

En: Teófilo Cabestrero, *Faith: Conversations with Contemporary Theologians*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (New York), 1980.

A Conversation with Enrique D. Dussel

Enrique Dussel was born in 1934, in Mendoza, Argentina. He earned a master-in-philosophy degree at the National University of Cuyo, in Mendoza, and a master-in-theology degree at the Catholic Institute in Paris. A Ph.D. at the University of Madrid and a doctorate in history at the Sorbonne followed. He also studied at the universities of Mainz and Miinster in Germany. A layman, married, he has taught at the National University of Cuyo, the Latin American Pastoral Institute in Bogota, at CIDOC in Cuernavaca, Mexico, at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, at Lumen Vitae in Brussels, etc. He is president of the Commission on Studies of Church History in Latin America. Among his works are History and the Theology of Liberation and Ethics and the Theology of Liberation.

The conversation with Enrique D. Dussel was a unique experience in this whole series of interviews. From his first reply I felt myself swept away by a flow of rapid, measured, dense sentences. His mental agility and his aggressive dialectic spurred me on and forced me to react by improvising questions. I was asking, but I knew it was he who was leading the conversation.

When I shut off the tape recorder it seemed to me that I had managed to get an interview different from all the others, with astounding answers, but around this conviction were whirling certain suspicions.

I still do not know whether his discourse was dominated by the skill of his phrasing and the magic of his words, or by a critical daring half brilliant and half naive, or by the depth of thought, or by the power of synthesis and

interdisciplinary relationships, or by a highly creative capacity. There is surely a little of all that. And in any case there is lightning and hailstones in the storm of his speech. His talk carried truths along like boulders, and from time to time it offered a disembodied vision of things.

In a simple room in the residence hall, Enrique and I face each other with the tape recorder open on the bed. With his thin frame, his sharp face and black goatee, with his flashing glance behind his glasses and his talk, brilliant, agile, incisive, and dialectical, I see in the man a sharpshooter of words. He speaks with ease and dialectical fluency from an astounding culture and interdisciplinary capacity. If he chooses, he is capable of creating a rhythm of challenging suspense and of daring, to lead his listeners to approach positions, theses, doctrines, whole philosophies that he has examined, attacked, destroyed, or reconstructed. I do not know whether he will in a simple conversation venture into this as I have seen him do before a vast audience. But I know intuitively the exciting risk of plunging into conversation with this man. I go in frankly, with the basic questions that I address to everyone. We shall see.

They Have Deified European Culture

For you, what are today the real dangers that threaten faith?

I think the greatest danger for faith is not being able to have it, and not "losing one's faith," as is frequently said. I even go so far as to think that it is very exceptional to lose one's faith. For example: I don't believe that Judas lost his faith but that it is quite possible that he never had any. So I insist on saying that the most serious question is not the "loss of faith" but situations in which faith is impossible. What is called "loss of faith" comes to be the disorganization of a certain system in which one thought one had faith, when there was only a "catechism knowledge" but not a true faith. And so one hasn't lost faith but, on the contrary, by disassembling the structure of what one thought faith was, one is in just the right situation to be able to have faith. Thus, in situations in which it is usual to confess that one is losing faith, one would have to probe into that experience of loss that is produced when the Christian faces a new situation to which habitual structures or doctrine cannot respond. This probing of established structures or doctrines is the result of the confrontation with a new situation that requires following an unaccustomed path to discover the "other," who is beyond doctrine and in whom one must believe.

Paradoxically, then, I believe that the greatest peril is to be in a situation where faith is impossible. And here is the gravest question: I believe that a great deal of European thought has, as it were, supernaturalized, deified, its own European situation—a "Christendom" that continues to be in some way valid—as unique and universal. It has then included the other "worlds" of the periphery (Latin America,

the Arab world, black Africa, Asia) as constituent parts of what is already "known," and for that very reason, as conceptualized entities. As soon as I conceptualize the "other," I can no longer "believe" in the person because I make of that one a thing and I do not respect the person as someone who is beyond the doctrine that I know or possess. That is the gravest peril: to totalize oneself in a *knowing* that claims to be faith, with the consequent impossibility of believing in the poor person (the "other") who is beyond the system of organized doctrine. The loss of sanctification of the organized whole, the realization that what was thought to be universal and definitive was a historical moment, that loss of the security of the doctrine that seemed to be loss of faith is, precisely, the condition of possibility for beginning to believe. In this I see the gravest danger for faith: not having had faith.

We Need the Death of That God

Is it on that line that are located the current tensions and that stubborn struggle between what they call "defense of tradition" or "preservation of faith" and the new statements and efforts of renovation?

It's really a question of something more than renovation. One would above all have to consider what "tradition" is. I think that the identical permanence of a certain traditionalism is confused with true tradition. Tradition would be the perennial opening to the other, the belief in the voice of the poor. Tradition is to be able always to turn to what is new in history, where the spirit is revealed. In the confusion of "fixed traditionalism" with true tradition it has been possible to deify modern European culture, which has been made to pass as the only "tradition" -to such a degree that when one goes against the totality it seems that one is taking an antitraditional posture. And it's not so. On the contrary: to be "traditional" is to desanctify all that. The phrase of Nietzsche's -which was Hegel's and goes back even farther- "God is dead," and which according to Hegel is "*the Good Friday of reason*," can be interpreted two ways: it can be said that it is the negation of the Christian God; but this Nietzsche and Marx could not say because they did not know him. What Marx denies is Hegel's "god," the totality of European reason. And that is what Zarathustra announces, shouting: "God is dead." This poetic, inspired assertion of Nietzsche, which shows that his hands are covered "with the blood of god," is the effective assertion that Europe begins not to believe in its own divinity; that is, at bottom it is beginning to turn atheist about itself: Europe is no longer "god". The condition of the possibility of faith is the death of that "god." We Latin Americans were born within that deification, as colonies and as if reified within that "totality ." To be able to be born as "others" and be respected as "others," we need the death of that god who, of course, is written lower-case.

