole makes the following points:¹⁴

- (a) The idea of ‘doing’ theology is one thing; confusing theology with activism is quite another.
- (b) There is an increasing ‘tendency to read and understand the Bible in the light of one’s own experience, and in the light of reflection on that experience’, whereas ‘The traditional pattern has been the very opposite-to meditate on one’s own

¹³ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁴ Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 34f.

situation and experience in the light of the revelation of the Bible. The first can easily become a 'new humanism', a new version of the old ploy of deciding on a doctrine, and then searching scripture for texts to prove it'.

- (c) There is an increasing sense of impatience that has led many, especially in the Third World, as well as here, to reject older understandings of the Bible on the argument that they have been tried for ages and did not work, or have not worked quickly enough. 'But impatience is not a substitute for theology: if God is not impatient we cannot afford to be'.

Geoff Bingham adds: While there is a certain form of quietism, and forms of laziness and indolence found within the church, the opposite of these is not necessarily social activism that has an impatience with theology or current Christian practice. If theology should produce praxis, then praxis must be seen to be the will of God. ¹⁵

- (e) There is the tendency to claim to be able to make 'Christian' judgements on very complex political and socio-economic issues, which can only be decided on the basis of extensive knowledge of the situations, and not by pure theology (even if fully biblical) alone. True, they will, or should, then be decided by the application of biblical principles to the known facts, but since our knowledge of the facts is partial and limited, Christian men may well come to differing judgements.

Since Marx wrote in a European context in the nineteenth century, his evaluation of social ills need not fit every age and situation.¹⁶ Adopting Marxist, or any other *-ist*, evaluation, then, should not be confused with seeing the solution which is true across every age and culture.¹⁷

¹⁵ Social Justice and the Gospel ('Living Faith Studies', vol. 5), NCPI, p. 77.

¹⁶ He is alleged to have expected the revolution to occur in Germany or England.

¹⁷ It should surely be our goal to have a theology which is, as far as possible, true in whatever context we may find ourselves, while at the same time we should be aware of the way in which our theology will analyse the context.

THE EXODUS

We are no doubt familiar with the traditional view which sees the Exodus as the great action of redemption which is to be understood within the context of Biblical theology. Within the Scriptures, it makes sense only in the light of creation and its expressed purpose and then in the subsequent call of, and covenant with, Abraham.

More, the Exodus is not a mere picture of secular salvation, nor can it be restructured to that: it is at heart a picture of spiritual salvation, learned through and expressed in secular terms. The Exodus has purposes that reach far beyond itself, both in the revelation of God that it brings, and in the creation of a people of God to which it leads. This in turn will involve a new system of spiritual values that was ultimately designed, in the fulness of God's gradually unfolding revelation, to wean men from this world altogether, and to point them to the world to come

But this is a far cry, at first sight, from the popular modern view of the oppressed group of State slaves, toiling in unnecessary and extravagant public works for a right wing dictator by the River Nile, suffering not only oppression but religious discrimination and ultimately genocide (Ex. 1: 8-14 and 16). It is a far cry too, from the proletariat leader who expressed his solidarity with the poor and oppressed by abandoning all advantages that came from association with the Pharaoh's junta and throwing in his lot with the suffering people of God (Ex. 2:11-12), enduring the consequences gladly (Heb. 11:25). It is far cry too from the grim judgment that overwhelmed the military strength of the junta, when horses and chariots went down like driftwood on the tides of the Sea of Reeds.¹⁸

What must be stressed is that although Israel's salvation was literal, as were all the events associated with it in the Scriptures, and although the Exodus is a clear pattern of future salvation, none of this is able to be termed merely 'secular'. The meaning of the event is not to be found in categories which are imported into the Biblical narrative, however significant those categories may be in the present.

¹⁸ Cole, art. cit., pp. 36-37.

