

SOCIETY, HISTORY, MEANING: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

We cannot speak about the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ unless we speak about the real deaths of the people, insists Gustavo Gutierrez.¹ This claim, growing out of situations of widespread poverty, political torture and repression throughout Latin America, has profound methodological implications. It reflects the fact that theology inevitably walks on two legs: the first leg is the interpretation of the meaning of human life; the second leg is the Bible and Christian tradition as privileged resources in our efforts to unfold the meaning of human life. Ultimately, it seems to me, these two moments in doing theology are inseparable, just as walking requires two legs. And thus Gutierrez indicates that the task of the theologian is to interpret the faith and re-read the Gospel as it is lived in the Christian community, pointing to the embeddedness of both moments in doing theology in the praxis of the Christian Community.²

Gutierrez's claim, however, is a strong one. For implicit in it is the insistence that some interpretations of the meaning of human life and death are more adequate than others, and that the adequacy of these interpretations in turn affects the adequacy of theology and of biblical interpretation.

In this essay, as a contribution to our discussion of theological anthropology, I would like to reflect on the nature of different interpretive frameworks from the point of view of the social sciences. In particular, I would like to examine the nature of publicly influential world views and how they change. More concretely, I would like to explore dimensions of the world view which has dominated an extraordinary wide range of thinking in the United States in the post-World War II era, and the challenges to this world view which have emerged at both conceptual and methodological levels from the experiences of a variety of groups struggling for justice and liberation. In all of this, my goal is to contribute to the clarification of what is at stake in the lives and deaths of ordinary people, and thus in doing theology today.

The social sciences are particularly appropriate vehicles for this kind of exploration. For they may be understood as religious, or quasi-religious, grammars of interpretation in the modern world. We may wish to dispute such claims, but at least the classic social scientists like Marx, Durkheim and Freud claimed that this is what they were

¹Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Voice of the Poor in the Church," *CTSA Proceedings* 33 (1978), 33.

²Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation," trans. by J. P. Donnelly, in C. Geffré and G. Gutierrez, eds., *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith* (Concilium 96) (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), p. 57. In this connection, cf. J. Segundo's notion of the hermeneutical circle in *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. J. Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976).

about. Of course they did not want to be understood as religious, but as scientific. Yet the new sciences they were involved in launching were chartered to do many of the same things for individuals and for society which their theories said that religion did. Freud, for example, referred to the physician in counselling as "a teacher, as the representative of a freer or superior view of the world, as a father confessor who gives absolution, as it were, by a continuance of his sympathy and respect after the confession has been made";³ and elsewhere he referred to the "Catholic fathers" who were our "predecessors in psychoanalysis."⁴ Of course, Freud and the other classic authors also insisted that their new "science" was vastly superior to traditional religion, that it could perform religion's functions better than religion did; and this is why they were so critical of religion in their own time. Nevertheless, their theorizing was not in the image of the detached, passive observer which they sometimes also projected in their work. Their basic concepts and concerns are ones which have been traditionally defined as religious or moral. And they pursued these concerns with a genuinely religious fervor. This religious tone of the social sciences has seldom been clearer than in the early period of American sociology; this spirit was articulated very clearly by Albion Small, one of its founders: "In all seriousness, then, and with careful weighing of words, I register my belief that social science is the holiest sacrament open to men."⁵

Of course, most social scientists, including Freud, would have been embarrassed by such a claim. As I have already indicated, they were very critical of religion, and they preferred to think of themselves as objective social scientists. If they saw any relationship between social science and religion at all, it was, in their view, like that between the mature, rational adult and the irrational child. Yet the conclusions they came to regarding the functions of religion in individual and social life are problematic, for if religion, which in their own theories was so important at earlier stages of development, is to disappear in the modern world, as most thought it would—the secularization hypothesis—then what would replace it if not social science itself?⁶

Many analyses of the actual functioning of the social sciences suggest that they do indeed function "religiously" in our world, though not on the image of the rational knower seeing in the clear light of day what religious believers saw only dimly, as many social scientists themselves would have us believe. Rather, the social sciences function in much the same ways that religion has always functioned. Fromm, for example, does not hesitate to describe psychoanalysis as a new religion, rooted in Freud's own messianic impulse to find a movement for the

³S. Freud and J. Breuer, "Studies on Hysteria," *Standard Edition* 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 282.

⁴Quoted in R. M. Rainey, *Freud as Student of Religion* (Missoula, Montana: American Academy of Religion and Scholars Press, 1975), p. 148.