But the One Who Is Dead Is the Poor Person

If in fact god is dead, there are groups in power who prop up the corpse.

Of course they preserve the corpse. That's why I frequently use the beautiful gospel words: "Let the dead bury the dead, but you follow me." In fact there are those who believe they can save the "God of Israel" by staying with the theistic affirmation of European totality, which is Christendom in which Christianity is confused with a culture. In not accepting the death of that god, they also do not accept the death of a system in which they've murdered the poor person, who was the Indian, the African sold into slavery, the Asian oppressed in the opium war. The poor person is the epiphany of God the creator. When the poor person of the Third World is murdered, God disappears. In not accepting the death of the European god, one does not accept the revelation of God the creator.

That's why in Europe the problem of the death of God is a theoretical, theological question, while in Latin America, in Asia and Africa, and equally for the future universality that is approaching-and in it European theology is reduced to a moment surpassed-the death of God is a problem of justice, at the international as well as at the personal level. God will reveal himself when the "other," liberated, can speak. His word is the historical and concrete "content" of the revelation of God. For God to reveal himself again, for him to rise from his apparent death, it is necessary to resurrect the real corpse, which is the colonial brother or sister. That is, the one who is dead is not God (now taking the phrase in another sense); the one who is dead is the Indian, the African, the Asian. When justice is done them, God will reveal himself. From that we deduce that for these peoples the problem of the death of God is a problem of liberating praxis, and, of course, this demands a new theology. But I think it is, moreover, the theology of the Old and New Testaments; it is a withdrawal from a theology supported, in the end, by the *ego cogito*. All European theology is an "I think what is given." And "what is given" is the European "totality," which is confused with the natural and the divine; it is a tautology. That tautological tautology has concealed the original sin of modernism, which is the control of the metropolis over the periphery. And in not accepting this politico-economic sin, its whole theology is floating in the air.

The Mediation of the Poor

You have announced (and denounced) a series of matters that we shall come back to. Speaking of the confusion of tradition with "traditionalism" you have suggested to me the problem of the formulation of faith that plays an important role today: some people confuse tradition with the traditionalism

that is a defense of a specific formulation of faith based on a concrete culture. You have touched on that matter; say more about it.

In saying "formulation of faith" one would have to see if it is a formulation of what people think is faith or of the real faith as an attitude that allows God to be revealed. Faith is an "attitude" (*virtus*, said Thomas) by assent, *ex voluntate*. It is an assent of reason toward something that the will loves first of all; *ex voluntate* here means the ethical, therefore the level of praxis. This means that there is assent to something but starting from a previous practical commitment. That is, that faith, with regard to its concrete historical content, as an "attitude," cannot be formulated, because it is precisely the situation that cannot be formularized that is concretely described. Well now, if I refer to "what I believe," I should just consider "whom I believe."

Whom I believe is God, the eschatological God who is not exhausted in the historical. But that eschatological God always reveals himself-and the question is a real one-in his historical economy; he always talks through the mouth of the poor. Besides, he reveals to us-and this would be the *constitutive* revelation-the interpretive rules of the voice of the poor. This voice is the historical content of revelation. The rules are forever, and they are very simple. I would almost say that they are like operative-interpretive categories. These have been revealed to us pedagogically from the time of the prophets, and through Jesus in a definitive way. Besides, Jesus makes *real* the rule that he reveals; that is, on a metaphysical plane Jesus carries out by means of Christian grace the salvation that he reveals. Revelation gives us interpretive rules that are directed toward reason. These rules must be accepted, assented to, because God reveals them to me and because I believe in him. Now, they are going to allow me to interpret the "content" of the *voice of the poor*, which is the concrete way that those rules are used at every historical moment.

So what does the "formulation" of faith mean? It's a complicated matter. If by this I'm saying that I'm going to explicate or conceptualize those interpretive rules, yes. But what are those interpretive rules? For example, Jesus says: "The law and the prophets." The law is the organized whole. The law is *theflesh* (*basar, sarx*); the prophet, on the other hand, announces what is coming, the *Spirit*. These two categories are fulfilled in me, says Jesus in the transfiguration. He reveals himself as the only category or rule from which there spread out the other rules that are the essence of our faith. But these have become unnecessarily complicated in history .And thus the historical contents of Latin-Byzantine Christianity have somehow come to constitute the very rule of faith. That is, the revealed rules have become unified with a historical content. One can, then, formulate faith, for example the social doctrine of the church, which is like a rule, an ecclesial doctrine with respect to the political. But in truth it was no

more than the use of certain rules with a very concrete European content, invalid for other spheres.