And as Geoff Bingham has said, ‘God’s choice of Israel is that of grace. It is not necessarily a paradigm for all nations.’¹⁹

Nor, it should be noted, was Israel’s salvation accomplished by its own efforts. Indeed, if anything, the reverse is true. Also, although Moses was a member of the ruling class who abandoned his position for the sake of his people, at the same time his initial impatient and violent efforts to liberate Israel were a total failure and

In human terms, we might say that Moses’ rash act set back the coming of the kingdom of God for Israel by forty years (Acts 7:30). Had he succeeded in raising the Israelite proletariat by the terrorist assassination of the Egyptian official, his would have been purely a secular Gospel, which would have led to a purely secular kingdom, which could not, by definition, have been the kingdom of God.²⁰

Liberation Theology may well regard the Exodus as a significant event of liberation, and no doubt it was, in human terms at least. But how does it translate into current thinking and action? Again, Alan Cole puts it clearly:

If Moses was the evangelist, and deliverance from Egypt was the Gospel, what was the kingdom to which it was intended to lead? This introduces another aspect of the Exodus, often forgotten in the modern theologies that derive from it. We have already seen that the Exodus does not stand in its own right; it can only be truly understood in the light of the events that have gone before it. But equally it can only be understood in the light of the events that followed it: the Covenant and Law-giving at Mount Sinai, by which the people of God was constituted (Ex. 19:5; 24:8).

It is plain that the Exodus as an act of liberation was not the success which some claim it to be. The Scriptures are loud in their declaration that whilst ever Israel remained ‘uncircumcised in heart’ (Lev. 26:41; etc), although physically circumcised, it could never enjoy the salvation of God (cf. Ps. 51:10-12).

¹⁹ The Christian Revolution: Liberation Theology ('Living Faith Studies', vol. 5), NCPI, p. 51.

²⁰ Cole, art. cit., p. 39f

There is neither time nor space to pursue these details further. What must concern us is the relationship of the gospel to social action. Our conclusion must surely be that social action is not, and can never be, the gospel. Nor can we say that social action is intrinsic to the gospel. While all men are by creation responsible to do good to all men and to act justly, and so are culpable for their failure (cf. Mark 6:18; Acts 24:25; etc.), it is not a call to social action, or to a programme of socio-economic liberation, which will deal with the failure. At this point we must be uncompromising-unless the word of the Cross is central and dominant, our gospel is not the Christian gospel, nor is the liberation which we offer genuine. However, the regeneration which comes as a result of the word of the Cross actually liberates men and women to 'do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Gal. 6:10), and empowers them to do it.

Naturally, since re-creation, the new creation, is with a view to the 'good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in' (Eph. 2:10) then both as individuals and as a community we should not hesitate to move out in action. But we should note that there may well be occasions when it is not appropriate to do what others may demand of us (e.g. Gal. 6:10, 'as we have opportunity'; cf. Acts 6:2-4). What is clear is that as the whole liberated community functions as the redeemed people, with all that that implies, so their action will flow naturally and freely. As their priority is the proclamation of the Cross, so their action, even to their enemies (Rom. 12:20), will be authentic Kingdom action.

STUDY FIFTEEN

The Bondage and Freedom of Conscience



(Rev. Noel Due)

THE BONDAGE OF CONSCIENCE

INTRODUCTION

What do we understand by the term ‘conscience’? How aware are we of its presence and the manner of its working? Are we aware that the conscience must be educated and instructed? Or do we see it as a law unto itself? How do we respond to it, and do we see it as primarily ‘positive’ or ‘negative’? These are all important questions. Perhaps all of our pastoral and counselling problems are at core matters of conscience.

What do we mean by the term ‘conscience’? For the moment we may accept the following as a working definition, but will need to modify it later.

Conscience is that faculty within man which gives him an awareness of himself and his actions, and this particularly as they relate to the matter of good and evil.

Biblically speaking, the matter of conscience is of some importance (an understatement!). Paul's statements of I Timothy 1:5; 1:19; II Timothy 1:3; Romans 9:1; and Acts 24:16 are very telling, and when these are seen against the Old Testament understanding of 'a pure heart' we see something of the power of a good conscience, both for the individual and the nation. (We may see the implications of this statement in the events of David and Bathsheba, but only through the lens of Ps. 51; Samuel's statement of I Sam. 12:3-5 in contrast to the thought of Jer. 23:9-15; etc.).

