

The Reception of Luther's Concept of Freedom in Latin American Liberation Theology

Von Walter Altmann

I The Question

The theme presented to me proposes an exploration of a possible contribution of Martin Luther's concept of freedom in the adoption of the liberation concept by Latin American theologians. In dealing with the issue, we engage ourselves in a systematic endeavor, rather than a historical one. Of course, this can be done only in a very tentative manner. No direct linkage between Luther's concept of freedom and Latin American liberation theology can be traced – and even an indirect linkage can be very problematic.

I will therefore concentrate myself in presenting representative examples of the understanding that influential non-Lutheran Latin American liberation theologians have of Luther's theology and work as a whole. I will bring, in addition, brief comments of my own in relation to these forms of understanding Luther. In conclusion I will present brief systematic theses of the question: freedom – liberation, inserting before that as a bridge a short section in which I intend to outline the direction which I think could be used as a possible way of speaking about Luther's influence on Latin American liberation theology.

II The Difference Between the Historical Processes

This approach is also appropriate since we will attempt to compare two situations and theologies which are quite distant from each other in time and quite dissimilar. While Luther lived precisely in that time, in which Europeans began to conquer the continent which is called the Americas today, the Reformer hardly took notice of this historical event. The Latin American liberation theologians, on the other hand, reflect exactly on the basis of the experience of Christians who are conscious of a history of 500 years of oppression and exploitation which began with that epic conquest. Liberation theologians yearn profoundly for the liberation of the human bodies hurt by poverty, economic

exploitation, and social injustice. This is then also the context for Latin American interpretations of Luther.

III *How is Luther Seen by Latin American Non-Lutheran¹ Liberation Theologians?*

I *Roman-Catholic Theologians*

1.1 *Juan Luis Segundo: the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*

Segundo (* 1925), a Jesuit from Uruguay, criticizes Protestant eschatology in the context of the relation between faith and ideology. He understands it as the notion of »a transcendence of anything and everything in history«, under the suspicion that »this continuing function of de-ideologizing« would »in fact oppress our ideological creativity. Why? Because it wields the sword of criticism even before the ideologies have time to become effective and to arouse real enthusiasm.«²

Segundo finds the origin of this incapacity for historical commitment in Luther's doctrines of justification by faith and the two kingdoms. Quoting James S. Preus, Segundo understands that there was »the fastidious depoliticization of the doctrine of justification, via the two-kingdoms doctrine«.³ Segundo recognizes that »this eschatological relativization of any and every existing historical reality, the desacralization of any and every political regimes, initially has a liberating impact«, because then, »faith enables people to imagine new

1 I limit myself to non-Lutheran theologians, in order to assess the repercussions of Luther and his theology beyond the Lutheran confessional frontiers, in the context of Latin American liberation theology. As to Lutheran analysis of Luther in Latin America cf. among others Walter ALTMANN: *Luther and liberation: a Latin American perspective*/ [trans. by Mary M. Solberg]. MP 1992, 148. For a general overview of pertinent literature published in Brazil, both of Lutheran and non-Lutheran – even non-Christian – authors, up to the date of the publication cf. Joachim FISCHER: *Quem é Lutero no Brasil?* In: *Reflexões em torno de Lutero*/ ed. by Martin N. Dreher. Vol. 2. São Leopoldo 1984, 53-77; Gottfried BRAKEMEIER: *Justification by grace and liberation theology: a comparison*. *Ecumenical review* 40 (1988), 215-222; Vítor WESTHELLE: *O desencontro entre a teologia luterana e a teologia da libertação*. *Estudos teológicos* 26 (São Leopoldo 1986), 37-58.

2 Juan Luis SEGUNDO: *The liberation of theology (Liberación de la teología (engl.))*. Maryknoll 1988, 126.

3 Ibid, 142.

possibilities and to escape the mesmerizing allure of the established order«. ⁴ On the other hand, however, the permanent relativization of any and all human endeavor leads to »a politically neutral theology«. ⁵ Therefore we would be led inevitably »not to opt for anyone or anything in concrete history«, and this would mean nothing less than the »death of liberation theology«. ⁶

In his evaluation, Segundo admits that the Reformation, in particular Luther himself, has rescued the Pauline thinking, though it »was faithful only to one part of Paul's thinking, to that aspect which we could call freedom *from*«, ⁷ that is, freedom from legalism. Yet, the Roman-Catholic theology related to the »merit of human endeavors for *gaining entrance* to the eternal kingdom of God⁸ could, in its turn, provide a correction to »Lutheran passivity«. ⁹

Segundo concludes with accentuated severity: »So that Catholic doctrine was clearly inadequate insofar as it made the law the object of our liberty, and the Lutheran doctrine was inadequate insofar as it turned faith into a deprecation of human liberty.« ¹⁰ Therefore, Segundo expresses the wish that, instead of the controversy, there could exist »a fruitful and liberating synthesis« ¹¹ between the Roman-Catholic and Protestant theologies. In his opinion, liberation theology should develop on this basis.