So again, what does it mean to formulate faith ? I would say: it would be essentially to discern explicitly which are those revealed rules or categories, knowing that they do not include abstractly the anticipated content of history , because it is one rule of faith to be able to listen to that content. And this is a kind of methodical position of subjectivity, which always questions the organized system and which knows how to listen to the voice of the poor, which is the voice of Jesus. And so between the poor and Jesus there is not a "mystical" relation; it is a theological and real unity .God is beyond any historical situation; he speaks by means of the poor because he is beyond the organized system, out in the storm. And for that reason the appeal of the poor ("I have rights that you do not contemplate in your legal system") is the appeal of Jesus. To cast my lot with these poor people and to give them a juridical system, for example, in which they have rights, is precisely to make history advance toward the Parousia. Besides, it is an act of "atheism" with respect to the organized legal order: it is a confession of faith in divine otherness; it is to recognize a historical content in the word of God. To do this always is tradition. But what is paradoxical, then, is that this demands never accepting the same content, because the content gradually changes in history .That's why in my *Ethics* I say that there is paradox in the situation of an authentic virtue that consists of habitually doing the nonhabitual. Faith, hope, charity, Christian prudence, compassionate justice, all the really Christian liberating virtues, are virtues that make us disposed to do the nonhabitual. And to the extent to which we are disposed to do the habitual (the same thing) we have shut ourselves up in the mystification of virtue, which is always a vice. This would, of course, be a new ethic, an ethic of "creation," because it means to rush toward the new and to know how to cope with "the new." The real new is the poor person who is "beyond" the system.

Isn't there, for certain mentalities, a restatement of the formulation of the faith, of the creeds, a placing of orthodoxy in orthopraxy?

Yes, of course. One begins thus adequately to describe the creed; what I have said is exactly the creed; the creed gives us the rules. For example: when it says "and he died under Pontius Pilate" this is a rule; it is not only a historical event: it says that every just person dies under the empire and that the arms of the empire are the ones charged with murdering the person.

To Believe Is to Love the Poor and to Die to Free Them

This gives to the formula of faith a committed dynamism and frees it from being reduced to a conceptual formulation by means of which we are

content to repeat the "formula." One thus understands better that "one cannot believe with impunity."

Yes. And in fact that is what was always said. And I return to Thomas. If he says that faith is an assent *ex voluntate*, he means that it is through love that one can believe; but if I always do "the same thing," that is, "the old thing," then I no longer have "assent" but, as he says very well in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, I have either *intellectus* (that is, intuition), or science through demonstration, or memory, but I am no longer open to "the new." Faith is open to the new because it is assent. One may say: of course, what happens is that faith opens to God, who is a mystery. But can one believe in God alone, without mediation of the poor? Here, precisely, we are going to face the question raised by a Bloch or a Moltmann. That is, when in eschatology a God is proposed to us as Parousia, but it is forgotten that hope is staked very concretely in historical commitments, then in whom does one believe, or whom does one believe? We can believe in the system by believing that we believe in God. The only guarantee of believing in God is to believe in his word by mediation of the poor. And "by mediation of the poor" means to believe in the voice of the poor at a crossroad inevitably historical, economic, political, cultural, real. Now, what's remarkable is that in almost all the eschatological thinking of European theology one has forgotten the relation between the hardened plan of the present system and the need for a historical future liberation plan. The liberation plan is revealed to me by the poor. I don't impose it. I learn it from them because they, from the wind and the rain, tell me where they need a house to live in; because if I make them a house like my house and to my measurements, the only thing I'm doing is controlling them and putting them into my controlling plan.

So there is a historical liberation plan, future but historical, the sign of the eschatological plan of the kingdom; both are future, both question the current plan, which is the "idol." If between the current plan and the eschatological, the liberation plan does not intervene, the eschatological kingdom "goes up in smoke." Why? Because if I love and believe in the eschatological plan and at the same time love and believe in the prevailing, concrete, historical plan, without questioning it from a future historical plan, at bottom I affirm it as the status quo. All the eschatology of Moltmann {and also of Bloch, in part} leaps over the concrete "other" and forces the status quo. And so what is really eschatological is denied, because one doesn't discover the concrete sign that one should propose so that the nonbeliever may believe in the future, for in fact one loves the present and does nothing. One believes the eschatological future, but-I would say-on a cloud. Only by doing something for that future does one mean something by faith, hope, and charity. Charity is love for the other as "other." It's not only the *mutual fraternal* love of those who are

involved in *an all*. Friendly love is not the same as charity. Charity, if it were friendly love (I love him, he loves me; "we" constitute a whole), would be mistaken. Charity is properly a "first loving" as St. John said. God loves us first by creating us. I love first the poor person if I love him or her as such. This is love for the other one as "other." What is remarkable is that by loving the poor person I am in "friendship" with God. Loving the poor person as a poor person and hoping for his or her historical liberation, that is how I can believe in the person's word. To love the poor as "other" and to hope for their liberation. What they have revealed to me as the concrete and historical content of Christian faith (to the extent that Christian faith is the rule of interpretation, and what they reveal to me comes from a horizon that is beyond my possibility of understanding, because it is their world and not mine), what they have given me in their voice in a way that can be understood only inadequately, I shall understand adequately only by casting my lot *in fact* with them.

At the end of the liberating process I shall understand their word, I shall comprehend it better, I shall interpret their word completely. To understand and interpret completely the word of God one must already be in the kingdom. And I approach the poor only by casting my lot on their concrete, practical liberation. That's why there is a theology that is like a tautology, we might almost say that it is an ideology, and that it does not consider what is beyond its horizon because it does not know how to listen to the voice of the poor, of the poor European but also the poor colonial, expressed as extreme poverty, in which an oligarchy is included, but essentially the oppressed classes, over there in Africa, in Asia, and in Latin America.

