THE DANGER OF INCLUDING CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THEOLOGICAL METHOD

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Theological Studies and the Graduate School of Religion of Liberty University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Lynchburg, Virginia
1991
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The intent of this thesis is to bring to question the matter of including contextualization in the method of theology. It seeks to demonstrate how this use of contextualization is becoming more readily accepted among contemporary theologians. Particularly, the methodological process of liberation theologians in Latin America is examined to show how their attempt to contextualize in that process has led to a misinterpretation of Biblical truth.

This thesis employs historical research. Data has been gathered from the field of knowledge in theological method and liberation theology. Of the sources that have been used to gather the data for this thesis, approximately seventy percent of them are drawn from primary sources.

The findings of the research have been used inductively to criticize the common notion that contextualization is part of the task of developing theology. Since the boundaries preserving the integrity of Biblical truth in contemporary methods of theology are only subjective, either a truly Biblical standard needs to be raised or contextualization should be seriously questioned about its role within the process of doing theology.
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PREFACE

The words of a statement by Hendrik Kraemer in his article "Syncretism as a Theological Problem for Missions" ring harmoniously with the desires of my heart: "To me a 'theological problem,' if really of fundamental significance is an eminently practical affair demanding new decisions and followed by new action." The subject which I intend to deal with in the following pages of this work will hopefully be seen as one of practicality. This desire to be practical was a motivation for my research into the subject matter of this paper. Having a goal to be personally involved in foreign missions on the soil of Brazil, my intent is to incorporate my theological studies into something which will be useful for me with respect to this future endeavor. Thus, for me the issue to be dealt with does have practical significance.

Beyond my own interests, however, I hope that this thesis will serve as more than an attempt by a student to meet his degree requirements. It is my sincere desire that those theologians who read the following pages will be challenged in their agreement or disagreement to make decisions that will affect their practice. If ensuing action results, then I will consider this work to be a worthy contribution to the pages of theological knowledge.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One very crucial concern, if not the most, in considering the formulation of theology is that of "showing the whole Bible to be relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life."\(^2\) However, the cultural gap between the time of the Biblical writings and contemporary society presents a challenge to the theologian who seeks to be true to Scripture and relevant to his modern day audience.\(^3\)

This challenge has been undertaken in various ways.\(^4\) For the theologian Charles Hodge, all the facts of theology were contained in the Scriptures and were to be compiled apart from any dialogue with other sources.\(^5\) Thus, he concluded:

The true method of theology, is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of nature are the contents of the natural sciences. It is also assumed that the relation of these Biblical facts to each other, the principles involved in them, the laws which determine them, are in the facts themselves, and are to be deduced from them, just as the laws of nature are deduced from the facts of nature.\(^6\)

This static, objective view of theology is virtually archaic among twentieth century theologians. Criticisms which have been leveled at Hodge's theological method reveal this fact. John Jefferson Davis says that the weak point of the old Princeton theologian is his obscurity of "creative imagination."\(^7\) For Davis, "the theologian's talk is not merely to repeat past formulations of the 'system,' but
to grasp afresh the 'essence of Christianity' for his own situation and to express it in a manner appropriate to the given context.  
Paul Tillich implies that Hodge's method is lacking when he rejects "the assertion of neoorthodox biblicism that the Bible is the only source" of systematic theology. Jürgen Moltmann would go even further than Davis and Tillich in propounding that theology does not make absolute statements of theological truth based on the Bible alone.

The examples of Davis, Tillich, and Moltmann afford the reader with a representation of contemporary theologians' attitudes toward Hodge's method of doing theology: it is outdated. Most, if not all, theologies developed today put some emphasis upon addressing the present culture in their methodology.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The assumption that the systematic theologian should make a conscious effort to contextualize the truth of Scripture in his theological method is becoming more and more accepted. Such an assumption, however, will be examined critically in this work. Is this present methodology of theology that includes contextualization as a deliberate step in its process automatically legitimate? This theological problem does not directly concern itself with an issue in the content of theology; rather, the focus is upon methodology—how the truths of theology are developed.

Liberation theology in Latin America is an explicit example of a theological method that passionately seeks to speak to twentieth century culture by contextualizing Biblical truth. The liberation themes of this movement are not due to some mere chance; they are
the logical outcome of the particular methodology which is employed. A statement by liberation theologian Leonardo Boff emphasizes how his type of theology is developed:

What makes theology a Christian theology? Is it only its reference to the "fonts" of the faith--scripture and tradition? Must it not have a conscientious and critical relationship with reality and its conflicts? The statement that a pluralism prevails within the theology of liberation is an easy route to the mechanisms of excuse by which one seeks to exempt oneself from any obligation to answer the questions that this type of theology raises, and thus to write off its validity and legitimacy.  

A comparison between this comment by Boff and comments by evangelicals today on the matter of doing theology reveal a mutual appreciation for including contextualization in their theological methods. Contemporary "evangelical" theology itself seeks not only to make reference to Scripture and tradition, but it also attempts to relate to present reality in a "conscientious and critical" manner. Since this is the case, then who sets the standards as to how far one is to go in the process of making some truths of Scripture absolute and some culturally relative? Also, what are those standards?

A detailed analysis of how various persons theologize will be given in the next chapter to compare their answers to these questions. These theologians will represent a wide spectrum of theological thinking. Labels such as "evangelical," "neo-orthodox," and "liberal" will be avoided since they are often misused and misinterpreted, and really these categories are irrelevant for what is being discussed here. The point is to show that there is similarity to some degree in the theological method of these men. An objective basis for doing
theology seems to be lacking. If one's approach to doing theology is on the basis of some self-wrought criteria, then is not the content of that theology no less the result of subjectivity than the content of liberation theology?\textsuperscript{14} It should be mentioned here that the intention is not to establish guilt-by-association but to reveal a subjectivity in theological method which could be dangerous.

Thus, the issue at hand is very important. Harvie Conn recently stated at a regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society that an emerging affirmation among evangelicals is the "validity of situational theologizing."\textsuperscript{15} A closer examination may reveal, however, that such an affirmation may pose a serious threat to the preservation of Biblical truth.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Before dealing with this subject, several statements need to be made to help the reader clarify what expectations he should have of this work. First of all, this thesis will not include an explanation of all details in the methodologies of the theologians who are mentioned. The writer realizes that the intricacies of their approaches are many and varied. However, a statement can be made on how each person does his theology. Thus, the purposes of this thesis will be served in giving a brief synopsis of each person's methodology without doing injustice to their theology.

A second limitation is that this thesis will not cover all of the various details and differences of liberation theologians and their soteriology. It is recognized that there are as many deviations as there are liberation theologians. Nevertheless, a consensus can
be reached about major tenets of their view of salvation. This assessment will be adequate for the purpose of this paper, whereas a detailed assessment would be too weighty and irrelevant.

In addition to painting the picture of liberation theology's soteriological ideas with broad brush strokes, it is necessary to limit this picture to the realm of Latin America. This will help in being fair, brief, and concise.

It is also important for the reader to understand that the inspiration of the Scriptures is being assumed here by the writer. Therefore, no basis for that doctrine will seek to be established. This explanation of these limitations and assumptions should give a clearer picture as to where this paper is coming from and where it is headed and should remove any false expectations concerning the scope of its content from the reader's mind.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Lastly, before embarking on this endeavor to show the risk of including contextualization in theological method, consideration needs to be given to the terminology which will be used in this discussion. This defining of key terms will help to alleviate misunderstandings between the reader and this writer.

Since the primary object of the discussion is theology, a clarification of the word "theology" as it will be used in this paper will be helpful. The difficulty in defining this word is that what theology means to a person basically reflects his position on the issue of contextualizing theology.¹⁶ Hence, a definition which does not apply to any number of theologians' methodologies would be inadequate here.¹⁷
A definition which seems to be fitting then without favoring any certain methodology is that theology is the statement of the doctrines of Christianity in some intelligible and orderly fashion. It is with this meaning that the term "theology" will be used throughout this work.

Another key term to be understood is contextualization. The root of this word ("context") is derived from a Latin verb meaning "to weave" or "to join together." The noun form "contextualization" implies the process in which the action of this verb occurs. Thus, its usage suggests some sense of a weaving or joining together.

Another important note in trying to define the term "contextualization" is that it was distinguished from indigenization when it was first coined by the Theological Fund Staff of the World Council of Churches in 1972. Indigenization, which means "growing out of the situation," refers primarily to the establishing of a church in its native culture so that it is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Contextualization, on the other hand, goes beyond this to include not only the practice of the church but also its message.

Taking into account these two points—the etymology of the term and its history—, a definition of the term would have something to do with a weaving of the church's message into the fabric of the situation which it addresses. Hence, there seems to be appropriateness with what Josphat K. Yego states:

"I understand the word to mean making something applicable to the life situation in which one finds himself. It means to clarify to the people, or make it applicable to their particular situation."
Some might argue that this is rather simplistic, but it does not seem that it is overly so. This definition serves best as a medium for a variety of definitions which have been assigned to contextualization.24

Since contextualization deals with making the Christian message applicable to a particular culture, a definition of culture should also be given. This term encompasses a number of things. For the sake of conciseness, it can be said that it refers to "a way of life belonging to a designated aggregate of people."25 Some of the things which a culture would consist of then are manners, beliefs, customs, ceremonies, rituals, laws, ideas and thought patterns, language, arts and artifacts, tools, social institutions, myths and legends, values, concept of self, and ideals and accepted ways of behaving.26

The three terms that have been briefly defined here—theology, contextualization, and culture—will be used extensively in the discussion ahead. Thus, understanding what they mean is very crucial to avoid any confusion in the reader's mind so that new decisions will be followed by new action.
NOTES

PREFACE


CHAPTER I


3. Philip Hughes, "The Use of Actual Beliefs in Contextualizing Theology," East Asia Journal of Theology 2 (October 1984): 255. Hughes makes this statement to describe the dilemma: "The Biblical writings were written in cultural contexts different from our own. Thus, many of the questions with which they deal are not directly relevant to us. They use illustrations which were appropriate to cultural contexts to which they were addressed, but not directly to ours. They were written on the basis of presuppositions and in terms of categories of thought that we, in other cultural contexts, do not share."

4. Stephen Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology," Missiology: An International Review 13 (April 1985): 185-202. This article discusses six different models which have been used to contextualize theology.


6. Ibid., 28.


8. Ibid., 175.

takes the Christian message to be a sum of revealed truths which have fallen into the human situation like strange bodies from a strange world" (64). The method used by Tillich is what he termed "the method of correlation." What he meant by this is that the theologian analyzes the human situation to identify the questions being asked by a given culture and then he correlates the answers derived from the pole of theological authority. To be fair to Tillich here though it must be noted that while he rejected methodology which held that the Bible fixed the content and form of theology once and for all, he equally criticized methodology which held that this content and form were provided solely by an analysis of the human situation. The latter is what he referred to as the "naturalistic" or "humanistic" method (60-66).

10. Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 283. For Moltmann, "the key to the hermeneutics of the Bible is the 'future of Scripture.' The question as to the correct exposition of the Old and New Testament Scriptures cannot be addressed to the 'heart of Scripture.' The Biblical Scriptures are not a closed organism with a heart, or a closed circle with a centre." The label which he attributes to his theology is that of theologiae viatorium. His is a living theology because it does not merely make absolute statements of theological truth based on the Bible alone as Hodge nor does it merely address the questions asked by the culture as Tillich; rather, his theology allows for change in its answers as well as its questions since there is a constant movement toward the final reality of God's revelation.