1.2 Hugo Echegaray: Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer

Echegaray (1940-1979), a Peruvian priest, examines Luther and Müntzer as two antithetical models for the ongoing problem of the relationship between faith and politics. He does so with special attention to the concepts of freedom and liberation. ¹²

4 Ibid, 144.

5 Ibid, 145.

6 Ibid, 148 $\triangle$ Juan Luis SEGUNDO: *Liberación de la teología*. Buenos Aires 1975, 169.

7 Ibid, 150 $\triangle$ *Liberación de la teología*, 172 (emphasis in the original).

8 Ibid, 139. Segundo laments that, in order to arrive at »an honored recognition that Roman-Catholic theology past over the teachings of Paul in respect to justification by faith«, post-Vatican II Roman-Catholic theologians, such as Hans Küng, have also not taken into account »the true aspect that the Catholic Church defended at the time of the Reformation« (160 note).

9 Ibid, 150.

10 Ibid, 151.

11 Ibid, 150.

12 Hugo ECHEGARAY: *Lutero y Münzer: dos concepciones antitéticas de la liberación*. In: Hugo Echegaray: *Anunciar el reino: selección de artículos*. Lima 1981, 134-169.

In relation to Luther, Echegaray recognizes the legitimacy of his protest against the tutelage of the Church over the political realm, as well as the »democratic character«¹³ of this claim. He understands that Luther, when distinguishing between an interior and an exterior freedom, »anticipates by one century, obscurely and in the realm of theology, the philosophical principle of Descartes of the dichotomy of reality into two different orders: one of extension, the other of thought«.¹⁴ Thus he contributes towards the modern concept of freedom of conscience,¹⁵ and also establishes »a certain desacralization of power«, but equally lays the foundation for »a radical distinction between two realms or orders entirely independent from each other«.¹⁶

This would lead to a contradiction: to have interior freedom, exterior freedom is of no importance at all; on the contrary, interior freedom can be exercised precisely in exterior captivity. Echegaray finds the sources for this thinking in Luther's »radical anthropological pessimism«,¹⁷ which does not admit any cooperation of the human person with God in the former's liberation, and in his Christology of the cross, which knows God only in God's hiddenness. »Christ's humanity is de facto devaluated, even if theoretically it is orthodoxically affirmed«.¹⁸ Redemption consists then in the »exchange of God's righteousness and human being's sin«, »without any real change in human nature«; »the transfer of imputations« is a »juridical fiction«.¹⁹

Thus, Echegaray concludes: »The subject who has acquired Christian freedom, in reality, for Luther, lacks any efficient freedom before God and the world.«²⁰ Luther would know only the freedom from sin, pretending to »ignore« the world.²¹ The judgement is impious: »Luther subtracts any moral relevance from the political realm.«²²

13 Ibid, 139.

14 Ibid, 140.

15 »For Luther, the only true freedom is that obtained by faith in the power of one's own conscience« (ibid, 157).

16 Ibid, 143; cf. also: »The political order is autonomous with respect to the religious sphere« (157).

17 Ibid, 158.

18 Ibid, 162.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid, 164.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

1.3 Franz Hinkelammert: *Charisma and Institution*

Hinkelammert (* 1931), a German economist living in Costa Rica since 1963, seeks to understand the Reformation in the context of the historical dialectics between charisma and institution. Institutionalization is opposed to the Christian charisma, but nevertheless gives the necessary support so that it can be proclaimed.²³ The Reformation is thus seen as that historical period of the XVth/XVIth and beginning of the XVIIth century, which comprises both a wide millenarian anti-institutional movement, as well as the later foundation of new churches and societies. In this wide sense it was »a people's liberation movement«,²⁴ carrying charismatic claims against the still prevailing medieval order. However, as charismatic expression, the movement lacked a clear institutional perspective.

On the other hand, the Reformers were not representatives of the millenarian charisma – against the peasants, Luther even presented »an antimillenarian fury without limits«²⁵ –, but they were precisely »men of the institutionalization of the millenarian charisma«.²⁶ Thus the people's movement slowly but inevitably adopted »a certain bourgeois character«.²⁷

From this, similarities and differences between the Reformation period and the experience of today's Christian base communities can be derived. Not only are the setting up of the base communities and the autonomous reading of the Bible analogous processes, but also the point of departure is the same: the subjectivity, that is, people become subjects of their lives. But there is also »an important difference ... The Reformation conceives the autonomy of the subject in the context of bourgeois values and affirms this concrete subject as a subject who can live in harmony with these values. The current liberation movement, on the contrary, makes explicit the needs of the concrete subject and is conscious of the conflictiveness between these values and the bourgeois values.«²⁸

23 Franz HINKELAMMERT: Carisma cristão, sua institucionalização e as reformas: uma tentativa de reflexão. In: José Míguez Bonino ...: Luta pela vida e evangelização: a tradição metodista na teologia latino-americana. São Paulo 1985, 12.

24 Ibid, 14.

25 Ibid. While the German peasants came to deposit their hope in Luther's support, he »never had any doubt as to institutionalizing the church as society against them«.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 17f.