⁵Quoted in L. A. Coser, "American Trends," in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet, eds., *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 287.

⁶R. Robertson, "Religious and Social Factors in the Analysis of Secularization," in A. W. Eister, ed., *Changing Perspectives in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Wiley, 1974), p. 44.

ethical liberation of humanity, with its own sacred rituals, notably the analytic session and the training analysis.⁷ And Vitz does not hesitate to include Fromm himself, along with other widely read humanistic psychologists like Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Rollo May, among the chief priests of the new cult of self-worship, involving a creed which, by the way, he sees as "deeply anti-Christian."⁸ And certainly, as Back has shown, the human potential movement which was so influenced by these psychologists and which endlessly multiplied groups—T groups, C groups, encounter groups, sensitivity training—can best be understood as a religious phenomenon.⁹

The situation is not different in the other social sciences. Robertson, for example, characterized the work of anthropologists like Mary Douglas and sociologists like Robert Bellah and Peter Berger as "sociotheology" since it so clearly entails normative claims about the nature of "the ultimate" in human existence.¹⁰

And Friedrichs finds the metaphor of religion to be the most adequate to characterize the whole history of sociology. The dominant perspective in American sociology in the post-World War II period was the structural-functionalism; in this perspective the question of social order is foremost. The proponents of this view and their opponents, Friedrichs insists, may be classified in terms of either priestly or prophetic roles vis-à-vis the status quo; that is, in terms of those who support and those who denounce the status quo. Priestly social theorists, the overwhelming majority, are characterized by their insistence that scientists as scientists make no value judgments. Believing science to be a means of escape from "irrationality," they base their analyses of the present and their projections for the future on "fact" and their faith in the virtues of a stable social order and the supreme desirability of control through prediction. It is worth quoting Friedrichs at length concerning the differences between the two groups:

The community of faith of which natural scientists are a part may—indeed, ideally does—provide the broadest freedom in the pursuit of . . . order; but *order* it must be. Disorder, like heresy or unbelief, is seen simply as challenging the orthodox to more faithful witness. The scientist as priest would address his professional and communal life to confronting, even more intimately, the reliably ordered core of nature and natural man and would seek to mediate between it and the flux that is the evident world of the layman. His is not the priesthood of all believers; the initiation rites are much too exacting, the preparatory rituals too demanding, the language of communion too specialized. Ordination, furthermore, demands renunciation. Anything that would threaten reliability in the precipitation of order—the unique, the private, the absolute—must be relinquished as heresy. Indeed, from this point of view the "prophetic" mode is the focal threat, for it is dedicated to change, not order; risk, not reliability; "subjective" standards, not "objective" perception. The prophet would destroy the priestly edifice that is the

⁷E. Fromm, *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 105-08.

⁸P. C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

⁹K. Back, *Beyond Words* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972).

¹⁰R. Robertson, "The Sociology of Religion: Problems and Desiderata," *Religion* 1 (1971), 109-11.

Church. The prediction to which the scientific priesthood is dedicated is the antithesis of prophecy; the priest would project the order of the past into the future, honoring both as revelation of the continuity that is nature's core; the prophet would *use* short-term projections of order as a weapon to destroy the actual fulfillment of that projected future.¹¹

The point of describing the social sciences as religious is not to belittle them, in spite of their often positivist pretensions, or even to label them as unscientific. Nor is it to obscure the differences between classic metaphysical theology and contemporary empirically grounded social science. Rather, it is to take with ultimate seriousness the social sciences and their social role as moral and religious or quasi-religious languages and institutions. This concern is intensified when it is recognized that not only at the level of the personal search for meaning and values but also in the making of public policy, whether it concerns problems of community mental health or the logic of foreign aid, the social sciences have completely displaced theology as tools of analysis, goal-setting and policy-making. This means that the differences among social scientists are not merely academic debates of interest only to intellectuals. For social scientific theories are important factors shaping the policies of governments, opposition political movements, and major institutions. In the midst of economic and political struggles in the United States and throughout the world, and of conflicting interpretations of these struggles, we are witnessing a battle for life and the meaning of life.

The difficulty of talking about the articulation of meaning and values in the social sciences as a religious process is that the terms "scientific" and "religious" are themselves so value-laden; indeed, the definition of each is intimately tied up with the definition of the other. We need another term which is broad enough to include both. I suggest that we begin with the notion of culture.