11. This observation agrees with that of Robert J. Schreiter, "Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies," Missiology: An International Review 12 (July 1984): 261. Schreiter says, "It has become commonplace at this point in time to insist upon respecting the cultural situation when we engage in the development of theology in a specific context. Called by a variety of different names--inculturation, indigenization, contextualization--the attitude in investigating the cultural context in constructing theologies for a local church or community is now part of the rhetoric, if not always the method, of anyone concerned with developing Christian situations. Habellian (1983) has chronicled some of the history of these developments. What is certainly clear is that this call to sensitivity is now heard in virtually every branch of the Christian family albeit with different emphasis and suggestions of different approaches."


14. The writer agrees here with a criticism leveled by William Hordern, "Theology in Dialogue," in The Living God, Vol 1 of Readings in Christian Theology, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 54. Hordern writes: "There is no world view that is dominant today. This is why theology in our time often reads like the autobiography of the theologian. Those who say that God is dead are describing how they have come to feel about God, and often those who answer them do so by saying that they feel differently. This hardly solves any questions."


16. This idea of implied methodology in one's definition of theology can be illustrated with a remark by Adrian Hastings, "On African Theology," Scottish Journal of Theology 37 (1984): 359. Hastings refers to theology as follows: "It is a 'critical self-consciousness'--an extended intelligent response of men of faith both to the word of God and to their own world." It is very apparent by his statement that for him contextualization is part of theological method.

17. An example of a definition which would fail here is that of Carl F. H. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations, vol. 1 of God, Revelation, and Authority (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 238. Henry says, "Christian theology is the systematization of the truth-content explicit and implicit in the inspired writings. It consists essentially in the repetition, combination, and systematization of the truth of revelation in its propositionally given Biblical form." This definition is inappropriate for use in this paper not on the grounds that the writer necessarily disagrees with its truth; rather, it is too narrow. If this definition were used for this paper, the writer could not speak of Tillich's theology, for example, because Tillich did not merely limit himself to the content of the Scriptures. This definition is inadequate to describe the work of those who are not "Hodgenian" in their methodology.


22. Ibid., 32.

23. Josophat K. Yego, "Appreciation for and Warnings about Contextualization," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 16 (July 1980): 153. What is odd here is that Yego mentions the insufficiency of English dictionaries to provide a helpful definition. Those definitions—"weave together, knit or woven together close, firm" (Webster's) and "logic, philosophical definition of word or symbol by explaining the meaning of the phrase or statement in which it occurs" (Random House)—, however, seem to have affinity with the definition he gives!

24. Mulholland, 1-3. He points out that "just as there have been a variety of definitions given to redaction criticism, so there has been a variety of definitions assigned to contextualization."

25. John J. Honigmann, Understanding Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 3. Honigmann illustrates his definition by presenting a glimpse of the Kaska Indians in British Columbia. Such things included in their culture are log cabins with glass windows and stoves; techniques of trapping, hunting, and fishing; covert beliefs and knowledge; and traits limited to men or women. A detailed analysis of what culture is can be found in A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

CHAPTER II

THE THREAD OF SIMILARITY
IN THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGIES

The thrust of this chapter here will be to examine the theological methods of specific theologians. Six men in particular have been chosen for this examination—L. Harold DeWolf, Jürgen Moltmann, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Carl F. H. Henry, and Millard J. Erickson. These men represent a broad range of theological thinking on the contemporary scene. Their diversity will serve to strengthen the argument being made here.

This examination of these ways of doing theology will not be an end in itself. Rather, it will be a means to an end—that end being to discover whether there is a certain similarity in their methodologies. Do these men make a deliberate effort to contextualize, and, if so, how does each defend being culturally relevant without being Biblically errant?

L. HAROLD DEWOLF

Lotan Harold DeWolf saw the task of theology to relate the faith and contemporary culture as ongoing. For this reason, traditional definitions of theology which regard its content as given "once and for all" in Scripture are inadequate. These definitions would be the outcome of those whom he labels as "misguided friends" of the Bible. They are misguided in that they suppose that the
very words of Scripture have been spoken by God and are all equally authoritative.

This does not mean that DeWolf denied that the Bible had authority. He believed that the message of the Bible as a whole with respect to its great central themes had high authority. However, there was a higher authority than Scripture itself in his thinking. This authority "is the totality of human experience" which encompasses the Bible as well as intelligent thinking, history, records of religious experience, and the experience of the reader himself.

His view of revelation of course shows in his theological methodology. Sources other than Scripture itself had to be incorporated in one's theology because "the authority of the Word of God resides precisely in those teachings through which God speaks now to the living faith of the reader," not in "a general uniform authority of the words 'from cover to cover.'" For a theologian to only consider the data of the Bible and tradition is to demand God to speak to one in a certain way and no other.

It is interesting that DeWolf provides a critique for his own methodology by pointing to several dangers that it poses. One such danger is that a theology can become wedded with scientific and philosophical ideas of a given culture in order to be relevant; if some of those ideas are later discredited, certain theological beliefs may be discarded along with them. Another danger which he mentions is that Christian teaching can accommodate itself to the culture so far "as to lose its essential character and its saving power." DeWolf's mention of these dangers shows an underlying concern for something at the heart of theology which must always remain the
same.

Despite DeWolf’s preoccupation with trying to protect some "essential character" in his theology, there seems to be a great deal of subjectivity in his methodology. There is talk of "genuine communication with the culture of his day" while being "steeped in the historic teachings of the Bible and church."\(^{35}\) That sounds nice, but it does not answer questions concerning objectivity. Just what is authoritative in the Bible that cannot compromise to culture, and what is not that can adapt? Furthermore, what is the objective nature of one's "present religious experience" that is considered when developing theology?\(^{36}\) The absence of answers to questions such as these reveals the subjective nature of contextualizing in DeWolf’s theological method.

JÜRGEN MOLTMANN

Without a doubt, the theology of Jurgen Moltmann reflects a concern to be relevant to the modern society. In *The Crucified God*, he writes:

\[\ldots\] Christian theology must be worked out amongst these people and with them. It is "contemporary" theology when its thought is conducted in the sufferings of the present time, and this means in concrete terms, amongst and with those who suffer in this society.\(^{37}\)

Moltmann’s basis for a theology that is relevant to the social crises of its society is the identity of the church in the crucified Christ. The crucifixion of Christ reveals to man that God is known not in desiring political power and world domination but in being set free from the concern for self-deification.\(^{38}\) This revelation
should not only affect reform in the church but be formulated as social criticism as well.\textsuperscript{39} Liberation from the "vicious circles of death" found in society, therefore, becomes a logical end in his theology.\textsuperscript{40}

It is obvious from the previous statements that Moltmann would be critical of a theology that does not interact with the modern social and political context. Such a theology is labeled by him as a "fossil theology."\textsuperscript{41} In his estimation, many people felt that Christianity was irrelevant as a result of rigid and legalistic theological thinking, and those feelings were the springboard for all sorts of theological movements.

In spite of Moltmann's desire to be relevant to the modern situation, he does seem to be somewhat sympathetic of the reasoning behind those so-called conservatives who produce the fossil theologies. This sympathy is communicated in his discussion of what he calls the "identity-involvement dilemma."\textsuperscript{42} The point of the dilemma is that while theology attempts to relate to social crises, it faces the crisis of its own identity. In other words, how can theology be contextualized and yet remain distinctively Christian?

So, just as L. Harold DeWolf's theological methodology revealed a concern to preserve something essential in its content, Moltmann shares a similar concern.\textsuperscript{43} This can be seen as well in a criticism that he makes of modern theologies desiring to merely be contextual. This "chameleon theology" has no more beneficence than a fossil theology in his opinion because it loses its Christian identity.\textsuperscript{44}

How then does Moltmann develop a theology that is not a fossil by being socially relevant and that is not a chameleon by maintaining
its Christian identity? He declares that the identity-involvement dilemma finds its resolution in the cross of Christ.\textsuperscript{45} There, both identity and relevance are found. Christian identity is found there because the cross separates faith from superstition and unbelief, and it separates theology from other religions and modern ideologies of power. Relevance is found there because on the cross Christ makes the cry of the oppressed his own cry and suffers with the suffering to give them hope of liberation and redemption.

Moltmann would not at all deny that this Christian theology must be Biblical. However, being Biblical must not be confused with being historicist and fundamentalist (these are to be rejected). Being Biblical means discovering in the Bible the promises of God about His future kingdom and moving toward that future with missionary and practical efforts for liberation.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, he says in his Theology of Hope, "The missionary direction is the only constant in history."\textsuperscript{47}

The contextualization that takes place here in Moltmann's theology ultimately fails to objectively guard any Christian identity. Though perhaps a better attempt is made than DeWolf at objectivity in his method by making the cross of Christ "the criterion for distinguishing between the spirits,"\textsuperscript{48} subjectivity still pervades his method in the end. He says it himself: "The absolute is now sought and experienced only in our liberated, socially disburdened subjectivity."\textsuperscript{49} Thus, his methodology runs the risk of constructing another chameleon theology that merely blends in with its surroundings.\textsuperscript{50}

KARL BARTH

In trying to state the theological methodology of Karl Barth,\textsuperscript{51}
it must be remembered that his theology arose as a reaction against Liberalism. Perhaps the most fundamental principle of that movement was its exaltation of man. It follows from this principle that man was considered to be the object of theology: an empirical discovery and understanding of the general truths of anthropology were basic to one's knowledge of God.

Barth, however, strongly disagreed with a method of theology that was too anthropocentric. Such a theology was heretical in his mind because nothing could be known about the Word of God unless God so chose to reveal it. The dogmatism of Barth on this point was so strong that not only did he reject the possibility of knowing God because of some human inner resource, but he also disputed the idea of man having a special, God-given capacity for knowledge of God.

It logically follows from what has just been stated that Barth would base his theology on God's revelation. It is the content of the Word of God which must serve as the content of theology. The Word of God for Barth referred to the self-revelation of God primarily through Jesus Christ, not to Scripture alone at all. However, the "only valid testimony" to this revelation upon which theology is to rest is the Holy Scriptures.

Though Barth's time was unfamiliar with the term "contextualization" (as it relates to theology), nonetheless the ideas behind this concept can be seen in his theological method. In his Credo, he describes dogmatics by saying,

It articulates again the articles of faith; it attempts
to see them and to make them plain in their interconnection and context; where necessary it inquires after new articles of faith, i.e., articles that have not up to now been known and acknowledged.\textsuperscript{59}

Obviously from this statement one can see that Barth would not be content with a theology that merely repeated the past formulations of previous theologies.\textsuperscript{60} Such a reiteration of doctrine would fail to apply to the current situation, and ultimately theology would be failing to accomplish its task.

It seems that the primary situation to which theology needs to relate in Barth's methodology is that of the church.\textsuperscript{61} There is a sense in Barth, however, for theology to not only be contextualized to the church but to the larger social setting surrounding the church as well. There seems to be some hesitation by Barth in making this point.\textsuperscript{62} From a statement that he makes in his \textit{Dogmatics in Outline}, one can see that, regardless, he undeniably did have the concern for a socially relevant theology in his methodology:

\begin{quote}
In dogmatics our question is: What are we to think and say? Of course, that comes after we have learned from Scripture where we have to draw this "what from, and keeping in view the fact that we have to say something not just theoretically, but have to call something out to the world."\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

Just as with DeWolf and Moltmann, there is a concern in Barth for such a relative theology to always maintain its Christian identity.\textsuperscript{64} This is why Barth says that theology must be critical.\textsuperscript{65} By this, he meant that the theologian's task involves making sure that his theological formulations reflect a proper understanding of the Word of God. Some would charge Barth with subjectivity at this point, saying that this proper understanding of the Word of
is not possible with Barth's lack of objectivity in defining the Word of God.\textsuperscript{66} This criticism does not hold any weight, however, when one considers the number of statements that Barth makes about theology being based on the Holy Scriptures.\textsuperscript{67} His "Word of God" does not betray or belittle the written Word of God.