1.4 *Leonardo Boff: Luther – Revolutionary or Only a Reformer?*

Leonardo Boff (* 1938), a former Franciscan from Brazil, understands the Reformation as »above all a religious phenomenon«, yet »always in articulation with concrete history and economic-political structures« of his time.²⁹ In the religious realm, »Luther brought about a grand liberation process. He will for ever be an obligatory reference point for all who seek liberty and know how to struggle for it«.³⁰ Boff, referring to Luther's great writings of 1520,³¹ recognizes in them »a liberation of the Babylonian captivity of the church«,³² and classifies »the basic thesis of justification by faith« as »a radical liberation« from all requirements by the law, in order to receive God's grace, »an expression of incredible inner freedom achieved by Luther«.³³ Of particular significance is that Boff does not fall into the traditional trap of understanding justification by faith, in Luther, as nonconductive to good deeds in the social realm. On the contrary, quoting Peter Manns, Boff recognizes in Luther the opposition of the »fides concreta, composita seu incarnata (active in good works)« to the »fides abstracta vel absoluta (outside of good works)«.³⁴ Boff's conclusion is therefore: »An undeniable aura of liberty pervades his principal texts and is transformed into the yeast of liberation in the corpus christianorum.«³⁵

As to Luther's influence in the political field, Boff is more reticent. He recognizes that Luther »was not able to control the movement he unleashed« and understands that he »was not even aware of its sociopolitical implications«.³⁶ Since, »fundamentally, he respects secular power« as authorities instituted by God,³⁷ Luther's religious movement attracted finally as allies, »more

29 Leonardo BOFF: Luther, the Reformation, and liberation. In: Faith born in the struggle for life: a re-reading of Protestant faith in Latin America today/ ed. by Dow Kirkpatrick; trans. by Lewistine McCoy. Grand Rapids, MI 1988, 200f. [Port.: Leonardo BOFF: A significação de Lutero para a libertação dos oprimidos. In: Leonardo Boff: E a igreja se fez povo; eclesiogênese: a Igreja que nasce da fé do povo. 3rd. ed. Petrópolis 1986, 168].

30 Ibid, 201 (in the original: »... to struggle and to suffer for it«, 169).

31 For example, the treatise concerning »The freedom of the Christian« is classified as »one of the most beautiful texts of [original: the] Christian tradition« (205; original 173).

32 Ibid, 202.

33 Ibid, 202 f.

34 Ibid, 211 f.

35 Ibid, 206.

36 Ibid, 207.

37 Ibid, 208.

than the poor people, the peasants and serfs«, »the princes, the humanists, and the artists ..., the urban bourgeois«, whose project »was not oriented to the line of liberation but to the accumulation of wealth and privilege«. ³⁸

Thus, for Boff Luther's role in the sociopolitical realm was limited to one of reforms, so that the Protestantism, which emerged out of it, with its individualism, »runs the risk of masking the conflicts that torment the poor and thereby failing to collaborate with the messianic task of the liberation of the condemned of the earth«. ³⁹ In order to achieve this purpose, Boff proposes a process of recovering »some perceptions of Luther, especially ... his open spirit of liberation within the church«. ⁴⁰ Among these, he proposes to reassess the Protestant principle (Paul Tillich), to »recover the liberating potential of the Gospel«, ⁴¹ in particular to put the Bible in the hands of the common people, and to stress »faith which brings forth deeds of liberation«. ⁴²

1.5 *Eduardo Hoornaert: Luther – a Theologian of the People*

Hoornaert (* 1930), a Belgian, former priest, living in Brazil since 1958, detects precisely in Luther's »On the Babylonian captivity of the church«, a writing which is notoriously polemical, »a thinker, who is organically linked with the people at the grassroots level, who perceives the problems and the way of thinking of the common people«. ⁴³ Radical, though never anarchical, Luther formulates his critiques »inspired in the most healthy realism and in the understanding of the conditioning factors, which affect people. One perceives in them a deep pain for the degradation of the church under the tyranny of an ecclesiastical system, but never hatred towards concrete persons or situations.« ⁴⁴

Hoornaert understands that Luther reveals himself as »excellently knowledgeable of Christianity as was practiced in the Medieval Age among the common

³⁸ Ibid, 209.

³⁹ Ibid, 210.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 211.

⁴² Quoted and translated from the original, 178 (the edition in English reverses the statement: »faith which is fired by works of liberation« [ibid, 211]).

⁴³ Eduardo HOORNAERT: Martim Lutero, um teólogo que pensa a partir do povo. In: Reflexões em torno de Lutero/ ed. by Martin N. Dreher. Vol. 2. São Leopoldo 1984, 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 13.

people«. ⁴⁵ He made a most necessary »analysis of at least four hundred years of Christian life lived out under the dominance of a clergy ever more professionalized«, ⁴⁶ since the Councils of Lateran 1179 and 1215. The sacramental practice initiated by these councils had had as an aim nothing less than »the reconquering of the believers and their separation from the first great people's heresies, which threatened to organize the people, giving them the instruments to oppose the clerical power, above all through the Bible«. ⁴⁷

In this context, Luther's action reveals itself as profoundly liberating. Hoornaert does not hesitate even in reassessing some of the customary critiques made against Luther. Thus, the return to the »Gospel«, as advocated by Luther, is not classified as an expression of a non-historical idealism, but as a hope which »rehistoricizes the petrified Christendom, which pretends to be eternal and immutable«. ⁴⁸ Concerning the relationship between Luther and Müntzer, Hoornaert advocates a revision of Ernst Bloch's presuppositions, which »created an image of a Luther antagonistic to the people, committed to the powerful«. ⁴⁹ Finally, Hoornaert also refutes the accusation that Luther was »a typical expression of modern individualism«. On the contrary, in him we could discover »a person who looks after what is happening with the people at grassroots level«. ⁵⁰

Hoornaert therefore concludes: »Luther has revealed ... a truth too often forgotten among Christians: more than an organized system, Christianity is a ferment, an explosive force in the midst of societies, a continuous reference, and an uncomfortable one, to the gospel, to the poor, to the forgotten and oppressed people. There have always been and will always be attempts to channel and domesticate, to civilize or institutionalize this force of the Spirit, which acts in history. But there will always be people, as well, who are inspired by the Spirit, prophets and charismatics, »protestants« in the genuine sense of the word.« ⁵¹