There are passages in St. John very close to all this.

I am trying to approach St. John. But more than that, I believe that in this all the evangelists coincide absolutely. The Synoptics say this in the parables, for example, the one about the Samaritan. John says it in a much more explicit, theological way. But Paul also says it. The clearest formulation of this is his conceptualization of the "face to face" (*prosopos pros prosopon*), when he speaks to us of love and hope, and of the fact that faith is going to disappear, because in the "face to face" faith disappears; its meaning is fulfilled. But that "face to face," this category, is also in John, and in the Synoptics, because it is the great experience of Jesus and of Hebrew thought in general, from the beginning, from Abraham and Moses. So in this all are at one.

The Idol against Faith, Faith against the Idol

What tasks do you consider most urgent to announce faith authentically, to awaken it and promote it?

For me the most urgent and most important thing is how to make faith possible. We must go back to the prophets and to Jesus; they show us their explicit methodology. They were theologians, although we have "devalued" them. To make faith possible we must begin by overturning the idol. Like Moses, we must destroy the golden calf. The first thing we must do is preach the atheism of money and the bourgeois design for living. It has always surprised me to see on the dollar the phrase "In God We Trust": that god is the dollar itself. As long as the plan of a bourgeois world is the basis of existence, faith is impossible. The idol must be overturned. We must say that the system, such as it is, is not paradise, is not the kingdom. Here sin is in control. The sin of domination, which is the only sin, because all sins are summed up in the death of Abel: Cain killed Abel, and to kill Abel is to remain alone and to "systematize" sin. It is Adam's temptation: "You will be like gods." The one who kills a brother is "god," for that one is left alone, adoring self and not God: it is an act of idolatry, of self-adoration. This means that to be able to adore the one creator, God, to prostrate oneself and to wait for his word and to believe it-to have faith-one must begin by overthrowing the idol. What is needed is preaching-denunciation facing and opposing the system that is sin. It is clear that it is sin, for example, if one can read theologially the economic statistics and the political and cultural structures. One must be a disbeliever of that god and denounce the sin of idolatry so that the God in whom we must believe can be revealed in the face of the poor. Because what happens is that the poor endure the system and are the only ones who are not unjust, because they have not committed domination but suffer under it, like Job.

To make faith possible is to begin by prophetic criticism of idolatry, which is the system. And afterward to show how it is the poor who give historical content to the revelation of God. To cast our lot with them is what makes the word of God comprehensible. The discipleship of Jesus must appear in the face of the poor. That's why Jerusalem kills the prophets. That's why the idol is going to kill the prophets, the beast of the Apocalypse is going to kill the just. The *martyr* is a *witness* of Jesus and of the poor and gives testimony of a future order: in struggling against the idol that is the system, the martyr is seen to be a witness of the future-not only of the ultimate, eschatological plan, but also of the next liberation plan. That's why it becomes dangerous for the system. And the system, in the "logic of totality," has to kill that person. But at the same time, in the "logic of the other," is discovered the meaning of the person's death. All this happens in Jesus. I believe that theology has not yet raised the question of why Jesus had to die tortured and speared by soldiers of the empire. It is always the soldiers of the empire who kill the just person, the soldiers of every empire. That's why -I insist- it was from faith that Jesus

died "under Pontius Pilate." This Pontius Pilate is not in the creed simply as a small historical datum but as the "structure" of the cause of the death of the just person: Pilate is the idol; Jesus dies under the claws of the idol.

The Political Force of Prophecy Is the Critical Function of Faith

According to what you say, evangelization always has enormous political consequences.

I distinguish carefully between party politics, which goes as far as the assumption of power, and the political function of prophecy, which is always out in the open with the poor. Even at the moment of criticizing "totality," the politician who is going to assume power always acts in function of a liberation plan that makes provision for a new political "whole" that the politician is going to have the responsibility of organizing. On the other hand, the prophet, and the church in its prophetic function, criticizes the idol not with the intention of assuming power but with the foresight that in time it is going to have to criticize also the new "whole" that is being organized, because the church is always on the side of the poor. "My kingdom is not of this world": it will never have arms or political systems or coercive legality or repression, because its function is to cast everything again toward the eschatological. The political function of prophecy is precisely criticism of the divinity of the moment. And this is always political even though it utters the most innocent criticism. In denying the divinity of Caesar, in declaring that the empire is an idol and in saying that they did not adore the god Caesar, the Christians were transformed into subversives of the empire and went to the circuses to die as martyrs. Today Christians are dying in Brazil, are tortured in Argentina and in other countries of Latin America; they die tortured like Jesus on the cross. Those Christians went to the circus accused as "atheists" and the atheism that they professed and preached was the denial of the god-idol, totality, the empire, the system; they did not believe in the Roman gods, they were subversives, and they were witnesses of the future, not only of the eschatological but of the historical ultimate "step forward." Their prophetic gesture had a political function; they were not, however, politicians.

What is specific and peculiar to Christian faith in the sociopolitical and revolutionary commitment? Its critical function?