Though the former argument for subjectivity fails, there does seem to be another indication of subjectivity in Karl Barth's theological method. That Scripture offers the criteria for a Christian theology to remain truly Christian is one of Barth's points of emphasis, much more so than DeWolf or Moltmann.\textsuperscript{68} However, his specific identity of those criteria only leaves the reader under the same burden of subjectivity. Barth, clarifying to what the autonomous nature of theology must be subject, says: "It can be only a function of the theonomy which alone founds and maintains, justifies and sanctifies both the Church and dogmatics."\textsuperscript{69} This autonomy is identified as the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{70} In his Credo, he wrote: "The question to the 'proper' language of theology is ultimately to be answered only with prayer and the life of faith."\textsuperscript{71} There is certainly nothing wrong with a dependence on the Spirit and a life of prayer and faith, but how does one objectively make sure that his theology is truly a Christian theology with these? Though there is no one greater than the Holy Spirit to provide the theologian with this assurance, should there not be an objective basis for testing the spirits? Without this objectivity, on what grounds can one evaluate other theologies? Could not the originators of the most unorthodox theologies sincerely profess a prayerful and faithful dependence upon the Spirit? Are then their theologies inherently correct? In light
of these questions Karl Barth then fails to escape subjectivity in his theological methodology.

PAUL TILLICH

Just as Barth criticized the theology of Liberalism, so did Paul Tillich. Referring to methods of theology which were inadequate, he wrote: "The second method to be rejected can be called 'naturalistic' or 'humanistic.' It derives the Christian message from man's natural state." Tillich believed that the human situation did not provide the content of theology. Rather, it was the Bible, church history, and the history of religion and culture that served as the sources of theology.

Though the theology of Barth and the theology of Tillich both shared criticisms of Liberalism, Tillich has a major difference with Barth about the starting point of theology. For Barth, as was seen in the previous section, his "wholly other" idea of God logically meant that the starting point would be God's revelation. This, however, in Tillich's mind only met one of the two basic needs that a theological system is to satisfy--"the statement of the truth of the Christian message." The other need that theology should meet is "the interpretation of the truth for every new generation." In order to fulfill this need, Tillich begins with an analysis of the human situation in his theological method.

Tillich's method which sought to mediate between the "naturalistic" methodology of Liberalism and the "supranaturalistic" methodology of Barth was what he coined "the method of correlation." It was so called because
It tries to correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message. It correlates questions and answers, situation and message, human existence and divine manifestation. 77

The theologian's first step is to analyze the human situation because the answers provided in the message are only meaningful if they correlate to the questions being asked in man's existence. Thus, once the questions are identified, the answers can then be correlated. 78 Tillich argued that this does not mean that God is dependent on man; it means rather that "God in His self-manifestation to man is dependent on the way man receives his manifestation." 79

The level of subjectivity in trying to contextualize without compromising the truth is perhaps higher in Tillich than DeWolf, Moltmann, or Barth. Obviously, from what has been said in this section concerning Tillich's rejection of a "naturalistic" theological method, he must view some truths as not being relative. 80 However, the objectivity in determining what those truths are or in using criteria to protect those truths is missing. Several points will serve as examples here.

One concern is what Tillich calls the norm of systematic theology. The answers of theology are to fall under this norm. Identifying it, he says: "The material norm of systematic theology used in the present system and considered the most adequate to the present apologetic system is the 'New Being in Jesus as the Christ.'" 81 Although Scripture does give support to this "new being" as a mark of a Christian (2 Corinthians 5:17), this is highly experiential to use as a norm for a theology. A theology of the New Age Movement could easily fall under this norm. Besides that, the use of the
word "present" in the above quote causes one to wonder if this is a true norm or not. Has it changed from what it was or will it change from what it is now?

A second point to be made concerning the subjectivity of Tillich in his theological method is that concerning the priority of experience. He refers to experience as the medium of theology. It is distinguished from a source of theology. One has to wonder if ultimately, however, experience is not really a source for his system if "the sources of systematic theology can be sources only for one who participates in them, that is, through experience." 82

CARL F. H. HENRY

The theological method of Carl F. H. Henry attempts to be very objective. He, too, is aware of the subjectivity in contemporary theological methodology, 83 and thus desires to establish some criteria by which theology can be evaluated more objectively.

Though Henry holds such a concern for theology to be less experientially based, this does not at all mean that theology is to be irrelevant to the human situation in which it is developed. He criticizes evangelical theology for failing to be so. 84 In fact, this is whole point about having a better set of criteria for theology: the anti-intellectualism of present-day theology falls to the criticism of the unbeliever who asks, "What persuasive reasons have you for believing?" 85 Thus he states,

If the theology of revelation holds more than an antiquarian interest, Christians must indicate their conviction that Christianity is distinguished above all by its objective truth, and must adduce the method of knowing and the manner of verification by which every man can become personally
persuaded.  

Henry then begins in his theological method with a return to "biblical theology." The source of truth is the living God, and His truth has been revealed to man by the Scriptures. There is no appeal to outside sources as was seen in Tillich. The content of theology is to be derived solely from the written Word of God.  

Henry identifies reason as that by which the truth for theology is recognized. Man is able to reason logically and can comprehend truth given by God about Himself and His creation. It follows from this that the tests of truth are logical consistency and coherence. This means that whatever is logically contradictory cannot be true. Thus, a theology that is Christian will be the one whose truth most consistently and coherently explains the empirical data.  

When Henry eventually sets forth the task of theology, according to him, in words, it seems as though there is no real concern for relating theology to a particular context. He states that "the proper task of theology is to exposit and elucidate the content of Scripture in an orderly way." His ossified definition of theology seems to have no room for contextualization: theology is basically the declaration of Scriptural truth in an orderly system.  

Henry's theological method may, at first glance, seem to be very objective. Indeed there is no doubt that he intends to be. A more critical analysis, however, reveals that he cannot escape subjectivity altogether. An important point to be made here is that he fails to fully consider that man's reason has been tainted by the Fall. He touches on this criticism by saying that
the nature of truth is such that the Christian revelation is formally intelligible to all men; it convincingly overlaps ineradicable elements of every man's experience, and offers a more consistent, more comprehensive and more satisfactory explanation of the meaning and worth of life than do other views.\textsuperscript{94}

This is a rather weak answer; it still does not solve the problem of man's unreasonableness, especially considering that a fallen man made that statement, not God! In other words, the most that can be said about a theology that is the most reasonable is just that. Henry falls prey to the same criticism of Tillich concerning experience: his emphasis on reason is so demanding that one must wonder in the end if it does not actually become a source of truth,\textsuperscript{95} although he denies this.

So, to conclude here about Carl Henry, it can be said that contextualization does take place in his theology in that he tries to establish a system that will appeal to the reasonableness of men. He does not escape subjectivity because there is a false assumption that man's reason can be trusted to make a proper judgment concerning what is truth and what is not. Thus, Henry falls prey to his own criticism: "But the evangelical movement is increasingly aware that it, no less that non-evangelical thought, is exposed to the danger of subjective bias in the exposition of biblical teaching. The risk of unjustifiable dogmatism is always near."\textsuperscript{96} Yes, Henry, it is very near.

MILLARD J. ERICKSON

The choice of Millard J. Erickson as one of the theologians whose methodology is being examined in this chapter may seem as a
matter of poor judgment to some. He has been chosen, however, not because of his influence or popularity but because of the position that he represents. He considers himself an evangelical who represents classical orthodoxy, trying to respond to the recent developments in theology and other disciplines.\footnote{97} Erickson's definition of theology is very helpful in the understanding of his methodology. He defines it as follows:

\ldots that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily upon the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.\footnote{98}

One can obviously see the idea of contextualization present here.\footnote{99}

In actually listing and explaining the steps in his theological method, this concern for making theology relevant to the contemporary culture becomes even more apparent.\footnote{100} There are nine steps that he outlines in the process of doing theology:

1. Collection of the Biblical materials
2. Unification of the Biblical materials
3. Analysis of the meaning of Biblical teachings
4. Examination of historical treatments
5. Identification of the essence of doctrine
6. Illumination from sources beyond the Bible
7. Contemporary expression of the doctrine
8. Development of a central interpretive motif
9. Stratification of the topics

The reader will notice that once the essence of doctrine has been determined, "the next task is to give it a contemporary expression."\footnote{101}

Thus, he likens his theological method somewhat to that of Paul Tillich.\footnote{102} However, Erickson's basic difference would be that he would give central place to the Scriptures as being the revelation
of God which serves as the authority for theology. Nonetheless, he believes that doctrine needs to be made understandable to the contemporary context.\textsuperscript{103}

Erickson is very conscious, as were the other five theologians that have been discussed in this chapter, of an essential element of Christian theology which must not be lost in the effort to be relevant.\textsuperscript{104} Several possible answers are suggested for this question of what the abiding element of genuine Christian theology is. After briefly looking at an institution, acts of God, experiences, doctrines, and a way of life as various permanent elements, he concludes that doctrinal content is that which is the most important.

The attempt is then made by Erickson to state how this unchanging doctrinal content can be identified.\textsuperscript{105} Here he lists five "criteria of permanence": 1) constancy across cultures, 2) universal setting, 3) a recognized permanent factor as a base, 4) indissoluble link with an experience regarded as essential, and 5) final position within progressive revelation. Without going into detail on these criteria, a criticism that can be made here of Erickson's method is that same criticism which has been made in some way of the other methodologies that have been examined: it is subjective. Though Erickson criticizes the theological method of liberalism, the problem is that his criteria for striking "something of a balance between the timeless essence of the doctrines and a statement of them geared to the contemporary audience" are just that—they are the criteria of Millard J. Erickson.\textsuperscript{106}
CONCLUSION

Looking at the methodologies of the six theologians, one can certainly notice differences between them. For example, Karl Barth's wholesale rejection of man being able to reason any truths about God totally clashes with Carl F. H. Henry's idea that the truth for theology can be recognized by man's reason. L. Harold DeWolf and Millard J. Erickson would strongly disagree with each other as to the sources of theology: DeWolf considers not just Scripture but history and human experience as well; Erickson looks primarily to the Scriptures alone. However, the point of this examination has not been to identify differences. For that, another thesis could be written.

What is most important to the author here is that a thread of similarity runs through each of these notions about doing theology. The point on which the theologians are similar is that there is a desire to be relevant to the contemporary context. This desire is to the extent that a "look at the culture" is incorporated in the action involved in shaping theology. In other words, before theology is a completed product, contextualization takes place. It is inherent in their method.