'Man is really what his state of conscience is' (G. C. Bingham, *The Principle and Power of Conscience-A Theology of Conscience*).

CONSCIENCE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

What is the ontology of conscience? Man is a reflexive creature. He has a knowledge of himself and his actions, as well as their outcome and effect. He can be held responsible in the light of this, and this is his dignity. He is in the image of God, who is a faithful (responsible) Creator.

The reflexive knowledge of man before the Fall would have been without bitterness or shame. There would have been consciousness (of God and themselves) without an accusing conscience, i.e. true co-awareness. Here we make an important change to our definition. Simply, conscience is 'knowledge with God'. This is what conscience is essentially, but in the Fall the essential nature of conscience is twisted to become 'of oneself' rather than 'of God'. It becomes the arena of God's wrath. The 'co-awareness' is no longer true. It is not that God has become wrath instead of love, though fallen man sees things this way, but rather the conscience, being informed by self, and this in the knowledge of the transgression, knows God only through the lens of guilt.

In the Fall, having died to God and lost the true knowledge of good and evil, conscience revealed the guilt of the act and this was

expressed in the apportioning of blame and the rationalization of the rebellion so as not to appear sinful (Gen. 3). Conscience comes into play (negatively) after the transgression of the law regarding the tree, yet there was consciousness beforehand of what was right and wrong. After the Fall, that consciousness of right and wrong is awry, deficient, and even rebellious. Conscience becomes a tyrant.

CONSCIENCE AND LAW

The law of God is innate to the creation. The giving of the law to Israel was seen as a remarkable gift, but it is clear that the law only gives clear expression to that which is already so (as seen in marriage and the Sabbath in Gen. 1 and 2 and also in the implications of such statements as those of Gen. 26:4f.). The law expresses the nature of the Creator, and the creation cannot but be stamped with His law. In truth, the law cannot be separated from God. His law is His will, the expression of Himself.

According to Paul in Romans 1:18ff. fallen man has refused to know God, and thus must construct a new worship (idolatry) and a new law, and all of this must be maintained in the face of the constant operation of the Truth. Man is a creature of law. Law, however, when it is separated from the Lawgiver, becomes a tyrant. Instead of being the way of life, law becomes the way of obtaining life. As such it is, in fact, the minister of death (cf. II Cor. 3). Wherever any person or society formulates law even where that is deficient, conscience is still active. (See Rom. 2:14ff.; cf. C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*). Conscience acts as the witness to the good and evil of actions, as a judge, jury and executioner. It must have a law in order to do this.

In the second Adam we see the knowledge of good and evil in true (innocent) operation, as He lives in and under the law, i.e. the will of His Father. There is at once total and complete consciousness of the Father, and thence Himself. 'Conscience', for

Him, was being pure, without accusation or defilement. Here is true ‘co-awareness’. Those who are ‘in Him’ have their conscience rehabilitated and share in His purity. Law, which is in reality nothing other than God’s will and therefore cannot essentially be separated from Him, becomes a thing of delight.

THE REHABILITATION OF CONSCIENCE

INTRODUCTION

It must be stressed that conscience, as part of dead humanity, must be rehabilitated along with the whole man. This rehabilitation cannot be anything less than that which is constituted by the new birth, regeneration, and justification of the sinner.

Rehabilitation of Conscience in Hebrews

9:7 now comes to the key element in the writer’s unfolding argument. The holy of holies was very restricted in terms of access. Only ‘once a year’ could the High Priest enter. It symbolized the very presence of God, the dwelling place of His name, and thus the High Priest could not go in ‘unprotected’ as it were. He took with him blood to atone for both ‘his own sins’ and also for the ‘sins of the people committed in ignorance’ (cf. Num. 15:27-31). There is no covering for sins done with a high hand, and this was David’s dilemma (Ps. 51). David knew the guilt of his sin working in his conscience (see Ps. 32) and also knew that release from the guilt was impossible apart from God Himself acting to bring cleansing.

