

Topic 23: Theology and the Turn to Historical Reality

There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, „Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames." Abraham replied, "My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours." He said, „Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment." But Abraham replied, „They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them." He said, "Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." Then Abraham said, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead. (Luke 16:20-31)

I. Theological Place and Theological Method: The construction of a theology, like any human act, necessarily occurs within a particular context. Hence, before one can do theology, one has to first be situated in a specific place. The notion of "place" includes physical location, as well as social-historical location, cultural location, economic location, political location, etc. The "place" of theology is not simply given (although it includes elements of nature) but is also a chosen historical reality.

The best theological place will appear as: A particular, historically-real, social location capable of manifesting God's revelation and call to conversion; The place most likely to inspire a living faith in Jesus and a corresponding praxis of discipleship, and The place most apt to stimulate a lively, authentic theological understanding of faith.

Before engaging the theological criteria of place, one must make a prior option to look at the truth of things. For Ellacuria and Sobrino, this foundation of Christian spirituality is the sine qua non for Christian theology. The choice of the theological place of the poor involves criteria that lie outside the hermeneutical circle. That

this particular place leads to greater contact

II. The Function of Sentient Intelligence in the Operation of Theological

Method: The exercise of intelligence depends in every instance upon specific theoretical possibilities that are historically constituted. The social interests behind the activities that produce a theology function as historical determinants of theological method. Thus, even as a search for meaning, hermeneutics cannot be reduced to a search for what has been objectified in theoretical formulations. There must also be an ongoing and thematically focused investigation into the social world to which these formulations respond.

Theological activity both not only serves the faith, but also serves an ecclesial institution. At the same time, it is configured by that ecclesial institution, which itself remains profoundly configured by various other social-historical forces and structures. Hence, through the faith community it serves, theological activity is transformed into an ally or adversary of certain social forces. This implies that every theology is a political theology.

Ellacuria uses the term, historicization, to designate two different but correlative processes which his philosophy of historical reality interprets. First, the historicization of nature names the process by which nature becomes history, that is, the very dynamism of historical reality "realizing" itself. Second, the historicization of concepts refers to the disciplined investigation of how closely the concepts used to describe historical realities actually correspond to those realities.

In its critical moment, the historicization of concepts directly aims to overcome human bias. Aware that every interpretation of divine reality has concrete implications for this world, historicization unmask distortions and helps the ecclesial community discern and respond to the signs of the times. It empowers believers to live as disciples of Jesus.

III. The Church as the Historical Sacrament of Liberation: The church as a sacrament unveils (revelation) and actualizes (historical praxis) the salvation it announces: the historical-transcendent coming of the Reign of God that Jesus preached. The church is the continuation of the mission of Jesus in history. It reveals God's salvific offer and provides a concrete horizon within which it can be accepted. Theology illuminates how the human task of history participates in God's salvific plan for history. The work of theology is critical (an external critique of the quasi-divinities and an internal critique of privatized religion) and constructive (it imagines new ways for the church to announce and realize

salvation).

The church as the people of God correlates with the Reign of God. Starting with the people of God produces an ecclesiology that is honest with reality, faithful to reality, and swept along by the "more" of reality. Characteristics of the church as the people of God: it is constituted of the poor and on behalf of their liberation; it bears the suffering caused by injustice and confronts the evil that causes the suffering; it locates the struggle for justice in the mission of Jesus to inaugurate the Reign of God; it encounters fierce persecution from the powers opposed to God's Reign and the poor.

Historical praxis: the church as historical sacrament of liberation. Only a church at work in history can reveal and communicate the God of history. To be a historical sacrament the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, must incarnate Christ in history by following the historical footsteps of Jesus. To follow the historical footsteps of Jesus means to continue the life and mission of Jesus in history. In this way, the church becomes the body of Christ in history. The church becomes the historical body of Christ by becoming a neighbor to the people whom Jesus approached as a neighbor: to be the historical body of Christ, the church must be a church of the poor.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is critical about the theological place of Christianity?
2. What kind of dynamic in the Faith is created by allowing the poor and suffering to be the apex of the people of God?