The thing which most concerns the author about this thread of similarity is that which distinguishes the extent of that contextualization: the subjectivity of each theologian. L. Harold DeWolf talks of "present religious experience"; Jürgen Moltmann only experiences the Absolute in his "liberated, socially disburdened subjectivity"; Karl Barth relies on the Holy Spirit, prayer, and faith; Paul Tillich has authoritative sources, but they must be experienced;
Carl Henry trusts man's reasoning to discern between theological truth and falsity; and Millard Erickson sets up his own "criteria of permanence" for preserving the essence of Christian theology. The lack of objectivity in these methodologies should be cause for much concern among those who are interested in construction of a "Christian theology" that is truly orthodox.

The conclusion of the matter to this point can be stated in the form of a question: If the standards for contextualizing in theological method are of a subjective nature, then how can one's theology claim to be any more Christian than another? Some might argue that one's suppositions concerning the authority of Scripture in the development of theology must be taken into account here. With this the author would agree. However, what has happened is that those who claim to have such a high view of Scripture have devised criteria which are extra-Biblical! Their theological truths therefore cannot be defended as having more credibility than someone with a low view of Scripture if both use their own self-made criteria to determine the scope of contextualization. It seems that a concern for more objectivity is valid.
NOTES

CHAPTER II

27. L. Harold DeWolf, Present Trends in Christian Thought (New
York: Association Press, 1960), 15. The statement is made as follows:
"Christian thinkers must define in every age the relations between
their faith and the contemporary culture. Since culture is always
changing, the task is never finished. In periods of rapid develop-
ment the need for it becomes especially imperative. We live in
an age of unparalleled breadth, depth, and speed of change in science,
economics, politics, and modes of living. Hence the task of recent
theology has been both extraordinarily urgent and also more complex
than ever before."

28. L. Harold DeWolf, A Theology of the Living Church, 2nd
Charles Hodge would undoubtedly be included in this criticism. Cf.
chapter one, page two.

29. L. Harold DeWolf, The Enduring Message of the Bible (New

30. DeWolf, The Living Church, 83. One can see his position
that the Bible was authoritative but not equally so in all of its
parts reflected in the fact that he has two separate chapters in
this book, "The Fallibility of the Bible" and "The Inspiration of
the Bible." The Bible is fallible, according to him, in that there
are internal contradictions, differences between texts, contradic-
tions of known truth, evidences of legend-making, morally unworthy
passages, teachings of Jesus against the Old Testament, and writings
which are human. On the other hand, inspiration is attributed to
the Bible with the idea that it as a whole was written by men who
had their powers elevated by God to convey truth useful for man's
salvation.

31. Ibid.

32. L. Harold DeWolf, The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspec-
with trying to revive some of the positive contributions of the old
European liberals.

33. Ibid., 14. This is another reason that he uses the term
"liberal" to refer to his theological perspective. Just as the basic
idea of "liberal" is "free" or "unrestricted", so, he says, Christian theology can be written in a perspective that is free from the restriction of certain preconceptions.

34. Ibid., 58-59.

35. Ibid., 59.

36. The importance of this question becomes even more significant in light of a statement made by DeWolf, *Case for Theology*, 14: "... No relevant consideration drawn from human experience is ruled out of bounds."

37. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 24. Some of his other works clearly express this desire for relevancy also. In *Religion, Revelation, and the Future*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 3, he states, "If we consider our contemporary situation, we find that in all areas of life the unique characteristic of modern times consists in the fact that we are everywhere asking for something that is 'new.'" Thus, he calls for the category novum in Christian theology as well. Moltmann's *The Experiment Hope*, ed. and trans. M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 12, makes this statement: "Christian theology is fundamentally a theology of dialogue. It has and reveals its truth first of all in dialogue with other people and other religions and other ideologies. Its center lies on their boundaries. Its object is universal, and exists for all men. But because it can itself only be particular, it must discover and spread the universal truth in dialogue with others." Thus, the need for some type of contextualization is very evident in his theological methodology.

38. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 69. Thus, he names this theology "the theology of the cross." Explaining it, he says: "The theology of the cross leads to criticism of the self-glorification of dehumanized man and to his liberation, and is directly associated with the human way of life and practice chosen by this congregation of weak, lowly and despised persons, a way of life which takes away the power of the social circumstances which bring about the aggression dehumanized man, and endeavors to overcome it" (70). It is important to note that his theology of the cross is not a change from his theology of hope, cf. *Theology of Hope: On the Grounds and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). The theology of hope and the theology of the cross are essentially one and the same. Whereas the theology of hope has its starting point in the resurrection of the crucified Christ, the theology of the cross has its starting point in the cross of the risen Christ (*The Crucified God*, 5). A concluding statement by Moltmann himself further explains: "The cross of Christ is the sign of God's hope on earth for all those who live here in the shadow of the cross. Theology of hope is at its hard core theology of the
cross. The cross of Christ is the presently given form of the kingdom of God on earth. In the crucified Christ we view the future of God. Everything else is dreams, fantasies, and mere wish images. Hope born out of the cross distinguishes Christian faith from superstition as well as from disbelief. The freedom generated by the cross distinguishes Christian faith from optimism as well as from terrorism" (The Experiment Hope, 57-58).

39. It is on this point that Moltmann criticizes Luther's theologia crucis: Luther's theology failed historically in that it did not prevent the Protestant ethic of achievement encouraged by Erasmus' humanism. It also failed politically in that it did not criticize the feudal society. cf. The Crucified God, 71. For a comparison and analysis of Luther's theology of the cross and Moltmann's theology of the cross, see Burnell F. Eckhardt, Jr., "Luther and Moltmann: The Theology of the Cross," Concordia Theological Quarterly 49 (January 1985): 19-28.


41. Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, 2. In interesting relation to what is being said here, Moltmann, in The Crucified God, 13, argues that there is a sense of relevance even in those theologies which claim to be conservative: "If, with their anxious concern for their own identity, they cling to the form of the church received from the past, opt for religion against politics and associate themselves with the forces of social and political conservation, then they have chosen a particular form of relevance, of which similarly no one can say whether it is Christian or not."

42. Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, 1.

43. It should be stated here that though Moltmann is concerned with a substance to theology that never changes, he makes a very important distinction between the absolute truth of God and "theology." Theology is not "what God himself says" but "speaking about God" (The Crucified God, 66-67, and The Experiment Hope, 12). It is hoped by this writer that the same distinction is understood throughout this paper. Only God Himself is absolute; one's statement about Him can only be made as one reflects in faith and trust on what He has revealed.

44. Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, 3. He writes: "A modern theology which desires merely to be a 'contextual theology' is often similar to a chameleon that always assumes the colors of its environment. This 'chameleon theology' is no better than a fossil theology, for a chameleon changes the color of its skin in order to adapt itself and hide among the leaves. But Christian theology should not adapt itself in order to hide; it is required rather to reveal what is specifically its own in the changing times. Christian theology should rather be an 'anti-chameleon theology,' and that means display-
ing colors which contrast with its environment." This writer whole-
heartedly agrees with this latter statement. In fact, this concern
for preservation of Christianity's contrasting colors is the motiva-
tion of this paper.

45. Ibid., 4.

46. Ibid., 5-6. For Moltmann, the Bible must not only be demyth-
ologized but dehistoricized as well.

47. Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 284.


49. Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 310.

50. Several examples showing the chameleon nature of the theo-
logy of hope can be given here. One relates to the concept of salva-
tion as presented in Theology of Hope, 329: "But salvation, **Hupthesis**, 
must also be understood as **shalom** in the Old Testament sense. This
does not mean merely salvation of the soul, individual rescue from
the evil world, comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the
realization of the eschatological **hope of justice**, the humanizing
of man, the **socializing of humanity**, peace for all creation." Another
example is found in The Crucified God, 329-338. In this section, the
"vicious circles of death" from which men need to be liberated are
being discussed. None of these five dimensions of life mentioned
deal with man's spiritual condition of sin. Courage to be, peace
with nature, emancipation, democracy, and socialism are ways in which
God reveals Himself to man, according to Moltmann, rather than as
the Savior in the person of Christ that redeems man from his sin.
Though he would probably not claim that any of these ways can replace
personal salvation, Moltmann's attempt to pay attention to an area
that has generally been neglected by theology has led him to a neglect
of those truths which are most important.

51. For a book dealing solely with this matter, see Gordon
H. Clark, Karl Barth's Theological Method (Philadelphia: Presbyterian
and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963). Clark's work is very scho-
larly as he treats an area concerning Barth which has received very
little attention. Particularly insightful to this writer was the
chapter on "Dogmatic Method" where it is shown that Barth's theology
in some sense meets the criteria for being a science.

52. Ibid. Clark has an entire chapter entitled "Modernism"
which deals with the theses of that movement that Barth stronbly
attacked. It must be remembered here that Liberalism is not being
used in a wide sense as it is often today to refer to a variety of
things that are not conservative or evangelical. Rather, it here
refers to that movement primarily of the nineteenth century that
was marked by belief in an immanent God who was part of nature, the
goodness of man, and a non-emphasis on history. Thus, its first
letter is capitalized in the usage here.
53. Ibid., 16-26.

54. This stress on the need for God's revelation against that man-centeredness of Liberalism can be seen in a statement that he makes in his book *God in Action*, trans. E. G. Homrighausen and Karl J. Ernst (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), 56: "But one must make it clear that right here, more than anywhere else, one has to start and end with revelation, with the Scripture, and not with the personally achieved psychological, pedagogical, aesthetical, or political assumption or premise."

55. Clark, 27.

56. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1, pt. 2 of *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 869. Concerning the content of theology, Barth makes this statement: "Concretely applied, all this means that the unfolding and presentation of the content of the Word of God must take place fundamentally in such a way that the Word of God is understood as the centre and foundation of dogmatics and of Church proclamation, like a circle whose periphery forms the starting-point for a limited number of lines which in dogmatics are to be drawn to a certain distance in all directions."

57. Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1, pt. 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 98-140. Barth talked about "the Word of God in its threefold form." Those three forms are: (1) The Word of God as preached, referring to the Word of God in the proclamation of the Church; (2) the written Word of God, referring to the Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures; and (3) the revealed Word of God, referring to Jesus Christ.

58. It seems that on this point Barth has often been misunderstood. An example of one who represents this misunderstanding and a correction of his views by some quotes from Barth will be given in this note. Charles Ryrie in his *Neo-Orthodoxy: What It Is and What It Does* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956) says that he prefers to use the term "Bartianism" for neo-orthodoxy. (Obviously then Barth is included in his use of this label.) He says that the chief characteristic of this movement is "its call to the Word of God as the authority, but the Word of God is not synonymous with the Bible, and this is the point of deception" (55). This charge of deception seems totally ludicrous! Barth would not have hesitated to make clear at all his teaching to Ryrie about the distinction that he held between the Word of God and the Holy Scriptures. How could he be trying to deceive someone?

What is most bothersome about the criticism of Ryrie and others is that it seems to suggest that Barth relies upon something else other than the Scriptures as the basis for theology. Such a suggestion is unfounded in light of the following statements by Barth.
In CD I/2, 280, he says: "The event of God's revelation has to be understood and expounded as it is attested to the Church of Jesus Christ by Holy Scripture. It is within this concrete relationship that theology has to work." In his work Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creeds, trans. J. Strathearn McNab (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), the next two statements are written: "Both Dogmatics and Catechism aim at being instruction in Christian doctrine on the basis of Holy Scripture" (175). "Well I have been asked about the standard by which tradition is to be measured. . . . The norm that determines our choice is Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is the object of our study, and at the same time the criterion of our study, of the Church's past. As I read the writings of the 'Fathers', the witness of Holy Scripture stands continually before my eyes; I accept what interprets this witness to me; I reject what contradicts it. So a choice is made, certainly not a choice according to my individual taste, but according to my knowledge of Holy Scripture" (183).