45 Ibid, 11.

46 Ibid, 12.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 13.

49 Ibid., 14.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, 16.

2 Non-Lutheran Protestant Theologians

2.1 José Míguez Bonino: *Two Kinds of Righteousness*

The Argentinian Methodist theologian Míguez Bonino (* 1924) examines Luther's writing »On Two Kinds of Righteousness«. We must pay attention to the fact that in other languages than English the word »righteousness« coincides with »justice«, and precisely this concept attracted Míguez Bonino's attention. In order to answer the question of what is »righteousness« for a believer in Jesus Christ, the reformers »waged one of the crucial battles«, responding »without any hesitation: it is a righteousness which »proceeds from God«; only and totally from God. We, in turn, undertake another battle. And we are obliged to answer, with equal vigor: It is a righteousness we must »place as a deed among human beings«. Are these two answers antagonistic to each other? Do they belong to different planes? Are they exclusive to each other?«⁵²

Míguez Bonino understands that Luther achieves »a unity« in his sermon, »be it seen »from below« – the issue of human conflicts –, be it »from above« – the redemptive initiative of Christ«.⁵³

As to the central issue of the relationship between the two kinds of righteousness, Míguez Bonino makes three observations. »In the first place, it becomes clear that Luther seeks to emphasize the »absolute priority« of that righteousness which God gives to us, out of pure grace, through faith.«⁵⁴ Christ himself is this righteousness, classified as external and foreign. With precision, Míguez Bonino observes that »external« and »foreign« have nothing to do with »distant« and »strange«,⁵⁵ because Jesus Christ himself is not; on the contrary, his righteousness »is ours just like the common goods in a marriage«.⁵⁶ The Methodist theologian seems surprised by the dynamism, with which Luther describes Christ's righteousness: it encompasses the totality of our life, where it »starts, grows, and finally comes to perfection through death«.⁵⁷

52 José MÍGUEZ BONINO: La justicia del cristiano. In: Lutero ayer y hoy. Buenos Aires 1984, 36.

53 Ibid, 49.

54 Ibid, 49f.

55 Ibid, 50.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., quoting Luther literally.

In the second place, it is observed that in relation to the second kind of righteousness, we enter »into the field of human activity, where the believer is an »active subject«,⁵⁸ though not with autonomy and independence, since »our righteousness [justice] is inseparably and intrinsically linked with Christ«⁵⁹: »origin, content, and power of all righteousness [justice]«.⁶⁰

In the third place, Míguez Bonino observes that Luther indicated »the small ones, the weak, the sick, the poor, with whom Christ identified himself when assuming his »form of a servant«, as the place for the concrete exercise of righteousness«.⁶¹

Míguez Bonino raises the issue whether this distinction is adequate from a Latin American perspective. He answers in first place confirming »the constant divine prevenience«, not in a formal way, but as »Jesus Christ's ever anticipated and active presence«.⁶² It is not our task to »invent« a righteousness of our own, but to »incorporate ourselves« to this righteousness, which is, ethically seen, »the space of freedom and hope, into which the human praxis of justice is inserted«.⁶³

Then Míguez Bonino asks himself whether speaking of »two kinds« of righteousness is an appropriate classification. He distinguishes here the danger of »three grave deformations«: to relegate human righteousness to a »secondary, optional, and dispensable level«, ⁶⁴ to favor the resurgence of a privatist individualism, which relegates public issues to autonomous functionaries (quite contrary to Luther's own thinking); to de-Christologize the second righteousness.

Finally, though without developing the issue, Míguez Bonino makes the suggestion of rereading the theme taking as the departure point the world of the poor, of those who are without power. These powerless ones should not be invited to self-renunciation, but should be called »to take upon themselves, with confidence, their quality as »children of the Father, »brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, »heirs of God's wealth««.⁶⁵

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid, 51.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid, 52.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid, 53.

2.2 *Elsa Tamez: Justification by Faith*

In her book »Contra toda condena« (Against all condemnation),⁶⁶ Tamez, a Mexican theologian living in Costa Rica, does not intend to undertake an examination of Luther's theology but of the Pauline teaching on justification by faith. It is, however, the most extensive inquiry into this central theological topic of the Reformer's theology done from Latin American hermeneutical presuppositions. It is an effort to reread this key concept, bringing new insights into the already undergoing process in Latin America of reassessing the importance of social justice in relation to the doctrine of justification. This step is »considered important, in order to supersede the individualism and subjectivism which permeate the life of faith of the churches«.⁶⁷ Tamez describes the attempts of interpretation and actualization done by other Latin American theologians in relation to the doctrine of justification, in emphasizing the issue of justice, of the dignity of the human being, of the spaces of freedom.⁶⁸ In these attempts the aim is to emphasize the liberation from sin, from the law, and from death, »in all its concrete manifestations«.⁶⁹ The novelty consists then precisely, »in considering the justification / liberation issue from the historical perspective of oppression, poverty, and struggle«.⁷⁰

On her part, Tamez manages firstly to underline the relevance of the Pauline doctrine, contributing thus from the outset to break two preconceptions which are deeply rooted: one that Paul would be an irrecoverable conservative and the other that the doctrine of justification by faith would be detrimental to the task of liberation of the poor and oppressed.