9:8-10 are verses in which the author draws an important conclusion from all that he has outlined. In all this, he says, the Holy Spirit is at work ‘signifying that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed’. The tabernacle (and all the later temples

which embodied the same principle) is a lesson in itself in that the access to God is not open. All this constitutes ‘a symbol for this present time’, i.e. something that his readers should learn from. The symbol is this: all the Old Testament cultus ‘cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience’. They were basically external regulations that were to point to the need of something new. This is also the point of Hebrews 10:2 and 10:22. At core, worship is a moral activity and the barrier to worship is known in the conscience. The Old Testament system held this ever before the congregation of Israel, and David’s experience is an enduring testimony of its power.

According to the Old Testament system the worshipper could not be ‘complete’ in his conscience. The word is a telos word. The writer is saying that the Old Testament system could not lead to the conscience achieving its true goal. What is the true goal of conscience? Surely it is nothing less than co-awareness of oneself and God, without accusation (cf. Heb. 13:18; I Tim. 1:5; Rom. 9:1; Acts 24:16).

9:11-12 begins the contrast. ‘But when Christ appeared’ (aorist tense) a new thing was begun in Him. He appeared as a ‘high priest of the good things to come’ (or ‘have come’ as some MSS have). Whatever reading we adopt the point is simply that a new state of affairs has been inaugurated in Him. What, however, is ‘the greater and more perfect tabernacle’? It is described as one ‘not made with hands’, i.e. it is ‘not of this creation’. It is probably best to take this as a reference to the heavenly tabernacle referred to in 9:24 (cf. Acts 7:48). It emphasizes that the work of Christ was not simply hammered out on an earthly or ‘horizontal’ plane. Rather it is eternal in its dimensions and thus is effective forever, and totally so.

He entered into the true holy of holies, the very and actual presence of God, ‘not through [i.e. by virtue of] the blood of bulls and goats’, but ‘through his own blood’. Whereas their shed blood was the symbol, His shed blood is the reality to which theirs pointed.

His work has ‘obtained an eternal redemption’. (For some uses of the word ‘redemption’ in the O.T. see Exod. 21:29-30; Lev. 25:25. In the N.T. the word group appears in Luke 1:68; 2:38; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; I Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; etc.)

9:13-14 again utilizes the principle of arguing from the lesser to the greater. The blood of bulls, etc., cleansed in an outward (i.e. symbolic) way. Christ’s spotless, perfect sacrifice (cf. Lev. 22:20; Mal. 1:13f.) cleanses the ‘conscience’ totally from ‘dead works’ and thus it enables us ‘to serve the living and true God’ which is our true vocation and our only hope.

There are at least three reasons why the works are ‘dead’. They proceed from those who are themselves dead (Eph. 2:1; etc); they are those which reap a harvest of death (cf. Rom. 6:21; Gal. 5:19ff.); and they end in judgement (cf. Rom. 6:21ff.; Phil. 3:19; Rev. 21:8). Not only are these things so, but the conscience must be appeased, and the works so elicited are dead in that the conscience is not settled by them (cf. Isaiah’s restless sea). The conscience is the realm of the conviction of sin, but this can only come by the Spirit Himself (John 16:8f.). Apart from this conviction the conscience remains full of dead works, for it is part of dead humanity. There is no such thing as conscience in the abstract, only conscience as the part of man. As such, the whole man, conscience as well, must be revived.

CONSCIENCE AND FAITH

In I Timothy 1:5 Paul says that the aim of the apostolic teaching was love. This is seen to come from a ‘pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith’. There can not be any of these things apart from the other. They all come grace-wise, and are maintained as such by the richness and reality of grace.

That a pure heart is needed to know God cannot be doubted and it is clear that this comes only by faith (Ps. 24:4; Matt. 5:8; cf. Ps. 51:10; Ezek. 36:26; Acts 15:9; Eph. 3:17).