Lastly, Barth states in Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, trans. Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1963), 34: "Theology responds to the Logos of God, in the seventh place, when it endeavors to hear and speak of him always anew on the basis of his self-disclosure in the Scriptures."

59. Barth, Credo, 3. This point is emphasized several pages later when he says, "Dogmatics is the Credo speaking here and today, speaking exactly according to the needs of the moment" (8).

60. Barth, Evangelical Theology, 9-10. He says, "Therefore, in its perception, meditation, and discussion, theology must have the character of a living procession. Evangelical theology would forfeit its object, it would belittle and negate itself, if it wished to view, to understand, and to describe any one moment of the divine procession in 'splendid isolation' from others. . . . Regardless of what the gods of other theologies may do, the God of the Gospel rejects any connection with a theology that has become paralyzed and static." Certainly, the methodology of Hodge would fall in light of these statements. Cf. 1.

61. Barth prefers to use the term "community" instead of "Church". Cf. Evangelical Theology, 37. This is important to remember for one could easily become confused and misinterpret this usage as meaning "community" in the larger sense of a social structure. Keeping this in mind, the following statement by Barth reveals how important he felt it was for theology to relate to the church: "Theology would be an utter failure if it should place itself in some elegant eminence where it would be concerned only with God, the world, man, and some other items, perhaps those of historical interest, instead of being theology for the community"(42).

62. That hesitation can be felt in this quote from Evangelical Theology, 194: "One concluding question remains; it cannot be more than a question. Since theological work is service in the community, indirectly it is also service in the world to which the community
is commissioned to preach the Gospel. But is theological work, beyond this, also direct service in the world? Should the clarifications which it has helped achieve in the community also have significance, mutatis mutandis, for the general cultural life of mankind (for instance, for the sense and procedure of other human sciences)? Should it also be necessary to art, for example, or to politics, or even to economics? Should it have something to say to them and aid to offer them? Such a thought can only be a question here, since the answer can only be given, reasonably enough, not by theology, but by those whom theology actually helped or failed to help. The case might be that the object with which theology is concerned could be experienced, at least as a problem, extra muros ecclesiae as well, whether consciously, half-consciously, or unconsciously."


64. Of course, Barth is going to differ with these two men on just what it is that makes a theology distinctively Christian.

65. Barth, Evangelical Theology, 42. He says this: "Nevertheless, the special task of theology is a critical one, in spite of its relative character. The fire of the quest for truth has to ignite the proclamation of the community and the tradition determining this proclamation. Theology has to reconsider the confession of the community, testing and rethinking it in the light of its enduring foundation, object and content."

66. Clark, Barth's Theological Method, 160-165. Clark here accuses Barth of vacillating between an objective and subjective point of view concerning the written Word of God.

67. Cf. note 58.

68. Barth, CD I/2, 26, 243, 817.

69. Ibid., 884.

70. Ibid. This dependence on the Spirit can elsewhere be seen in his Evangelical Theology, 55: "Only in the realm of the Spirit can theology be realized as a humble, free, critical, and happy science of the God of the Gospel. Only in the courageous confidence that the Spirit is the truth does theology simultaneously pose and answer the question about truth."

71. Barth, Credo, 186.


73. Ibid., 34-38. Tillich did not see the Bible as the only source of theology. Such an "assertion of neoorthodox biblicism" was to be rejected. However, he did see it as the basic source.
An appropriate criticism here is expressed rather well by George F. Thomas, "The Method and Structure of Tillich's Theology," in The Theology of Paul Tillich, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: MacMillan Company, 1961), 95: "Though one must heartily approve the principle that the Bible is not the only source of systematic theology, there are times when one wishes that Tillich would refer more often to it. He is right in maintaining that the language of the systematic theologian need not be exclusively Biblical, and that philosophical terms should be used whenever necessary. But if the Bible is the 'basic source' of systematic theology, one would think that more frequent references to it would be appropriate, especially in presenting the 'answers' of the Christian message. Not only can the language of the Bible often give more vivid and moving expression to a theological doctrine than the abstract language of philosophy; but also reference to the Biblical basis of a doctrine gives greater assurance of its Christian character. If the Bible is the 'basic source,' why should it not be used more explicitly? Is not Tillich's failure to refer to it more often likely to lead some of its readers to deny that at crucial points his theology is really based upon the Bible?"

74. Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism, ed. Carl E. Braaten New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 538. He states: "Karl Barth starts from above, from the trinity, from the revelation which is given, and then proceeds to man, and in his latest period, even very deeply into man when he speaks of the 'humanity of God.' Whereas, on the other hand, I start with man, not deriving the divine answer from man, but starting with the question which is present in man and to which the divine revelation comes as the answer."

75. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3.


77. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 8. An example of the two extremes which Tillich was seeking to correlate can be seen in this response to a student recorded in D. Mackenzie Brown, Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 192: "The really dangerous people have been the great critics since the Enlightenment, and especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They could be called quite dangerous, but what I do is something quite different. After these dangerous people, these courageous people, have done their job and have undercut and destroyed the primitivism of religious liberalism, I try to recreate the old realities on another basis. Now many people are not as far along in their own development as the whole historical situation of theology is. They remain still in the post-Reformation period of fundamentalist thought. The 'word of God' is just what orthodox theologians of the year 1620
wrote. They think that this is the word of God for all times, although actually it is only the word of the theologians of the year 1620, in Germany and in Holland mostly—only that."

78. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 62. He states it as follows: "It makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions."

79. Ibid.

80. The following comment in his Theology of Culture, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 49, emphasizes this point: "Instead, theology must use the immense and profound material of the existential analysis in all cultural realms, including therapeutic psychology. But theology cannot use it by simply accepting it. Theology must confront it with the answer implied in the Christian message. The confrontation of the existential analysis with the symbol in which Christianity has expressed its ultimate concern is the method which is adequate both to the message of Jesus as the Christ and to the human predicament as rediscovered in contemporary culture. The answer cannot be derived from the question. It is said to him who asks, but it is not taken from him. Existentialism cannot give answers. It can determine the form of the answer, but whenever an existentialist artist or philosopher answers, he does so through the power of another tradition which has revelatory sources. To give such answers is the function of the Church not only to itself, but also to those outside the Church."

81. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 50.

82. Ibid., 40. The observation of David Hugh Freeman, seems appropriate here: "The experience through which theology becomes aware of its ultimate concern is not the scientific experience of detached observation. The only verification open to the theologian is that of active mystical participation which is beyond experimental verification. Such experience is an inexhaustible source of theological truth, in that the theologian participates directly in religious reality," Recent Studies in Philosophy and Theology (Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1962), 66.

83. Carl F. H. Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1967), 7-32. This section of Henry's book, "Evangelicals and the Theological Crisis," points out the existentialism and subjectivity which are the outcomes of much of contemporary theology. He blames this methodology on Immanuel Kant, "who contended that man lacks rational competence to know the supernatural. . ."(8).

84. This concern for relevance is seen quite clearly from a quote in the preface to his God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations, vol. 1 of God, Revelation, and Authority (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 10: "Evangelical theology is heretical if it is only creative and unworthy if it is only repetitious. That it can
be freshly relevant for each new generation of persons and problems is a continuing asset. One often hears that nonevangelical theology seems to speak more directly to the dilemmas of the age but that its message forfeits the timeless biblical heritage. Evangelical theology, on the other hand, while preserving the Judeo-Christian verities all too often fails to project engagingly upon present-day perplexities."

85. Ibid., 213ff. Also, another quote strengthens the point being made here. This statement appears in Carl F. H. Henry, "The Nature of God," in his Christian Faith and Modern Theology (New York: Channel Press, 1964), 93: "A denial of rational divine revelation and a rejection of scriptural doctrines inevitably throws the religious thinkers of our time back upon some form of natural theology, that is, upon a theology derived from experience. Since experience supplies no ground for theology, the theologians who pursue this course cannot confront the secular forces that grip our generation."

86. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows, 213.

87. Henry, Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 67. He states: "Evangelical theology has nothing to fear, and much to gain, from aligning itself earnestly with the current plea for a return to biblical theology."

88. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows, 229-232. Henry disagrees here with Barth that theology can only be performed by a believer. Henry holds that the truth-content of theology is capable of being examined by the unbeliever. This writer finds that to be problematic, however, especially in light of Paul's statement: γνωρίζως ἀπὸ ἀπεργίας ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁγίων ὑμῶν ἀπὸ ἀπήκρητου ἔργου (I Corinthians 3:14).

89. His statement is as follows in God Who Speaks and Shows, 225: "Human reason is a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth; it is not a creative source of truth."

90. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows, 232-238.

91. Ibid., 238.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid. His exact words are, "Christian theology is the systematization of the truth-content explicit and implicit in the inspired writings. It consists essentially in the repetition, combination, and systematization of the truth of revelation in its propositionally given biblical form. The province of theology is to concentrate on the intelligible and logical relationships of this scripturally given revelation, and to present its teachings as a comprehensive whole."
94. Ibid. There seems to be a dangerous equation here of reason with God's truth as though the believer can put such trust in his mental capacity! This can be seen in an earlier statement (234): "Attention to logical consistency will clarify that nonbelievers thrust aside the Christian revelation not because of any illogicality of truth, but because of their own personal illogicality and sinfulness." Does the believer have no illogicality which could warp his view of what is reasonable?

95. Ibid., 241. A strong support for this notion is found in the following statement: "Were the doctrines of the Trinity, of divine election and human responsibility, of the two natures of Christ logically contradictory doctrines, no evangelical Christian could or should accept and believe them." It seems not to matter here whether the Bible says so or not. Truth is left to rationality.


97. Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 11-14. This preface to Erickson's book is very insightful regarding information about where he is coming from, what position he is taking, and by whom he has been influenced.

98. Ibid., 21.

99. Erickson himself does use the word "contextualized" (Christian Theology, 75). He refers to three dimensions of contextualization: 1) length--moving from a Biblical setting to a twentieth century setting; 2) breadth--expressing theology in different forms to different cultures in the present time period; and 3) height--"dealing with theology on varying levels of abstraction, complexity, and sophistication." The primary dimension being dealt with in this paper (if one had to be chosen) is that of breadth. This author, however, fails to see such a definite distinction as is made by Erickson between the dimensions of breadth and length. When one deals with the matter of making theology applicable to the culture of a Brazilian couple, for example, is this not making a transition from a first-century setting as well as from a Western setting?

100. Erickson, Christian Theology, 59-80. Chapter three, "The Method of Theology," is covered in these pages. It is interesting to note that the theological methodology found here is akin to that methodology which he suggests to determine ethical principles in his Relativism in Contemporary Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974). Just as in his theological method, content must be distinguished from form (in other words, that which is absolute must be distinguished from that which is relative), so in his ethical method. The following quote concerning the status of ethical principles reveals this: "At some points, the principles are so specifically spelled out as to be equitable with rule. . . . Here the principle
(preservation of human life) is embodied in a rather specific dictate (the prohibition of murder), which becomes a universal. In other cases the identification is not nearly so close, however. . . . The concrete form that this would take might vary greatly from one culture to another" (138).

101. Erickson, Christian Theology, 73. Erickson also devotes a whole chapter to a more detailed analysis of this step, "Contemporizing the Christian Message" (105-125).

102. Ibid. One of the most important differences between the methodologies of Tillich and Erickson (which he fails to mention) is that Tillich's first step would not be a collection of the biblical material but an investigation or analysis of the situation.