The specific angle of Tamez's research is the relevance of justification by faith for the persons who are excluded from society, for the non-persons. This doctrine represents for these people the recovering of dignity and of space for freedom and action. »All, not only a few, have a right to live with dignity as subjects, because life is a gift of God.«⁷¹ Thus, the author is led to conclude that:

66 Elsa TAMEZ: *Contra toda condena: la justificación por la fe desde los excluidos*. San José, Costa Rica 1991, 196.

67 Ibid, 36.

68 Cf. *ibid*, 28-41.

69 Ibid, 41.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid, 184.

»justification by faith, understood as God's action in history, making the revelation of his righteousness concrete, declaring and making human beings righteous, is good news for the thousands of excluded people in history, because:

- when recognizing God's solidarity as the root of justification, the excluded one perceives that God is present solidarily in the one who has become the excluded one par excellence, Jesus Christ, and therefore in all those who are excluded; ...

- since it is by faith, and not by law, that one is justified, the excluded ones become conscious of their being as active subjects, and not mere objects, in history, neither of the law nor of any other system which subdues them to marginalization.«⁷²

IV Preliminary Conclusions

On the basis of the referred examples, we can draw some preliminary conclusions:

Firstly, there is evidently no uniformity at all among Latin American liberation theologians in the assessment of Luther's theology and work. The positions vary from an accentuated aversion (Echegaray) to an extremely laudatory appreciation (Hoornaert). While Segundo is above all critical, Boff is predominantly favorable to Luther. Míguez Bonino attempts to establish a positive dialogue, and Tamez seeks to reinterpret the central doctrine of justification by faith for a new time and situation.

Secondly, we can observe, in general, that the stance tends to be more favorable, when the authors have dealt with primary texts by Luther (Boff, Hoornaert and Míguez Bonino), and antagonistic when the judgements are formulated on the ground of secondary sources, quite often negatively biased themselves.

This may perhaps explain some judgements, which – as I see them – are frankly mistaken. For example, Segundo may well be doing violence to Luther's thought, when he understands justification by faith from the doctrine of two kingdoms, without even mentioning the extensive theological debate which took place concerning the latter. It also seems evident that Segundo was unaware of the fact that, in the civil realm, Luther advocated the cooperation of the human being with God, although he denied it decisively in the realm of salvation.

⁷² Ibid, 184f.

As to Echegaray, his interpretation, though containing sharp observations, accepts and reproduces uncritically and without sufficient basis neither in the texts nor in the respective research, the theories of an exclusively inner freedom of the Christian and of the total autonomy of the political realm in Luther. Consequently, he is unable to realize that the critique made by him against Müntzer as well, in the sense that he had replaced judgements which should have been made under political criteria, by religious enthusiasm, can well be made on the ground of Luther's theological argument.

Hinkelammert's analysis is particularly appropriate as a contribution towards the understanding of the similarities and differences between the Reformation period and the one of the Christian base communities in Latin America. We must ask, however, whether in respect to the dialectics of »charisma – institutionalization«, as worthwhile as the distinction in itself might be, Hinkelammert does not distribute historical roles too mechanically. Thus, to describe Luther's role exclusively as the one of institutionalizing the charisma, and denying him a significant participation, even a decisive one, in the movement of the charisma in history, does not seem to be totally convincing – an issue that Hoornaert judged quite differently, as we have seen.

Leonardo Boff's stance is characterized by great openness of mind and spirit. We can, fundamentally, agree with him, including with his final remarks that the good deeds must not be reduced to the »realm of subjectivity«, but must, in the sociopolitical realm, be preceded by »an analysis of the mechanisms which produce oppression« and by a definition of the »concrete steps which might lead to liberation«.⁷³ Our only restriction goes in the direction that the accomplished separation of the religious and sociopolitical realms is fruit of the development of modernity and Enlightenment, and thus it cannot be so easily projected backwards to Luther's time.

Eduardo Hoornaert's impressive position captures precisely the particularities of Luther's stances, such as his undeniable courage in difficult and dangerous situations, the sharpness of his way of arguing, his language adequately shaped according to the peculiarities and needs of the people. The restriction we raise goes in the sense that Hoornaert may have also been betrayed, to a certain extent, by a sense of admiration, leaving aside the obscure sides, which Luther undeniably had.

73 Boff: Luther, the Reformation, and liberation, 178.

Tamez's re-reading of the doctrine of justification by faith is a highly significant example of the effort towards rescuing a traditional Protestant doctrine for the context of liberation theology. Since it is a Biblical analysis, however, it did not intend to enter explicitly into dialogue with Luther, thus limiting its relevance for our theme. But in Míguez Bonino we can find a beautiful example, though a brief one, of theological conversation with the Reformer by someone who classifies himself as one of his »brother-sons«.⁷⁴

In general, these works stress heavily, under various angles, Luther's liberating impact in relation to church structures, as they hinder the believer or the congregation in their own responsibility. In some cases, the thesis of Luther's contribution towards the development of subjectivity and the freedom of conscience is adopted. The liberation impact of these specific emphases also upon society as a whole is recognized. In some cases, for example in Hinkelammert, we can observe that the historical development afterwards created new contradictions, which make the rediscussion of the issue in new terms compulsory. In relation to social liberation, the voices are critical or, at least, reticent. The critical revision of Luther's stances is advocated or, in the more positive cases, the necessity of a rereading based on the social and historic conditions in Latin America.