Yes. Total criticism. I would say that Christian faith is the most critical principle that can be imagined. In that I see a sign of divine clairvoyance. Whereas any critical system is worn out by the criticism of what it has before it -Marx, for example, wears himself out in the criticism of the bourgeoisie or the capitalist system- the critical func-

tion of faith is not worn out in any possible system, and precisely for that reason it is a guarantee of the eschatological. The church is an institution whose function is prophetic, and the prophetic is the critical function that reveals the discrete parts of every "whole"; it removes the cloak of sanctity covering "everything," and casts it into the future. This function is perceived down through the whole history of the church. The sin of the church begins when it turns inward and sanctifies itself as "divine institution," as "totality."

Do you think, then, that for a revolutionary commitment to be an option inspired by Christian faith, it must unite two conditions: historical concreteness and, at the same time, the transcendence that gives it the capacity for total criticism ?

Of course. And at the same time this is extremely useful politically. If it's true that at the moment of the overthrow of organized "totality" there is need for an enormous enthusiasm (and that's why certain political doctrines with a religious aura inspire people to throw themselves into the struggle against "totality" -which may at times demand even the sacrifice of one's life), nevertheless, at the moment when the "totality" has been overcome, the plan in the mind of the political liberator can be transformed into a fierce new totalitarian "totalization." On the other hand, those who are capable of a profound enthusiasm based on eschatological faith cannot only stake their lives on the overthrow of organized "totality," but faith will allow a sane realism in relativizing the plan that they have in their political grasp. This means that there are also safeguards against turning the new system into a totalitarian entity. It is clear that the commitment of a Christian to the taking of power is a possible option: it is not a commitment of the church as church, but it is the possible choice of any Christian, who would thus have in the political area even greater possibility of effectiveness for the better.

No Escape from Ambiguity

But this commitment is extremely difficult to achieve without loss of faith. In the present outlook for the political and revolutionary dynamism of faith in Latin America, do you see ambiguities or falsifications of faith springing up, or situations in which faith is "used" or subverted into ideology?

Yes. Some have deified the "whole" in which they find themselves tranquilly satisfied because they enjoy it. They have identified the church with "western Christian civilization"; they are getting along well in so-called Christendom, and they say, "All is going well, why change?" Here there is an ambiguity, with falsification and utilization of faith, which has become ideologized. Yet others, seeing that they have to overcome this and make a new order, deify the future plan.

That's why certain Christians, of the old Catholic Action, even with great faith -I would say, rather, with a great, practically absolute, religious attitude- deify the next plan, and then practically lose eschatological faith. They keep this faith only in the plan made mystically feasible and, for example, they adopt Marxism or other positions. That is, they absolutize now the future historical plan. It's another ambiguity. There are still others who do not support the current situation but neither can they see clearly how to commit themselves politically and they propose a faith in God that is somewhat angelic eschatologically. They speak of love but not concretely. They speak of a love for fellow humans in the abstract and of the kingdom of heaven in the abstract -I would say "after Moltmann"- and then, criticizing the ambiguity of the political commitment of other Christians, at bottom they come to coincide with the first mentioned and with their ambiguity, because they affirm and reinforce the status quo.

All this means that there is no escape, that any of the three positions that can be taken has its ambiguity and its equivocation. But they must be overcome. And what is certain is that the saints, the prophets, and Jesus decidedly opted for an attitude that confronted them with the institution and confronted them with political perils: and so they were murdered, tortured, eliminated, because they did not preach an eschatological kingdom in such an ethereal way that it would declare them innocent before the system; they did not support the prevailing situation or the system. That's why they suffered poverty. This poverty is not the poverty of the poor as seen from without (the tyrant near the road in the parable of the Samaritan) but the availability of someone who "in-the-whole" raises questions about) the whole. The person who has given up the values of the whole can move to the liberation of the poor. That availability does not consist of not having any individual goods and afterward having great collective goods within the system (this is a still better organized wealth). Poverty is availability to serve the "other one." That is the *anawim*. *Anawim* is the "flesh" that opens. The perfect poverty was that of the Virgin Mary. She says, "Let thy will be done in me." When she said this she opened herself to the word of God. She believed in the "other one" and on believing in the other one she opened herself and on opening herself she became pregnant, she produced the new, which was the son. This son of hers, brought up in the pedagogy of liberation, in the end will have to die on the cross. Mary will go to the cross with her son, the fruit of her womb.

The Virgin Must Be a Sign of Liberation

What role is assigned to the Virgin in the theology of liberation?

I'll answer this best by saying what place she has in my reflections. I

was in Nazareth for two years with Gauthier. When I think of Mary I think of the poor, ordinary, common village woman. I think how the Virgin of Nazareth lived with her son and taught him the Old Testament with her own interpretation: "He made the rich come down from their thrones and he put the poor up high." The Virgin, on subverting (*sub-vertere*), on putting down what was on high, is really a teacher of "subversion." The Virgin, who was the perfect teacher, had to be next to the cross of her son; this means that a perfect mother runs the risk that her son will die tortured and murdered by the arms of the empire. Besides, another question appears here—speaking of the Virgin: I think, for example, that on the question of liberation the first thing to be considered is the man-woman relationship: it's the liberation of the woman. Then parents-children: this is pedagogical liberation. (The Virgin was wife, mother, and teacher.) Mterward, brother-sister: this is political liberation. But they're all very united. And, by the way, in Latin America today there's much talk of the problem of woman's liberation and how this liberation of woman (including the religious woman) comes to play a role in the pedagogical liberation of the son who must be educated to be a servant and not a master (which the mother never was, because she was the slave of her man), and in that way, the son comes to be the equal of his father, that is, his brother, not to control him but to serve him. There is a correlation here between the great themes, I believe, of our theology of liberation, which is being organized. The Virgin, the Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, also has the figure of a mother of a new country; Hidalgo in Mexico began the popular revolution in the nineteenth century ("the land for the person who works it") with the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Virgin Mother is equally a political sign of liberation in Latin America... or ought to be one.