103. Erickson illustrates the need for contextualizing by an interesting analogy in his The New Evangelical Theology (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1968), 16. He says, "The way in which a plant develops is very much affected by the soil in which it grows. The same is true of a theology. Theology is dynamic. It stems from the dialogue and interaction of different ideas, events, and men. New forms of thought arise in response to demands of history. A theology thus can only be really understood when seen in its historical context, in the frame of the influences which produced it."

104. Erickson, Christian Theology, 107. Erickson uses the example of Rudolf Bultmann as one who has lost the essence of Christianity in his theology.

105. Ibid., 120-124.

106. Ibid., 64.
CHAPTER III

THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

One might wonder: "Why is there all this concern over the subjective nature of contextualization in contemporary theological methods? What justifies the need for more objectivity?" Those questions are valid and will seek to be answered by giving an example of what can happen when every theologian does that which is right in his own eyes. 107

The example to be used is the theology of liberation. Whereas the last chapter presented methodologies which represented a wide spectrum of theological diversity, this chapter will seek to present the methodology of this one theology in particular. In examining how liberation theologians develop their belief system, it should become obvious to the reader that contextualization is very prevalent in their method. This prevalence and the resulting theological "truths" will serve to reinforce the argument that the inclusion of contextualization in theological method is potentially threatening to the preservation of orthodoxy.

This examination of the method of liberation theology will follow several logical steps. First of all, consideration will be given to its focus. After this, stages in the methodological process will be stated and explained. This then will be followed by a specific example of this process to help the reader understand how it
is applied in a Latin American culture.

METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS

The matter of relying upon some existential experience as the grounds of discovery seems to be foundational to liberation theology. In discussing the "suppositions of liberation theology," Roger Haight states: "Probably the most basic and fundamental experience underlying liberation theology is the experience of poverty." Haight further specifies that such an experience is not simply the existence of poverty nor the circumstance of those who are poor; rather, it refers to "an experience all at once of outrage, of condemnation of this condition, and of guilt at allowing it to continue."  

The writings of Gustavo Gutierrez clearly reveal this heavy reliance upon existential experience as the foundation of liberation theology. The following quote from one of his works serves as an example:

One of the main guiding ideas in these pages is the conviction that the historical starting point for the following of Jesus and for reflection on this following is to be found in the experience that comes from the Spirit. This is what Bernard of Clairvaux put so beautifully when he said that when it comes to spirituality all people must know how to 'drink from their own well.' In our insertion into the process of liberation in which the peoples of Latin America are now engaged, we live out the gifts of faith, hope, and charity that makes us disciples of the Lord. This experience is our well.  

Historian Enrique Dussel reveals this priority given to one's experience as a starting point when he says that "faith understood theologically can be described as supernatural and existential comprehension." Elsewhere, he talks about God's revelation to man being
exclusively limited to his everyday experience. Thus, it would make sense that he would see value in liberation theology's focus on man's present situation.

The Latin American situation of poverty and political oppression is clearly not just the starting point of liberation theology but its focal point as well: it is that for which answers are sought to be provided. An example of some of the questions raised in such an analysis of one's experiential setting is:

How are we to live as believers on a continent ravaged by violence, domination, exploitation, and dependence? How are we to live the faith in this conflict-ridden milieu so that our faith-based response to it will serve to animate and mobilize people's energies for the construction of a more just and fraternal society?

One can see here that the nature of these questions is such that they demand answers which are experiential, not theoretical.

This methodological focus on the experience of the poor and the oppressed in Latin America is one of the reasons for the utter disregard that liberation theologians have toward what is called Western or European theology. The accusation brought against non-Third World theologians is that they ignore the cries of the poor and "proceed to ask the wrong abstract questions and be satisfied with wrong idealistic answers." This disdain is reminiscent of the attitude of theologians such as Tillich and Moltmann toward Hodgean methodology which was seen in the previous chapter. However, even Tillich and Moltmann are too idealistic in their theological thinking because of their European bent for the likes of Gutierrez and his camp.
STAGES IN THE METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

Having clarified what liberation theologians have as their methodological focus—the oppressed and poverty-stricken experience of Latin Americans, attention will now be given to the actual process by which such theology is developed to answer the questions raised by that situation. This process will be outlined according to three stages: praxis, prehension, and proclamation.117

The notion of praxis relates hand-in-hand with the methodological focus on the experience of the poor. Praxis is a derivative of the Greek word ἑργαζομαι which means "to work" or "to execute."118 Thus, the idea is that as the liberation theologian reads the text of the Latin American situation, he seeks to execute a transformation of the unjust social structures. Harvey Cox explains:

It is a style of theology, perhaps the first, based on the conviction that all human thought is a form of action. It grows out of the continuing interaction between reflection and engagement, theorizing and doing. . . . These theologians spend hours with people who are engaged in difficult and dangerous political tasks.119

Inherent in this emphasis on praxis is again a disdain for intellectual formulations done in the name of theology which do not speak from the situation of the oppressed. This is apparent throughout the writings of liberation theologians. A remark by José Míguez Bonino concerning this radical nature of liberation theology serves as an illustration here:

It poses a radical challenge to certain classic Protestant formulations: sola fides, sola gratia, sola Scriptura, solus Christus. Do such formulations make any sense in a theology that starts off from the integration of the Christian
message into the struggle for liberation, the historical praxis of the faith, and socio-political analysis as an integral part of theological reflection.\textsuperscript{120} This theologian is making it clear that reality must be experienced and acted upon in the formulation of theology.

The significance of praxis is understood in a greater light when one recognizes that a major premise of liberation theology is that theology is a "second act." Gutiérrez states: "Discourse on faith is a second stage in relation to the life of faith itself. This methodological statement is a central one in the theology of liberation."\textsuperscript{121} The "life of faith" refers to praxis; praxis is "the first act." The commitment and involvement of the theologian in the renovation of his society must precede the formulation of theology. Thus, truth becomes tied to action.\textsuperscript{122} Only once one acts toward the societal transformation can he make a theological contribution for that context which is relevant.

After this praxis comes the second stage in the methodological process which the author has referred to as prehension.\textsuperscript{123} That liberation theology labels itself a "theology" demonstrates that it seeks to understand what God has to say about the social reality.\textsuperscript{124} Leonardo Boff refers to this as hermeneutical mediation, where the task is to answer the question "What has the Word of God to say about this?"\textsuperscript{125} It is a grave mistake to perceive of liberation theology as a movement of men who have no regard for what God is trying to tell them. Indeed, the pursuit of liberation theologians is very much guided by an awareness and sensitivity to God's message (according to their interpretation, of course!). This message is
sought through an evaluation of the context in terms of *Heilsgeschichte*, a reading of faith-tradition, and an analysis of the whole of human experience.\textsuperscript{126}

It is important to note here that the Bible is read with a theological-political bent, stressing the social context of the message. \textsuperscript{127} Though a textual meaning is sought, the purpose is to establish an "appropriate" (whether literal or nct) translation for the current situation.\textsuperscript{128} For this reason, certain texts are more favored than others—i.e., those which address liberation themes.\textsuperscript{129} Rubem Alves makes a statement that fittingly depicts the manner in which the message of the Bible is deciphered:

The bare facticity of events, persons, places, and dates is not what matters; the facts themselves are meaningless. What matters is the subjective how that is expressed in the words, that wells up from the realm of lived experience which gave birth to the text, but which the text itself cannot contain.\textsuperscript{130}

Noteworthy then is that an understanding is sought of God's revelation in light of the social context; but, this understanding focuses on answering the question "How?" rather than "What?" One can obviously see an action-oriented bias rooted in this type of thinking.

Though there is this bias, however, does not mean that there is no appreciation or regard for something authoritative in the Bible, no matter how minimal it may seem. Gutiérrez goes so far as to talk about reformulating the questions of the theologians if necessary.\textsuperscript{131} The Boff brothers do not deny that "the sovereign word of God" must have the priority in the dialectic which is taking place.\textsuperscript{132} However, there are several trademarks of the liberation theologians' prehension of Scripture:
1. It favors application rather than explanation.

2. It seeks the textual meaning for the sole purpose of arriving at the practical meaning.

3. It tries to find and activate "the transforming energy" of the passage.

4. It stresses the social context of the message.\(^{133}\)

It is only after the theologian has acted in his social situation for its betterment and sought to understand his actions in light of God's revelation that theology is ready for proclamation. The content that is formulated here is more so a program for action than a systematization of classic theological themes. Of course, this makes sense in light of the aforementioned emphasis on praxis and the sociological bent with which Scripture is interpreted.\(^{133}\)

The theology that evolves from this methodological process is by no means considered absolute or timeless. Great effort is taken to avoid falling into the trap of "theological purism" with which Western theologians are unmercifully labeled. In the words of Enrique Dussel, that type of theology is "incapable of seeing its own biases as the inhabitants of the earth are incapable of seeing the other side of the moon."\(^{134}\) Hugo Assman holds that Jesus and the prophets were opposed to "the cultism and legalism of orthodoxy."\(^{135}\)

Thus, the theology of liberation seeks to be a theology that practically relates to the present social reality. It follows then that this theology boasts itself in being distinctively historical as opposed to other theologies. Juan Luis Segundo states: "Attention to the signs of the times is the theological criterion which sets
off a theology of liberation from a conservative, academic theology." Since the times change, the truth-content proclaimed in liberation theology would be susceptible to change. Liberation theologians do not hide that fact. That, in their mind, is another strong point for their theology. One might then ask the liberation theologian what, if anything, is concrete or immutable with regard to the content of his theology. Notice the reply of Segundo to this matter:

What, then, does the faith say to me in the concrete? What is its truth content? If I remain logically consistent in deducing conclusions from the above principles, then my only response can be: nothing. Let me repeat that in another way. If someone were to ask me what I have derived from my faith-inspired encounter as a clear-cut, absolute truth that can validly give orientation to my concrete life, then my honest response should be: nothing.

The message of liberation theology then is one that changes with the times.

Thus, the three stages of the methodological process have been sketched: praxis, prehension, and proclamation. An example will conclude this discussion to add some insight to how this method works and to what types of theological tenets it can lead.

A METHODOLOGICAL EXAMPLE

The particular area of Latin American liberation theology which will be chosen as an example here is its soteriology. It is perhaps the soteriological scheme of this theology in which the liberation theme is most prominently recognized. Thus, the choice of this area will hopefully provide some insight into how liberation theology "works."
The focus and starting point, as was discussed earlier, for the Latin American liberation theologian is the situation about him. Specifically, it is the experience of the poor and the oppressed. This poverty and oppression is not a figment of the theologian's imagination; rather, it is a grim reality surrounding him. Consider these facts about Latin America according to a study published by the American Institute for Public Policy Research (1987):

--Approximately 200 million (seventy or eighty percent of the population) are devastated by poverty.

--The world's highest per capita debt is that of Latin American countries.

--Forty to fifty percent of the work force are victims of un- or under-employment.

--Widespread political corruption and enormous growth of bureaucracies had led to immense income inequalities.

--Prices for the goods Latin America must import are increasingly rising with inflation rates in some countries climbing higher than 1000% per year.