V Luther's Hidden Influence in Latin American Liberation Theology

At this point I would like to draw the attention tentatively and briefly to the questions of a possible, remote influence of Luther's theology in Latin American theology, as well as of the systematic relation between both theologies. Otto Hermann Pesch has on a certain occasion referred to Luther's anonymous presence as »Junker Jörg« in current theology, also and particularly in Roman-Catholic theology.⁷⁵ Something similar could also be taken into consideration in regard to the Latin American liberation theology, although it might be even more difficult to detect the identity of this unknown guest. I propose to collect first hints at this presence.

74 Míguez-Bonino: Op. cit., 53.

75 Otto Hermann PESCH: Estado atual do entendimento. In: Lutero ontem e hoje. Concilium 12 (Lisboa 1976) nr. 118, 125.

First of all, let us remind ourselves that Vatican II welcomed concepts and grievances that can clearly be traced back – in part – to Luther, for example: the definition of the Church as the people of God, liturgical renovation with new emphasis on preaching and the adoption of the vernacular, the description of the Scriptures as the word of God and normative. It is well known that these emphases have also played an important role in the renovation of Latin American Catholicism and in the flourishing of liberation theology.⁷⁶

Secondly, the influence of great Roman-Catholic theologians of this century must be mentioned. It can be said that those theologians that had a prominent influence on the documents of Vatican II also inspired in good measure the thinking of the theologians of liberation theology. Karl Rahner perhaps merits special mention because it was he who, through his concept of a »supernatural existential« and the revision of the relation between the natural and the supernatural, contributed decisively to the adoption of the concept of »only one history« in liberation theology. Also his concept of the »anonymous Christian« is present or alluded to frequently by Latin American theologians in the analysis of Mt 25, 31-46.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Rahner also is, clearly, a theologian who attempted to incorporate creatively typically Lutheran concepts, such as »sola scriptura«, »simul iustus et peccator« and »universal priesthood«. Frequent references and discussions of these concepts can be encountered in Latin American liberation theology, mainly in its works concerning ecclesiology and Scripture – though to a less extent the concept of »sola scriptura«.

Giving consideration to the question of a possible remote influence of Luther's theology in Latin American liberation theology, several evident *analogies* must be registered. All of the ecclesiastical analysis of liberation theology emphasize the Christian base communities, and at times even to the point of using the rather controversial – and perhaps confusing – expression that they »reinvent the Church«. ⁷⁸ However, it is widely known that the Reformation

76 Cf. the recognition of the reception of the stimulus of Luther by Vatican II in Hoornaert: Op.cit., 14.

77 For example, Leonardo BOFF: *Jesus Cristo libertador*. 13th ed. Petrópolis 1991, 160-162. [1st ed. 1972, 235-238, here with reference to Karl Rahner in note 17; I had no access in Brazil to the English translation: Leonardo BOFF: *Jesus Christ liberator*. Maryknoll, NY 1978. So the reference to Rahner there could not be checked.]

78 Leonardo BOFF: *Ecclesiogenesis: the base communities reinvent the Church*. Maryknoll, NY 1986.

had as one of its principal pillars the constitution of congregations, as well, and that Luther's ecclesiastical definition of the Church linked the word of God to the congregations, leaving as secondary the formation of the macro-institution of the church.

Furthermore, just as the Reformation of Luther, the ecclesiastical renovation by the Christian base communities has the reencounter with the Scriptures as one of its prime characteristics, or, perhaps one should say for these communities: »the discovery of the Bible for the first time«. The common people's (re)reading of the Bible has become a broadly based movement within the Latin American Christian base communities and it has the strong support of Bible scholars and pastoral agents.

An additional analogy is found when we consider that Luther not only adopted a colloquial style in his preaching, but clearly he also sought language that was close to the reality of the people in his translation of the Bible. In Latin American theology terms like »put the Bible in the hands of the people«, so that they »make the Bible theirs«, or similar expressions are frequently formulated. All this is understood equally as a living expression of the universal priesthood of the people of God.

After having registered the evident analogies, we must pay attention to some remarkable *similarities*, although the possible influences are less clear. For example, it is well known that Luther, in the Large Catechism in his explanation of the first commandment counterposed »God« and »idols«. ⁷⁹ This is also precisely the fundamental antagonism adopted by liberation theologians when they speak about God within their own reality. ⁸⁰ And one cannot fail to mention the impressive parallel, although without explicit reference by liberation theologians, that Luther also precisely identified Mammon as »the most common idol on earth«. ⁸¹

Another similarity is discovered when we consider that Luther's theology is a theology of the cross. ⁸² I concede: Liberation theology itself rediscovered the

79 THE BOOK OF CONCORD: the confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church/ ed. by Theodore G. Tappert. Phil 1959, 365-371.

80 Cf. esp. Pablo RICHARD: La lucha de los dioses: los ídolos de la opresión y la búsqueda del Dios liberador. San José, Costa Rica; Managua 1980, 268; ASSMANN; Franz J. HINKELAMMERT: A idolatria do mercado: ensaio sobre economia e teologia. São Paulo 1989.

81 The book of concord, 365.

importance of the cross only along the way, after a first phase in which the emphasis returned clearly to the resurrection of Christ.⁸³ This rediscovery was due, if I am right, for two reasons. One resides in the area of spirituality when the people perceive in their precarious living conditions the solidary and salvific presence of Christ. The second reason comes as the discovery of the cross as the source of the perseverance of the faith in the face of difficulties and troubles in the process of liberation. Both of these reasons, I think, can be found already in Luther.