To have a pure heart through faith is to therefore have a pure conscience in the same way as Hebrew 10:22 ('evil conscience', i.e. a constant consciousness of evil; cf. 10:1-4). It must be emphasized that conscience, as much as any other aspect of a person, is dependent upon faith for its right orientation!

What do we mean? To revise some material from earlier on, we know that conscience always demands right action, even if the law upon which it bases its demands is inadequate, wrong and a rebellious rationalization of the truth. In so doing every man under sin knows the tyranny of conscience for it is in his conscience that the wrath of God is revealed (cf. Jer. 17:1; Rom. 1:18ff.).

To apprehend the matter of propitiation is a faith action, and such faith must be maintained (so all the 'one anothers' in the N.T.). Note that in Acts 24:16, Paul's aim is to 'maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before men'. Such must be in the constant proclamation and experience of grace and in the outflow of love that that grace brings. Conscience is then renewed in that (a) the person is not now guilty and under wrath. There is no condemnation; (b) the person is thus free to see the true nature of things (cf. Titus 1:15); (c) the law is not a tyrant, and an entity detached from God; (d) the revived person has a will to do the will of God.

Therefore the need is to constantly live by faith in the matter of conscience (cf. I Tim. 1:19; Heb. 10:22). One can only have a good conscience if the faculty of judgement is itself clear. Paul's experience in Romans 7:13-25 is that of him, of himself, being overcome by sin of itself. But note the integrity of the person. Paul is not two people at war, but he knows his essential being is to do good, to walk in accord with the will of God. That he does not always do so is not a matter of doubting this integrity, but of affirming it. His disposition is not in question, only the power, of himself, to obey. Here is a grace-informed conscience at work!

THE LIBERATED PASTOR

It recognizes the true nature of the regenerate person, and affirms that nature, while none the less disapproving of sin. It does not seek redress on the basis of law, but drives the person to the great cry of grace found in Romans 8:1, and for the desire for continued obedience found in the rest of Romans 8. All of this reinforces in the heart and conscience of the believer the richness of grace, and reflexive obedience of love increases. Hence the manner of action enjoined in I Corinthians 8-10.

Conclusion

The point of all this is that the conscience has been freed from the old law which governed it to the liberty of grace. The old system continually reminded the conscience of sin, now the one sacrifice of Christ assures the conscience of the freedom of forgiveness. In this regard Colossians 2:13f. expresses that which the writer of Hebrews has been saying, and should be examined.

The conscience is now 'grace-informed' rather than 'law informed'. There is no accusation, for there is nothing left of which to accuse the believer. Faith must continually rise to see this is so, and such faith is in the hearing of the word. There should be no forsaking of assembling together therefore, but a continual encouragement to hear the word of grace.

MINISTERING OUT OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE

THE MATTER OF MINISTRY

Ministry is, in fact, the way of true life for all people (cf. Eph. 2:10; 4:11-16). The important question is whether ministry flows from a pure, liberated and free conscience, or one that is still bound. Another way of saying this is to ask whether ministry flows from justification or towards it.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL IN I CORINTHIANS 8-10

Statistically almost half of all Paul's references to the matter of conscience appear in this section (I Cor. 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25, 27, 28, 29).

Note the following things:

- (i) The Corinthian church had written to Paul asking advice on the matter of meat sacrificed to idols (among other things). He does not give a right/wrong answer that was in support of either party in the church, but relates his answer in terms of two things: love and conscience.
- (ii) That Christ brings liberty, and this to a person's conscience, is not to be doubted. Paul knew the liberty of which the libertine party boasted, but that liberty was never anything other than for love and of love. That is, even though a person's conscience should be robust and free, the fact is that not all are, and one must seek the other's good.
- (iii) In so doing we saw the high place that Paul gave to conscience, and that it could not be re-educated on a law basis, but only by grace. The person of weak conscience is used to operating on a law principle, and to force such a one to go against his conscience is to then leave him without any means of restitution for the wounds of his conscience. If he is law attuned rather than grace attuned, to go against his law, even if it is a false law, leaves him with a damaged conscience which is not within his frame of reference to heal.
- (iv) In short, the mark of maturity in the matter of liberty is to be free enough to refrain from something for the sake of the other. This means, by implication, that the mark of a mature conscience is other centred, not self centred. That is, the maturity of true liberty in grace, releases one from an introspective view to an 'outrospective' view. Even the libertine party, which boasted of its freedom, did so over