Some see it like this for the present. But bourgeois Catholicism and also popular Catholicism, what images of the Virgin do they have? How is the Magnificat still sung?

It is even sung at times at "campaign masses," attended by armed soldiers in well-organized squadrons. They sing, "He brought the rich down from their thrones," and they're quite happy. They certainly don't believe those words. They hear them as something they already know. They don't ask for interpretations. It's not a poor person who is speaking through them. It's a memorized doctrine, internalized in the system, made inoperative. They already have the kingdom. The future kingdom isn't possible. We're already in hell. Because hell is the false claim of a total anticipation of the kingdom; through "I am God" it is the serpent that is tempting Adam...

Two Violences: The Dominating and the Liberating

When we were speaking of the critical function of faith in political commitment, you referred to the prophets and to Jesus: they had to die and they are going to die. But they didn't kill. How do you view the relation between faith in revolutionary commitment and bloody violence?

As we keep advancing we see more and more types of violence. There used to be talk of violating a girl, which involves the sixth commandment, as is seen in moral theologies. But, of course, you have to go farther back. Violence comes from life, from force (*vir, vis*). Violence, like the passions, is ambivalent; it depends on what it's used for. If I use violence so that my son won't cut off his little sister's ear and I snatch the knife from him violently, that violence is good, just, and nobody can say anything. St. Bernard preached the Crusades to recover the Holy Sepulcher. And he's a saint!

But today we criticize him.

Well, I want to indicate how, within tradition, that was possible, even canonizable.

More in traditionalism than in tradition, according to your own concept of "tradition."

I agree. But there were even more interesting examples. Because, in fact, the example of the Crusades was that of an experiment in domination, in conquest. The conquest of the infidels was preached. But there's another type more in the line of the first example, and it's our struggle for independence from Spain. Of course, Spain probably doesn't see it that way, but in Latin American countries, a San Martin or a Bolivar struggles for independence. That's why there are two kinds of violence: "dominating" violence and the violence that I would call "defensive" or "liberating." "Domingating" violence is a violence that kills or enslaves. We might call it a dialectical violence. Whereas the defense of the poor, which is not my defense but the defense of the third person, is the right of the poor and not only of the one who takes up arms. To defend the poor is to defend them in their rights. In this case it's not only possible, it's obligatory. Then we have to see if it's appropriate to use one or another *means*, but this appropriateness is not now a question of principle, either moral or ethical, and even less of faith. To defend the poor is a duty. And to defend the weak, the child, is a duty. And this is just the situation of many of our peoples.

But there's more, something that deceives and confuses: the state of domination in an organized "whole" is one of violence, real but "implicit." As long as the dominated accept that violence, it's not

exercised "explicitly." But on the day when the dominated become conscious that they are "other" than the system and that there could be a system that was just, that's when they rise up and stand. And when they stand up and try to march, then violence shows its teeth or its fists and "implicit" violence turns into "repression." That repression has its origin in the love that the enslaved or dominated had of being free. That is, that love is at the bottom of the process. Repressive violence is the fruit of *sin*; defensive violence is an act of justice based on love and it's liberating to the extent that it is aimed at the new whole and that, in itself, it does not propose the death of the dominator. That can happen, but it's not proposed. Whereas repressive domination proposes the death of the liberator and that's why we have martyrs and the death of Jesus. This means that one violence proposes the death of the witness, while the other wants the liberation of the poor. The liberator also wants to convert the dominator. That's why the blood of Jesus falls on the Romans, not to kill them but to save them. So this defense, which I would call liberating, is just, and it is a duty. Nevertheless, there are vocations. Those who believe themselves called to a military vocation cannot elude this call. The church as such—because it does not propose to take over power, because as the prophet bears witness to the kingdom but cannot fall into the equivocalness of taking power or into the equivocalness of the use of arms—the church dies but does not kill. It would be necessary to make a distinction between the "hero" of the future homeland and the "prophet" of that future homeland and of eschatology. The church has, as a historical function, to be always the "prophet" of the future homeland and never the "hero" of the future homeland. That's why it has no armies. And that's why it hasn't today, praised be God, pontifical states. And if it had them at one time it was because Christendom confused things, and at that time it was possible to be a soldier but very hard to be a prophet. A St. Louis, with his weapon in his hand and yet a saint, is a completely ambiguous sign; if you don't agree, ask the Arabs and the eastern Christians. But, besides, he was a conqueror and not a liberator, a situation doubly ambiguous.

Which doesn't prevent Christians from taking up arms.