Finally, one must include in this list of similarities the following observation: With the incorporation of sociological analysis, independent of the correctness of the results, liberation theology radically departs from the Christendom model on the theoretical level – a model whose end is postulated in a new relationship between church and society. Besides, in the context of Latin American church history research a damaging criticism is made of the Christendom model where the civil and religious communities are coincident.⁸⁴ One needs to verify whether all this corresponds to the distinction Luther made between the role of the church and the secular order. I understand that, considering the different situations and specific emphases, a similitary can be traced to a good extent.

However, one will also have to pay attention to the *dissonances*⁸⁵ between Luther and liberation theology. Firstly, in regard to the frontiers of the Church there seems to be a clear discordance. Luther's theology describes the Church as the community under the word of God while liberation theology has a tendency to broaden the frontiers of the Church reckoning with the presence of God and Christ among non-Christian persons, peoples and cultures. An eventual approximation between these divergent conceptions might come from the fact that Luther spoke still within the context of Christendom, while liberation theology

82 Cf. esp. Segundo GALILEA: *Contemplação e engajamento*. São Paulo 1976, 95-106, but also Leonardo BOFF: *Passion of Christ, passion of the world: the fact, their interpretation, and their meaning yesterday and today*. Maryknoll, NY 1987.

83 In this respect there is a parallel to European political theology.

84 Cf. for example Pablo RICHARD: *Morte das cristandades e nascimento da igreja: análise histórica e interpretação teológica da Igreja na América Latina*. São Paulo 1982, 243.

85 I am using the word »dissonances« to indicate that also, in my opinion, in these points we are not dealing with unsuperable differences but with controversial issues in which eventual possibilities of approximations should be pursued.

thematizes the issue of the relationship between Christians and non-Christians living together in the same broad social reality.

A vital point relates to the concept of history. Latin American liberation theology has emphasized the existence of only one history and that the process of liberation develops itself within this one history. Thus, human history acquires a salvific character. This definition has been causing difficulties for Lutheran theology, and has even roused vehement protest,⁸⁶ since it is essential for Lutheran theology to preserve the exclusivity of the saving action of God. It is, however, by no means irrelevant to observe that the background of the affirmation of the »only one history« is a revision of the concept of the two planes in which the supernatural is placed over the natural and by this perfecting it. Considering this background, the concept of »only one history« does not invalidate a possible and even necessary eschatological dialectic between the present and the future of God. Inversely, the Lutheran »eschatological reservation« would be clearly abused if from it one derived (as unfortunately has been done) a contempt for the ethical commitment of the Christian community.

Analogically, liberation theology can speak about the »construction of the kingdom of God« referring to the historical action of the Christian community, while Luther emphasized, in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer in the catechisms, that the kingdom of God comes of itself, and it is ours to pray for its coming. On the other hand, Luther realizes the dialectic between the coming kingdom and the presence already now of the reality of God through his word, in human community and in history. Therefore it does not need to be simply a motive for rejection if liberation theology, in the area of its concerns, places emphasis on the conscious insertion of the Christian community in this dynamic.

86 Cf. for example Wilfried GROLL: Visão luterana da teologia da libertação. In: Reflexões em torno de Lutero/ ed. by Martin N. Dreher. Vol. 3. São Leopoldo 1988, 67-85, esp. 79-85. Liberation theology with this identification would be issuing »a rubber check« (80).

VI Systematic Considerations in Relation to the Concepts of Freedom and Liberation

1. In his treatise »The Freedom of a Christian« (1520), the Reformer Martin Luther outlines his concept of freedom in two directions: one is in the human being's relation to God, in which the human being becomes free by means of the gratuitous action of God, who grants him or her freedom (justification by grace through faith); the other is in the relationship with his/her fellow human being, which becomes characterized as unselfish service. The Christian, who in faith is free and is not subject to anyone, in love is servant to others and is subject to everyone. This »servitude in love« is the concrete exercise of the gratuitous freedom received by grace, through faith. Both, freedom and »servitude as an expression of freedom«, are unrestricted, total and potentially universal (»universal priesthood«, although »of the believers«).

2. How is this freedom and this »servitude of freedom« reflected in our social relations? For Luther, the rule of 1 K 7, 21 is valid, which he translated as such: »If you were called as a slave, don't worry; but if you can become free, prefer rather to make use of this possibility.«⁸⁷ On the other hand, verse 20 weighs heavily for Luther: »Everyone should remain faithful to the vocation to which you were called.«⁸⁸ Combined with the conviction that »all authority was instituted by God« (R 13, 1), Luther could not admit that civil liberty would become a program of Christian freedom still to be achieved.

3. The Radical Reformation (also called »the left wing of the Reformation«) fluctuated between the postulate that the freedom of the children of God implies necessarily the rejection of social servitude (»The twelve articles by the peasants of Suabia« and Thomas Müntzer) and the intransigent defense of the freedom of ecclesial congregational organization (the Anabaptist movement). In both cases it is expressed, explicit or implicitly, that the freedom of the justified becomes false if it does not have material expression in the conditions of social life (from servitude to freedom) or ecclesial life (free congregation of faith).

4. In the English religious movement of dissent, from the XVIIth century on (Puritanism, Baptist movement, among others) the struggle towards religious

87 »Bistu ein Knecht beruffen, Sorge dir nicht, Doch kanstu Frey werden, so brauche des viel lieber« (WA DB 7 II, 105).