against the weak party. In other words, the very demonstration of freedom that was so overt, was an introspective one in that the end point was not edification of another, but the justification of one's own position over and against another. The truly enlivened and justified conscience is corporately aligned. And this is the way Paul prosecuted his ministry. In so doing he maintains integrity (II Cor. 4:2; 5:11; Acts 23:1; Heb. 13:18). This is the point of I Corinthians 11:1; cf. Philippians 2:5ff.

THE CONSTANCY OF THE MESSAGE

In the light of the above material, Paul's statements in Romans 9:1; II Corinthians 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; II Timothy 1:3; Acts 23:1; 24:16; cf. 20:17-35 are powerful testimonies to the nature and goal, as well as the constraint, of his ministry. The aim of our instruction is love, and this can only come from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. Paul expended himself that men may know the grace of God in which all these things are found. In his own life he lived in love, from a cleansed conscience, for the sake of the Gospel. But it was only the constancy of the word of grace that maintained all this. So also it must be with us. If the aim is love, and such can only come through grace, then we constantly need to be of good conscience before God that this, indeed, is what we speak.

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STUDY SIXTEEN

Liberty in Apocalypse-IV



(Rev. Geoffrey Bingham)

THE LIBERATING HERITAGE: HOPE AND THE INHERITANCE

Whatever may be our interest in the events of history, our eyes are primarily set upon its goal-its telos. We need to understand apocalypse in order to be part of it, to live in and to participate in the plan of God which is the same as the will of God. We have enough evidence in Old and New Testaments to be sure God always had His plan for the world, and in particular for mankind. The matter of heritage or inheritance (Heb.: nachalah; Gr.: kleronomia, kleros) is a most significant one in the Scriptures, but mainly a matter of indifference to us. For Israel it was a primary thought for:

- (a) Israel was God's heritage, i.e. His possession over which He watched, guarding it (cf. Deut. 9:26, 29; 32:9; I Kings 8:51; II Kings 21:14).
- (b) God had allotted a heritage to Israel, namely the land of Canaan, and then within that land had given special allotments to tribes and

families (Ps. 47:4; 61:5; see Num. esp. chs 26, 27, 32, 34, 35, 36). Anything that God gives is a heritage, even evil and calamity which come to the sinner, e.g. ‘This is the wicked man’s portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God (Job 20:29; 27:13).

- (c) Gradually the idea grows that all the nations, i.e. their lands and possessions, are the heritage of Israel (Ps. 116:6). This was inherent in the covenant of God with Abraham—all nations would be blessed—and so Romans 4:13 says ‘The promise to Abraham and his descendants’ was ‘that they should inherit the world’.
- (d) The eschatological heritage is that which belongs to Christ. In Psalm 2:8 the Messiah—the one made king on Zion—is told, ‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession’. Thus all the earth is his heritage. In accordance with Genesis 49:10 all the peoples will be obedient to him—a theme also of the New Testament, e.g. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:5; 15:18-19; 16:25-26; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 7:9-14).
- (e) All believers receive the inheritance (Eph. 1:14, 18; Gal. 4:4-6; I Pet. 1:3; Col. 3:24), but then they are;
- (i) ‘heirs with Christ’ (Rom. 8:17) and
 - (ii) fellow-heirs with those of Israel (Eph. 3:6). Revelation 21:7 (cf. Gal. 4:7) links sonship and inheritance, which is natural enough. ‘The meek shall inherit the earth’ (Matt. 5:5; cf. Ps. 37:11 ‘the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity’) is eschatological, the meek being believers. The inheritance in Revelation 21:7 is ‘the new heavens and the new earth’, which is the same as inheriting the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; cf. Matt. 25:34) This means that the heritage or the inheritance is all that comes to the believer beyond death, i.e. resurrection of the body and its glorification, eternal life, the beatific vision of God, being part of ‘a priest-kingdom’ and of reigning on the earth—reigning for ever.