They may be heroes of the future homeland and politicians, but they are not, as such, representatives or signs of the church. The unequivocal institutional ecclesial sign is the kingdom. Jesus could have defended himself and did not choose to do so, because at that moment he would have fallen into a near totalization. Because those who take up arms today inevitably fall into the ambiguity of law that, even though it is just for the poor of today, it is repressive for the poor of the future. Every positive law—and there is no other, because the natural law is a limit that is in the foundation—every positive law always

includes a measure of injustice. This is the question: those who struggle against someone, in a certain way, are not only conquering the dominator but at that very moment are already imposing themselves, today, on a possible dominated one. This does not mean that a Christian (even a priest or a bishop) through civic vocation cannot take up arms. On the contrary. Nonviolence is a Hindu, not a Christian, doctrine. So it's a question of distinguishing: the prophetic violence of the church and the violence (even armed) of the politician; the first, the church is obliged to exercise; and for the second, it is wise to know its suitability, but there is no opposition to it because of theological or biblical principle or "according to tradition."

Much More Than a Political Theology

Let's talk about Latin American theology. How was it born? How is it in relation to European theology?

I think Latin American theology appeared when we began to discover the conditionings that I would call political in European theology. We suddenly noticed that there was a thinking in European theology that had not kept its presuppositions in mind and, for that very reason, had not been able to include the area from where that conditioning was being generated. Very important in this was the work of Methol Ferré, a Uruguayan layman, who wrote Cardinal Suenens a critical article from Latin America in which he showed that on the basis of some statements by Suenens there was "one politics"; he raised the question of "two politics; two theologies."

In Europe there is almost always a double conditioning that takes place when theology is made: if it is a theology practiced by a certain social stratum of university professor, that theology implies an economic-political conditioning; when it is made from a European perspective, it assumes that the European is the only and ultimate horizon. So there are cultural and economic-political conditionings: one is thinking from the metropolis and including the periphery as an entity, as a thing; and this is being done from a certain social level or stratum or class. That's why, for example, when a "political theology" (which means the discovery of the critical function -I would even say the liberating function- of theology) is practiced -as in the "political theology" of Metz- on the national plane and it does not see that there are nations and groups of nations in the world in quite different situations, that some nations from the North Atlantic dominate nations in the south, it is reducing itself, it is in fact falling into a particularism that leads to falsification. It's not the same to think on a national scale and on an international scale. If the critical-liberating function is limited to the national field, the whole question of colonialism that has dominated the world for five centuries, that

whole great problem of human domination over other humans, of nations over nations, of cultures over cultures, passes unnoticed into a theology that falls into a narrowing of the horizon and of the content of its theological reflection: it falls into a particularism with pretensions of universality. And what is serious is that it passes for the universality of Catholic theology. This is a mystification and theological domination, because the others (who are "others" and not parts of the "whole") come to be thought of from a situation that is not their real one; they come to be theologically alienated. They were already alienated religiously by a faulty evangelization imposed on them by foreign cultural molds, and now theology comes to think of and justify that alienation as something revealed.

On the other hand, if it is in the international field that the great sins are being committed, we're going to be able to rethink all the themes and questions of theology, but in its universal content and range, from the universal consideration of the content of sin and, therefore, in the universal range that the redemption of Christ has in our epoch. This in regard to the political conditioning of European theology. I could also speak of the erotic conditioning, which is no longer a conditioning of the "political theology" of Metz but of theology in general. In general, Catholic theology has always been done from the celibate point of view, by celibate males. As when Descartes says, "I think," it's always a celibate male who is thinking: the problem remains of seeing what will happen when a woman says, "I think." Besides, theology has always been thought out from the viewpoint of father to son. That is, one must now rethink a whole theology from the viewpoint of the poor, of the woman and the disciple, of the young man, of the son who suffers under a dominating pedagogy. This indicates that the "theology of liberation" is much more than a "political theology," because it implies the liberation of the woman, the son, and the brother. "I have done justice to the widow, the orphan, and the poor," say the prophets.

Spree Is Not Festival

What can Latin American theology contribute to the rest of theology?

From the experience that I am having with the dialogue, the contribution can be enormous. It can, above all, warn theology that the theological method is not a method that ponders what is already given as knowledge; it's not a "tautological" method but a method that we can call "analectic," that is, a method that asks how to be able to listen to the voice of the "others" who, at bottom, are the poor. The European must get to the point of knowing *how* to listen to the voice of the Latin American, the African, the Asian, and also the voice of the European poor, but in relation to the poor of the otherworlds, for one

must be willing to scan the universal horizon, and the liberation of oppressed Europeans will not be attained except by including them in the liberation of the oppressed of the Third World. We have had to listen for centuries and centuries to European theology (and so we can talk its language). European theologians are going to have to listen to the theologians of the poor countries, first, because then they are going to listen to the thoughts of their own poor. What we say of the liberation of the poor peoples must also be said about the liberation of the poor in Europe. And you have a Girardi, a Gonzalez Ruiz; they have solved some of these problems, and they haven't done it from a Latin American, African, or Asian perspective; they've done it from a European perspective. But that same thinking on a universal horizon is going to acquire much greater clarity. And it will be possible to think also of the responsibility that the oppressed of Europe have in the oppression of the world's poor, because the oppressed of Europe also have their share of domination. And this also must be discovered, because otherwise even the oppressed of Europe, struggling for freedom, in doing so will dominate the poor on the periphery. The European theologian who can't see this point transforms national liberation into international alienation of the oppressed.