88 »Ein jglicher bleibe in dem ruff, darinnen er beruffen ist« (ibid).

freedom is underlined, with the rejection of any interference by the State in questions of conviction and religious organization. The influence of this thinking, through the colonies of immigrants on the North American continent, left its marks even in the »Declaration of independence« of the United States of America (1776), when it guarantees free religious choice, without interference by the State, as an undeniable right of the human being. There this tradition becomes a positive ally of the tradition of the Enlightenment (which in the French Revolution adopted an antireligious or, at least, an anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical form).

5. The French Revolution, with its ideals of »liberty, equality, and fraternity« in a certain sense leads this new concept of freedom, introduced by the Reformation, to its summit, when it vindicates the universality of liberty as an asset attainable by everyone and a right of every citizen. On the other hand, it finds itself in dissonance or rupture with the tradition coming out of the Reformation to the extent that the tradition of the Enlightenment roots this ideal in the emancipation of the human being and in reason, while Luther in this respect could only classify the human being as one subjected to the bondage of will, which still needs to be liberated. However, a positive relation of the Reformation with these emancipatory ideals can be established on the basis of civil liberty (first use of the law), although the rejection of the total autonomy of the human being remains.

6. The concept of »liberation« used as the hermeneutical key by Latin American liberation theology is, on the one hand, heir of these traditions. There is in the liberation theologians frequent reference to the gratuity of God's action, as the basis and expression of freedom. On the other hand, the problem of the historic conditions of human liberation is made explicit. This means, first of all, that the notion of mediations for God's own action (within history, through historical agents) is deepened and widened. Secondly, as the reverse side of the coin, the historical commitment of human beings in general and of Christians in particular with liberation as a process is emphasized. Both concepts, freedom and history, are incorporated in the concept of »liberation«, in an Hegelian sense of supersession (*Aufhebung*), that is, the positive incorporation of these concepts with their simultaneous elevation to a higher stage.

7. In relation to the ideals of the French Revolution and the American »Declaration of independence«, there is a paradoxical face. On the one hand, these ideals are incorporated and widened: they are seen as conquests for the

individuals and as such as an expression of advancement in the human process of liberation. But they must be widened to become expressions of social conquests and guarantees for the human collectivity. On the other hand, we can register the critique of these ideals for their narrowness as an expression of the rights of the individual, as ideals of a »bourgeois« society, matrix of social oppressions (for example, rights affirmed for white men and owners, but denied to women, other races and non-owners; or: rights which on the economic level become idolatrously centered in profit, alongside of the simultaneous sacrifice of human beings who are exploited or marginalized).⁸⁹ Currently, there is a tendency of combining a revaluation of the positive facet of the relation with the bourgeois tradition (democracy, freedom, human rights, feminism), as an integral and unrenounceable part of the struggle towards liberation, with the deep critique of the (capitalist) economic system, globally dominant in the world, which in the name of liberty destroys the very basis of subsistence and the quality of life of an ever greater percentage of the world's population (superfluous masses in the third World, extraordinary groups of impoverished people in the countries that have come out of »historic socialism« in Eastern Europe, and even significant population groups in the so-called developed countries – the unemployed, foreign immigrants, homeless people, etc.).

8. In short, liberation theology places its emphasis on three aspects, all of them – as it seems to me – unrenounceable:

- a. the human being, as a social being, incorporates the individual values into the communitarian and collective reality;
- b. the historical dimension, which becomes concrete in specific mediations;
- c. liberation not only as an event, but also as a process.

In relation to the concept of freedom, we observe that in liberation theology it comprises clearly, as well, social liberation, which Luther considered as a consequence of attained freedom but, when elevated to the level of a religious program, as a falsification of true Christian freedom. The differing concepts could perhaps get closer to each other, if we consider that in concrete reality

89 Although a somewhat different way of approaching the issue, cf. Leonardo Boff: *Liberdade e libertação: pontos de contato e de atrito entre o I e o III Mundos*. Revista eclesialística brasileira 47 (Petrópolis 1987), 839-859 ≙ Leonardo Boff: *Europäische Freiheitstraditionen und latein-amerikanisches Befreiungsdenken*. In: *Lateinamerika und Europa*/ ed. by Johann Baptist Metz & Peter Rottländer. M; MZ 1988, 23-47.

divine action (»grace«) and human action (»efficient faith«; certainly better: »love«) do not follow each other necessarily in a chronological, mechanical way, but are in a continuous dynamic process. Though theologically grace has always the precedence, actual grace nevertheless evokes the reception in faith and this leads to love, which, in turn, can become for others a representation (historical mediation) of grace, which evokes a new manifestation of faith and love⁹⁰ – and thus continuously. Freedom is, therefore, understood as inevitably conducive to liberation – just as a good tree bears good fruits – a liberation which has occurred already and which always is intended to occur anew.

⁹⁰ In his treatise »The freedom of a Christian« for example Luther did not hesitate to call the Christian – precisely the person justified by grace through faith – to become »as it were a Christ« towards his or her neighbor. »Ideo sicut pater coelestis nobis in Christo gratis auxiliatus est, ita et nos debemus gratis per corpus et opera eius proximo nostro auxiliari et unusquisque alteri Christus quidam fieri, ut simus mutuum Christi et Christus idem in omnibus, hoc est, vere Christiani« (WA 7, 66, 25-28 $\triangle$ Am 31, 366f.).