We have to see, then, that what all history is about is the Kingship of Christ over creation, his heritage being all the nations, and thus his Kingship of the Kingdom of God. The sons of the Father inherit what the Son of the Father inherits. They are co-heirs with him of the new heavens and the new earth. In him who is the Priest-King (after the order of Melchizedek) they also are ‘priests and a kingdom unto God’. This, too, is ‘the glorious inheritance of the saints’.

APOCALYPSIS IS ALL ABOUT THE INHERITANCE AND IS THE SUBSTANCE OF HOPE

There are three driving forces in the New Testament—faith, hope and love. These are really the one for they are never found apart one from the other: in fact they cannot be known apart from one another. Faith and love are seemingly well known, but hope is often considered as a less powerful motivating force than the others. Hope is a powerful drive in any life. Where this is missing the person is literally ‘hopeless’. Hence Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:17ff., ‘having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you’. In this vein see Romans 5:2-5; 8:20-24; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:5, 27; Titus 2:13; I Peter 1:3; Hebrews 3:6; 6:11; 7:19.

When our congregations do not know the heritage or inheritance that is theirs, when they do not know the elements of that heritage, then apocalyptic prophecy is not a live issue for them. They see the history about them as simply a matter of causes and effects, and explain it on a natural level. They do not see God as the Prime Mover and the First Cause. If our congregations do not take an interest in what is happening in the world, or see it only through a secular interpretation, then they will live with a horizontal-dimension outlook and miss the vertical dimension.

LIVING HOPE IN PRESENT APOCALYPTIC

We conclude our four studies by saying that Christian freedom is first salvific, secondly functional as

- (i) we live in Christ's law,
- (ii) we fulfil the creational and redemptional mandates,
- (iii) we share with Christ in his battle with the powers of darkness, and
- (iv) we share in his unifying, filling up and reconciling ministry.

None of this work justifies us but springs from our being justified, and its driving force is the triple faith-hope-love constraint. This means we understand God's apocalyptic action in history, since we are fully involved in it. Only in this way do we have freedom. It is not only that obedience is the way of true freedom, but all obedience is purposive in that it is doing the will of God and furthering His plan as He has determined it and us. Thus salvation history is our primary interest, and its fulfilment is what draws us on in obedience and participation. We can face the terrible things that happen such as persecution, oppression, suppression and the judgements of God (as seen in the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls) without trying to ameliorate them for man.

The fact of inheritance, and all that it contains-the heritage or the inheritance that comes to the believer beyond death, i.e. resurrection of the body and its glorification, eternal life, the beatific vision of God, being part of 'a priest-kingdom', of reigning on the earth, i.e. reigning for ever-is the basis and source of all hope, that dynamic which keeps the believer in present action and unafraid of the turmoil about him.

THE MODE OF FREEDOM-LIVING

We do not have much time to develop this important matter. The principle is this, 'When believers are weak, then they are strong.' Their weapons are not worldly, i.e. the arsenals which belong to the world are not theirs. Their weapons (cf. Rom. 13:12; Eph. 6:10-18;

I Thess. 5:8; cf. II Cor. 10:1-3) are spiritual ones, yet more effective than worldly ones. If they are to go into captivity they must do so (Rev. 13:10), and do this by not using the sword. By this they do not lose the battle, but win it. The 'weakness of God' is stronger than the power of man. The witness of the saints in lands where they are oppressed is stronger than the so-called victory of their enemies. That they overcome the enemy within apocalyptic happening is shown in Revelation 7:9-14; 12:11; 14:12-13; 15:2-4; 19:14; 20:7-10; cf. Romans 8:35-39.

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