--Sixty-five percent of the population is now living in cities, resulting in homelessness, deteriorating public services, congestion, pollution, crime, and "ungovernability."¹³⁶

Thus, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff stated it precisely and correctly when the introduction to one of their books declared: "They are hungry, they are poor, they are exploited, and they die young. This is the reality confronting the theology of liberation."¹³⁹

It must be emphasized that as the liberation theologian takes the first step by becoming involved in this milieu of social problems, he does so with a finger of blame pointed at exploitation and injustice. The situation is so dire that to think in terms of mere
"development" and "reform" is simply not adequate for improvement. Almost every Latin American country has a rich and privileged ruling elite which maintains control and is most responsible for the oppression of so many. Thus, the liberation theologians are firm believers in socialism as the necessary precondition to building a just society where the needs of all the people can be met.\textsuperscript{140}

After actively beginning to participate in the revolution of the Latin American society for its betterment, the theologian of liberation attempts to determine what message God's Word has for the current situation. Particularly, the matter at hand here is what the salvation of God means in this context of poverty and oppression. One of the most favored texts for this soteriological prehension is Exodus 3:7-8ff.

It is important to remember that a guiding hermeneutical principle of the liberation theologian in looking at this passage is not to simply decipher the literal textual meaning (\textit{sensus literalis}) but to determine the deeper implication for his particular ideology (\textit{sensus plenior}).\textsuperscript{141} Thus, this passage is interpreted as an analogy of Latin American struggles: God is on the side of the poor and oppressed as their Liberator; the oppressed are symbolized by Israel; Pharaoh represents the elite ruler of the country; Egypt is symbolic of the oppressor; Moses is God's man who is sent to bring liberation to the oppressed nation; and the promised land is any society which achieves freedom through revolution. God's involvement was virtually non-existent. It was the Israelites who fought for their own liberation.\textsuperscript{142} It is this "deeper meaning" of the Exodus passage that gives validity to a concept of salvation which radically
differs from that of Protestant orthodoxy.

To be concise, in light of this text and others as well, the major soteriological thrust emerging from liberation theologians' method of prehension preceded by praxis "is that salvation lies in the struggle for political and economic liberation." Some basic trends of this thrust are as follows:

1. Salvation is Christocentric in that the transformation of the universe and the possibility for man to be fulfilled as a human being comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus, as a victim of oppression and execution by political and religious bigots, has cast His lot with the oppressed and actually affected the power and way of liberation in human history.

3. Liberation theology focuses on "this world" with aggression and passion, and so, any reference to salvational transformation is emphatically now and very political.

4. Salvation applies to any dimension where people are kept downtrodden: economic, political, educational, spiritual, institutional, medical, and cultural. . .

5. The oppressor's salvation is that of being prevented from prosperity which brings loss to others.

6. Since estrangement from God is to be reckoned anthropologically and sociologically and not theologically, salvation-liberation takes place on three levels: socio-political, historical, and spiritual.

7. The salvation of God occurs in history through the revolutionary socio-political methods of men empowered by Christ after which reflection helps to encapsulate God's dealings in the world for theological expression.

SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the theological method of liberation theology. The major findings of this examination have been that its methodological focus is upon the experience of the poor in Latin
America and that the methodological process comprises three important elements: praxis—an active participation in the transformation of the societal structure, prehension—an understanding of what God's word has to say about the situation, and proclamation—the declaration of a program of action to confront the social reality. The resulting product is a theology that is primarily dialectical, not substantial. An example of this was seen in the application of this methodology to the concept of salvation. A soteriology emerges that is radically different from that of traditional evangelical theology. Salvation is not primarily a personal matter concerning the spiritual problem of sin; rather, it is just as much (if not more) a social matter concerning the political and economic problems of oppression and poverty.

In light of what has been explained, it is clear that the idea of contextualization is very much imbedded in the method of liberation theology. Though the actual word "contextualization" is hardly found in their writings, the thought of weaving the Christian message into the fabric of the Latin American situation is very prevalent. The result of this contextualizing is a theology that attempts to "liberate" the oppressed from the plight of oppression.
NOTES

CHAPTER III


109. Ibid., 16.

110. Gustavo Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 4-5. This book is quite revealing about the spiritual nature of liberation theology. This theology has not grown out of some cold, hard-faced ideology. Rather, its roots are in a sincere spirituality. Gutiérrez himself says this: "Spiritual experience is the terrain in which theological reflection strikes root" (35). He later states: "When all is said and done, then, all authentic theology is spiritual theology" (37). Though this writer is in agreement with this latter statement, there is a question to be posed in response: Yes, but is all spiritual theology then authentic theology? Another of his works which reveals this reliance upon one's existence is A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, trans. & ed. Sister Caridad Inda & John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973). In it he says, "Theology must be man's critical reflection on himself, on his own basic principles" (11).

111. Enrique Dussel, A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberalism, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1981), 13. Just what is meant by this "existential comprehension" is elaborated: "Faith is learned existentially in the Christian community by the continual utilization of the tools of the Christian experience and by establishing a relationship with the Other. Faith in a practical sense is discovering in everything around us the new world, the world of Christian comprehension. The ultimate horizon that faith opens to us is necessarily nonobjective and nonobjectifiable" (13).

Books, 1976), 139. His exact words are: "We must come to realize that day-to-day history is the one and only place where God reveals himself to us."

113. This methodology basically matches that of the existentialist Paul Tillich. Tillich's method of correlation insisted that one first examine the human situation and listen to the questions being asked. These questions were then to be correlated to the answers found in God's revelation.


116. See Emilio A. Núñez C., Liberation Theology, trans. Paul E. Sywulka (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 41-44. Núñez discusses the influence of Moltmann's hope theology on the liberation theologians and then shares some criticisms that they level toward Moltmann. These criticisms reflect this feeling that he does not address the present experience of the poor in Latin America. Of course, if their feelings were truly consistent about the need to contextualize theology to one's own experiential setting, one would wonder why they would expect a European to treat Latin American problems. The reasoning to justify this expectation is a feeling that God is unequivocally on the side of the poor. The importance of this emphasis is again verified by Leonard and Clodovis Boff, Salvation and Liberation: In Search of a Balance Between Faith and Politics, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 2: "At the roots of the theology of liberation, we find a spirituality, a mysticism: the encounter of the poor with the Lord. Today the poor are a whole class of marginalized and exploited persons in our society, marked as that society is by an exclusive partnership with a dependent capitalism. A theology—any theology—not based on a spiritual experience is mere panting—religious breathlessness."

117. It is important that the reader understand that these stages are not so distinct to every liberation theologian; neither are these specific terms necessarily used. In essence, each stage overlaps the other. The distinction will be maintained in this paper for the sake of clarification.


Nessan points out five elements of the meaning of praxis: 1) living encounter with the social, political, economic, and religious context of Latin America; 2) ethical movement of prophetic indignation at the extreme poverty and oppression in that context; 3) application of social analysis to understand the causes of poverty and oppression including a critical use of Marxist thought; 4) Biblical and theological reflection in the context of Latin American experience; and 5) engagement for the change of unjust social structures.


121. Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, 136.

122. Numerous statements could be cited here; several will have to suffice. The first is from Dominique Barbé, Grace and Power: Base Communities and Nonviolence in Brazil, trans. John Pairman Brown (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 21: "In reality, the true theory is that which comes from practice and brings us back to practice. One has an experience; one studies in a more detached way and draws some general insights from it; one returns to one's field of action. This is always the way we proceed, whatever the realm of our activity, whether in science, commerce, politics, or religion--at least if we proceed in sanity, with the desire to achieve a result that has some actual grasp on reality. Thus it is practice leading to theory leading to practice that is the vehicle of truth, as Gustavo Gutiérrez constantly insists." Another comes from Juan Luis Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 32: "What is Cosme trying to say here? Unless I am mistaken, he is asserting that orthodoxy possesses no ultimate criterion in itself because being orthodox does not mean possessing the final truth. We only arrive at the latter by orthopraxis. It is the latter that is the ultimate criterion of the former, both in theology and in biblical interpretation. The truth is truth only when it serves as the basis for truly human attitudes. 'Doers of the truth' is the formula used by divine revelation to stress the priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy when it comes to truth and salvation." A final statement here is quoted from Robert McAfee Brown, Theology in a New Key: Responding to Liberation Themes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 71: "To take praxis seriously means, therefore, that we know the truth in a different way. It is not a matter of applying timeless truths to a finished universe we cannot understand without their help. Rather, both our understanding and our world remain unfinished; each needs development and refinement in relation to the other."

123. Unlike praxis, this word is not knowingly used by liberation theologians. It is used by this writer to represent a concept that is found in their methodology however--that of making some comprehension of the nature of faith as it applies to their situation.
124. For a discussion of what makes the liberation movement theological and not merely sociological, see Núñez, Liberation Theology, 140-142.


127. Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, 34.

128. Ibid.


130. Rubem A. Alves, Protestantism and Repression: A Brazilian Case Study, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985). Such a statement seems to suggest that there is no truth in Scripture which can be rendered absolute. If such is the case, then having a right theology becomes a meaningless effort. The logical conclusion of Alves' thought is that man becomes his own author of truth. For an interesting article that defends the liberation theologians on this point, see Christine E. Gudorf, "Liberation Theology's Use of Scripture: A Response to First World Critics," Interpretation 41 (January 1987): 5-18. Gudorf proposes that there are alternate ways of testing theological truth since there are alternate contexts for doing theology. Though this is acceptable, the problem still exists when theological truth is not merely tested in an alternate way but actually reformulated. How can such an action be justified?

131. Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, 34. He states: "Moreover, we must not forget that the word of God issues its challenges. The scriptures are not a passive store of answers to our questions. We indeed read the Bible, but we can also say that the Bible 'reads us.' In many instances, our very questions will be reformulated." One really wonders how serious this point is to be taken. It sounds nice and might superficially answer the cry of those who would accuse liberation theology of relativizing all truth (see author's comments in note 130), but what questions have they reformulated? To this author's knowledge, there are hardly any!

on the one hand, and the data of revelation on the other—will be legitimate and valid in liberation theology."


136. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 40. Interestingly, Segundo's book is so titled because of the point being made here. In his perception, theology is no longer bound to the cold, academic methodology of its past.

137. Ibid., 108. That theology could establish no tenet as concrete was the underlying point of Segundo's "hermeneutic circle." By this he meant that the continual changes in one's present-day society demanded a fresh interpretation of the word of God so that reality could be changed accordingly, and then there was the need for the word of God to be interpreted again, and on and on.

138. Howard J. Wiarda, *Latin America at the Crossroads: Debt, Development, and the Future* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), 1-5, 14-19, 40-57. For additional perspectives on the tragic Latin American situation, the following works may be consulted: Barbara Stallings and Robert Kaufman, eds., *Debt and Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 1-232; Ronald H. Chilcote and Joel C. Edelstein, *Latin America: Capitalist and Socialist Perspectives of Development and Underdevelopment*, Latin American Perspective Series no. 3 (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), 1-175; James L. Dietz and James H. Street, *Latin America's Economic Development: Institutionalist and Structuralist Perspectives* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1987), 1-303. Chilcote and Edelstein introduce their book with a noteworthy comparison between the life of a Latin American and a North American: 1) the Latin American has a life expectancy twelve years shorter than the North American; 2) the Latin American receives only a sixth of the education that the North American receives; 3) almost three out of four Latin Americans are affected by hunger compared to one out of ten persons in the United States; 4) the Latin American tends to be sick much more, and yet there are proportionately only a third of the number of doctors; and 5) the Latin American has an income that is one-tenth of that of an "average" North American (p. 1).


141. For a more detailed explanation of the methodological ploy used in this interpretation of the Exodus event, see Nunez, Liberation Theology, 186-192.


145. Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation, 143: "The term 'dialectical' should be emphasized, because it points up a difference with older ways of thinking. Much of Christian thinking was 'substantialist' in nature. In other words, it centered around the notion of 'substance,' and then talked about it as the substratum of 'accidents' which concretized and individualized a given substance. By contrast, 'dialectical' thinking focuses on the relationship between two things."
CHAPTER IV
THE NEED FOR OBJECTIVITY
IN CONTEXTUALIZING THEOLOGY

One conclusive statement can definitely be made in light of what has been said in the foregoing chapters: contemporary approaches to doing theology commonly assume the validity of some form of contextualization. Today's theologians are not content with merely porpounding absolute statements of truth that are not relative to their cultural environments. An unwritten rule for developing a modern theology seems to be that one must weave Biblical truths into the fabric of the society for which it is intended. Liberation theology is an extreme form of this principle in action. However, chapter two clearly showed that a wide variety of theologians (including those who deem themselves as "evangelicals") implement contextualization in their theological method as well.

BRIEF CRITIQUE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Though contextualization is a thread of similarity which runs through the methodology of the liberation theologian and that of the evangelical theologian, liberation theology has not been favorably received by the majority of evangelical theologians. Its truth-content has been the object of numerous criticisms, some of which will be briefly discussed here.146

One criticism of liberation theology which can be made is that
there seems to be a false assumption that any theology developed in the context of the Christian community is authentic to the extent that it reflects that community's needs. Though liberation theologians themselves probably would not make such a statement in those terms, this reasoning is the logical outcome of their priority given to the needs of the poor. The error of the above assumption, however, is that it neglects the priority of Biblical accuracy. If this priority is neglected, a theology could include reflection on a community's needs and yet be full of error. For example, if a community is over-populated and in need of population control measures, a theology would be far from authenticity if it were to offer abortion as a suggestion.

Another criticism which can be made of liberation theology is that it raises its own absolute standard for doing theology. Liberation theology has the reputation of being dogmatically opposed to any type of theological absolutism. However, does it not become a constituent of this same absolutism when praxis is emphasized as a necessary precondition to theology?

In addition to risking a false standard of authenticity and its own form of absolutism, liberation theology paves the way for theology to lose its Christian distinctiveness. The basis of this criticism is the reliance of the liberation theologian upon experience as the grounds for discovering theological truth. This is essentially equivalent to the existentialist notion that experience is the grounds of discovery. If the experience of the poor is a valid starting point for theology, why cannot the experience of someone
else be just as valid? For the liberation theologian to respond that such an emphasis on the poor is Biblical, then does not the liberation theologian have a theology which neglects the experience of the rich or the oppressor?

There is a need for a more objective basis as a starting point in theology. That starting point must be the entirety of the Word of God which is found in the Scriptures. Sure, no one can be totally presuppositionless in his approach to the Scriptures, but one must realize that theology must speak for all classes of society. To start with the existence of the poor is to be biased and just as limited as the Western or European theologian.

A fourth criticism which one can level at this movement is that the priority that liberation theology gives to man's existence as the object of inquiry leads in actuality to an anthropology of liberation rather than a theology of liberation. Rather than being a word about God it is a word about man. Once again, the Word of God contained in the Scriptures is absolute and speaks to all of man's situation. It is rather proud for man to set himself up as God and pick and choose what he "needs" from God's revelation to help him in his situation. If this is the case, why does one really need Christ if no need is seen for him, if the quest of personal experience leads to satisfaction and fulfillment in some other person or thing?

One last criticism to be made here is that liberation theology's emphasis on the community of believers in answering the call to freedom from their political and social oppression is too narrow in ignoring a call of salvation to the rest of the world from spiritual
blindness. That Scripture teaches the sense of community among believers is undeniable. However, at the same time, this membership in the community arises out of a personal experience which one has with the living God over the matter of sin--his own sin which has separated him from God spiritually, not the problem of political or social oppression.

These criticisms are cursory, but the point is that liberation theology comes to some conclusions in its attempt to contextualize Biblical truth which are not agreeable with what is traditionally considered to be orthodox belief. In an attempt to provide a fresh and relevant theology to a people who are miserably suffering, liberation theologians have only superficially attended to these people's needs. In actuality, the plight of the oppressed in Latin America has only been worsened because they have been further misled from the truth. Can real freedom come apart from the truth?  

The above criticisms and comments are not at all intended to question the sincerity of any liberation theologian. It should not be supposed that any of the attempts that these men have made have been guided by a motive of deceit. However, the purest amount of sincerity is not an automatic safeguard of theological truth. The example of liberation theology clearly shows that contextualization can be misused and thus ultimately lead to theological error.

HYPOCRISY AMONG LIBERATION THEOLOGY'S CRITICS

It is this risk of compromising Biblical truth which ought to create great concern and caution among those theologians in the evangelical community who have so heartily endorsed the validity
of contextualization as a step in doing theology. It has already been shown that a widespread acceptance of contextualization is prevalent among the scope of contemporary theologians. The problem is that the Biblical, objective limitations that these theologians place on their contextualizing is virtually absent. Either they have failed to mention them or they have not taken the time to develop such a framework within which to do theology. How is it that one can so scholarly confront the errors of liberation theology—a movement which has made an honest attempt to contextualize truth to the Latin American situation—and yet wholeheartedly endorse the validity of a theological method which includes contextualizing within a framework of his own subjective limitations? Within whose limitations is one to work—Moltmann's, Henry's, Erickson's? Would an eclectic approach be best or is it a matter that really is left to the individual theologian? If the latter is true, then what right does one have to criticize or refute another?

Two examples will serve to amplify the seriousness of this matter. Harvie Conn has written two chapters on the subject of liberation theology in the book Tensions in Contemporary Theology.\(^{148}\) In his second chapter, after negatively assessing liberation theology, he concludes the chapter by stating what he calls "some affirmations" of the movement.\(^{149}\) Conn himself recognizes the tension between having a theology that is overly zealous to contextualize and leads to doctrinal error and having a theology that is static and fails to address modern-day concerns. In light of this recognition, he affirms the unity of interpretation and application found in liberation
theology—a methodological ploy that escapes the captivity of what he labels the "ideology of objectivism." 150

Conn claims that such an affirmation is healthy because it will give respect to evangelical criticisms of liberation theology if evangelical theologians are involved in the similar dialectic of action and reflection:

Unless our interaction with liberation theologies takes us in this positive, growing direction, all the well-articulated criticisms we may offer are "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." The Gutiérreze and the Cones will say of us, "Poor, talkative little evangelicals." 151

Will "evangelical theology" really be any more readily accepted among the liberation theologians if it utilizes their "contextual approach?" It would seem that in this case the criticisms made of liberation theology would only sound more percussive to Gutiérrez and his camp. How could they be justifiably criticized if they used the same methodology of their critics? Their response would then likely be: "Poor, talkative, little hypocrites."

Conn's idea of combining the best of both "popular" and "historical" methodologies sounds nice, but in the end it fails to avoid the risk which he himself stated is inherent in the "popular" methodologies—that of being "ideologically conditioned by the subjective." 152 Conn even admits himself that there is a sense in which theology "can never be 'objective'." 153 According to him, theology is to be done out of a preoccupation with the mission of God to His world; it is not enough for it to simply be Biblically rooted. 154 Those same statements could accurately fit a description of liberation
theology as well. The Biblical boundaries have yet to be erected that will protect theological methods which utilize contextualization from becoming syncretistic.

Another example of this theological risk-taking is found in J. Andrew Kirk. In his book *Theology and the Third World Church*, Kirk makes a poignant, challenging statement for theologians to keep in mind as they formulate their theologies:

> On the other hand, theologians, thoroughly aware of the cultural traps into which unwittingly they may fall, must also challenge every attempt to promote anthropological empiricism, as a way of avoiding value judgments about different cultures. Culture is not right just because it is local. Exchanging the absolutist pretensions of Western cultures for the total autonomy of non-Western ones fails to take seriously both the universal and particular implications of Christ's lordship.

These words penetrate deeply into the heart of this whole matter about contextualization and show the seriousness at hand.

However, Kirk's effort to avoid this pitfall himself is not near as sharp as his ability to identify it. Chapter four of the same book outlines what he calls "some essential conditions for Christian theology." The conditions that he mentions are as follows: 1) "The historical and living Christ is the center of all theological discussion;" 2) "We must be committed to change;" and 3) "We must be committed to the whole people of God." Though these conditions are intended to provide balance between Western absolutism and non-Western autonomy on the tightrope of contextualization, one must really wonder if they do much more than promote the autonomy of Kirk. These are his conditions for Christian theology. What makes them
authoritative to apply universally as essentials for any other theologian who wishes to call his work "Christian?"

Not only do Kirk's conditions fail to rest on a Biblical, objective foundation, but they also fail to exclude the liberation theologies which he himself opposed. Would the liberation theologians not be able to sincerely declare their adherence to these conditions? Again, the evangelical finger of condemnation that has pointed at liberation theologies for their methodological errors has written its own subjective list of safeguards for contextualizing.

A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE

The emerging widespread acceptance of contextualization as a methodological step in the process of doing theology among the community of evangelical theologians (who can so craftily wield their arguments against Gutierrez and his disciples) leaves much to be desired. There are some tough questions for which answers are needed if this modern day pharisaiism is to be avoided.

One of the immediate questions that this issue raises is whether contextualization even belongs in the process of doing theology. Should not the real focus in formulating theological statements be upon trying to understand the Biblical message in light of the context in which it was written rather than the theologian's current context? It is understandable to reason that there is no such person as a presuppositionless theologian, and that because of that fact no theology can escape some modern coloring. This is vastly different, however, from intentionally injecting one's context into his theological methodology so as to affect its outcome.
Does this mean that Christian theology cannot be relevant? No, it does not. The theological statements that are formulated need to be applied. The truths about God and His ways are meant to influence the character of men. The major point of difference that this has from the prevailing contemporary approach to contextualization is that of order. Instead of contextualizing during the methodological process, it is done after this process. It is used not to formulate but to communicate. That seems to be the safer place for contextualization.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The suggested alternative is much to simplistic as it has just been stated, but such is in keeping with the purposes of this paper. It has been this writer's primary intent to raise some critical questions in light of the present, growing trend toward the inclusion of contextualization in theological method. By polling the theological approaches of a wide variety of theologians, revealing their bent toward formulating a theology to be contextually relevant, showing the errors into which this type of approach has led liberation theologians, and presenting a similarity of subjectivity found in evangelical critics of liberation theology, a sensitivity to the dangers of including contextualization has hopefully been heightened.

As was stated at the outset of this paper, all of this exercise in research and thought is virtually meaningless unless it ultimately has practical significance. The surrounding world needs the truth. May the attempts of this author and the readers to spread the truth and make it relevant to this world never compromise the Truth.
CHAPTER IV


147. Consider these words of Jesus: "καὶ γνῶσετε τὴν ἀλήθεια, καὶ ἀλήθεια ἐξουθένεται ἀπὸ αὐτῆς" (John 8:32).


149. Ibid., 418-434.

150. Ibid., 421.

151. Ibid., 429.

152. Ibid., 428.

153. Ibid., 424.

154. There is amazing similarity here between Conn and Jurgen Moltmann concerning this missionary dimension of theology. Cf. 16.

155. J. Andrew Kirk, Theology and the Third World Church (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 37.

156. Ibid., 38-45.
REFERENCES