An example at the philosophical and theological level: in Europe (and in North America) they are seeking a way out of the trap of modernity, a way out of pragmatic totality, and they fall into the stalemate of the *homo ludens* (Marcuse): in *play* it is said that humanity achieves gratuitousness. For us, beyond the pragmatic totality that we endure is the gratuitousness of liberation; in the liberation of the poor and oppressed, Christian love finds gratuitousness in casting its lot for the other one, for the poor one: the adventure of staking one's life gratuitously for the liberation of the poor is the true image of the "festival" of the kingdom (the Passover of the passage through the desert of liberation toward the Promised Land) and approaches it, whereas the other play of *homo ludens* degenerates into wasting time together, or having to go on exploiting the poor to be able to go on playing, "amusing ourselves." The "spree" is not the "festival."

Cox's "festival" was probably Marcusean. Perhaps some European theology is in many ways closer to the North American than to the Latin American.

Kant says that immortality is necessary for happiness and virtue to coincide. And as he thought himself virtuous, this means that he was unhappy. And of course one must die to the totality of an organized whole in which the only possible existence is a tautological and bored existence, in order to cast one's lot into the adventure of the life that comes after the death of the totality. This adventure is risky, but joyful, and this joy is just what happiness is. In fact, Kant saw clearly that one must die, but he didn't understand that it was not a question

of biological life but of "totality." In essence, current European thinking is Kantian: it postpones happiness until afterward, until after the work week, and then goes off to the country (and hence the civilization *du loisir*); it means that in essence *life* comes after *this* life. And what happens is that this life is not lived as an adventure. On the contrary, one ought to risk oneself in the adventure of the liberation of the "other." That's where there is a new anthropology and where the culture of poverty can bring a new vision of humanity, where humans live much more deeply as humans and show much more what they are. To give a homespun example, I would say that Europeans at times, or northerners, are required to eat less, and they give to this much less energy and enthusiasm than does the person who doesn't eat and wants to eat something. It's like a fat person who has to eat less and go on a diet, but has no real enthusiasm for it. On the other hand, a poor starving person who isn't eating struggles to eat. In this process it is quite possible that the one who has the force is the poor one—the force of resurrection, not the force of oppression.

To Evangelize, Become a Disciple of the People

You have spoken about evangelization in Latin America with historical perspicacity, with critical acuteness. You have pointed to the root of a terrible falsification in evangelization. Is evangelization today also corrupted by radical falsifications?

Yes, of course. I've said that evangelization is also an analectic service. At bottom, to evangelize is to give to those who are going to be evangelized the critical ferment that will allow them to liberate themselves. In *content* it teaches them nothing, but it teaches them to discover what they already are. First I have to listen to their revelation; I have to put myself in the service, the discipleship, of the people that I am going to evangelize, and only what they give me is what I have to give back to them as prophetic criticism—break down their alienation—in order to free them. Faith will enable them to deidolize the ideological totality in which they find themselves alienated, and it will launch them ahead again. In practice, I am not going to teach them a content, a doctrine. I am going to teach them the operative-interpretive revealed guideline. But because it is a guideline that God has revealed to us to know how to interpret what he says to us, on returning it to them now, judged by those guidelines, I return to them what he said to me not as he provoked it in me but as a doubly provocative situation. I provoke them to enter into the conversation and relaunch the process. Then it is an "analectic" movement, in the sense that the "*logos* comes from beyond-my-world." My *doctrine* is not valid; what is valid are the principles that allow them to go beyond themselves. At bottom, I teach them to listen also to the poor, although they are poor. The poor liberate themselves by liberating other poor

persons. The rich convert themselves by risking themselves for the liberation of the poor. That is faith: to teach how to enter into commitment to the liberation of the "other."

It would be an error and a sin to believe that we are helping the Latin American church by sending missionaries who would impose a false evangelization. Would you raise doubts about European missionaries continuing to go to Latin America, or would you oppose only their going indiscriminately and with false attitudes?

I believe that it is extremely positive that missionaries be sent. To such an extent that I judge it very necessary that we come to Europe to "missionize" Europe. But for what? To learn and to teach. The Spaniard who goes in an attitude of apprenticeship, of service, and not exclusively of teaching, teaches those who are there that he or she does not know what the "others" are. Because those who are there believe they know what the poor person is, and that's a lie; they don't know. It is first necessary to have a true disciple's attitude on the part of the one who goes, to want to learn what a given people are. That is the best testimony for the others who are doing mission, so that they do not forget that they always have to listen. With this attitude one can do a great work. But afterward they can contribute their Spanish experience, although it's not that they are going to teach it from the beginning, but that, listening to those poor people and from their experience, they can enormously enrich the critical process of liberating faith. So, with a warning that one is not going to teach "content" but to give critical guidelines to an *existent* content that has to be learned first, we can say that it is very positive to go to other lands: for the missionaries because they learn, for the people because the missionaries serve them in their liberation, for the missionaries' native colleagues in mission because they are taught to learn. But afterward, if missionaries return to their own countries, they have a magnificent basis for enriching their own people. Every Christian community should have-and it was always like that in the church-people to send to other worlds to be missionaries, because it is to repeat a little the experience of Abraham in understanding himself as "foreign." "Foreignness" is the condition that makes faith possible, because it indicates the detotalized position, freed of cultural bias and alienating ideologies, and allows us to hear the voice of the poor, the historical voice of God. All this is to take very seriously the description of the "last judgment" (absolute judgment of history) of Matthew 25.

Audacious in his criticism and audacious in his proposals, Enrique D. Dussel speaks with such decisiveness and rapidity, makes such extraordinary reflections and associations, that one feels involved in his feverish undoing and redoing, and one asks for time to put oneself at a distance and to reflect .