Clifford Geertz has pointed to two aspects or dimensions of culture. The first is a people's ethos; this refers to "the tone, quality and character of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects."¹² The second is a people's world view, "their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order." The ethos and world view of a culture mutually reinforce one another: "the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression."¹³ In other words, the relation between ethos and world view is circular.¹⁴

¹¹R. W. Friedrichs, *A Sociology of Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 107-08.

¹²C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 127.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 141.

Geertz specifically applies these concepts to religion. Whatever else religion may be, he says, it is an effort to conserve "the fund of general meanings" in terms of which people interpret their experience and organize their conduct.¹⁵ Thus ritual action and religious belief confront and mutually confirm one another. In fact, religion is a privileged vehicle for such meanings. For, according to Geertz,

meanings can only be "stored" in symbols... such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they resonate, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it. Sacred symbols thus relate an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: this peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact within value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import.¹⁶

This perspective on culture and religion has been welcomed by many Christians because, from a social scientific point of view, it recuperates religion which has been relegated by so many positivist social scientists to the primitive and infantile. In other words, as another anthropologist Victor Turner, has pointed out, it gives an "ontological status" to religious symbols.¹⁷ Nevertheless, two criticisms which are typically addressed to functionalist perspectives must be mentioned. The first concerns the apparent identification of the actual and the ideal in this perspective, and might well be made from the point of view of Christian experience. New Testament scholar Leander Keck points out, for example, that first century Christian teaching often stood in opposition to the dominant ethos of the time and, perhaps on occasion, even to that of many first-century Christians; thus in his view, the interpreter's task is "to liberate the text so that it could accost today's church as critically as it originally did."¹⁸ The point here is that we cannot always specify in advance the relation between a sense of the ideal and the perception of the real in a religious ethos and world-view; and least of all can we assume that religion always legitimates a given social order.¹⁹ The degree of fit between the two is, then, a matter for empirical investigation, not theoretical fiat.

The second criticism is closely related to the first. It concerns the fact that societies are seldom if ever the smoothly functioning organic wholes which are projected in Geertz's description of culture. Turner suggests an alternative perspective. "The culture of any society at any moment," he writes, "is more like the debris, or fall-out, of past ideological systems, than it is itself a system, a coherent whole." Coherent wholes may exist, he thinks, though these tend to be lodged in individual

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ V. W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 57.

¹⁸ L. Keck, "On the Ethos of Early Christians," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974), 450.

¹⁹ Baum in particular makes the point that religion can be a critical and transformative social force; cf. G. Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

heads, sometimes those of obsessionals or paranoics, or, I would add, intellectuals.

But,

... human social groups tend to find their openness to the future in the variety of their metaphors for what may be the good life and in the contest of their paradigms. If there is order, it is seldom preordained (though transiently bayonets may underpin some political schema); it is achieved—the result of conflicting or concurring wills and intelligences, each relying on some convincing paradigm.²⁰

Thus, Turner directs our attention to the dynamic and often conflictual social processes in which both individual identities and social meanings are unfolded; how conflict-free this process is in a given society is also a matter for empirical investigation.

These views of culture have the virtue of focussing our attention on the ways in which what is meaningful to a group of people is intimately bound up with their efforts to make sense of their daily lives; indeed, this relationship among ethos, world view and experience is so intimate that adults' efforts to pass it on to their children affect not only the psychological development of children but even their biological development.²¹ In other words, the very core of our being is shaped by the collectively-held culture into which we are born and in which we live. Because this complex of meaning and values is not given once and for all, it must be reproduced continuously at both individual and social levels, especially in the face of threats to this culture posed by changing circumstances, caused by anything from invading armies to new technologies.

This analysis suggests, then, that "thought" in the broadest and most fundamental sense is a social phenomenon. Geertz sums up much recent social scientific thinking about this issue:

There has been a general shift in modern anthropological discussions of culture, and with it of religion as part of inner culture, a shift from a concern with thought as an inner mental state or stream of such states to a concern with thought as the utilization by individuals in society of public, historically created vehicles of reasoning, perception, feeling, and understanding—symbols in the broadest sense of the term.²²

The key question, then, concerns how, concretely, thought gets channeled in particular social contexts. This is a question of how religious and cultural traditions are celebrated and handed on to new generations in the course of the daily lives of a people. Here the study of myths and rituals and other cultural forms is so important. Yet, it is also a question

²⁰Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Turner's use of the terms "metaphor" and "paradigm" in this passage parallels Geertz's terms "ethos" and "worldview."

²¹Cf. Geertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-86. For a well-developed psycho-social perspective on the intersection of biology and society in individual development, cf. E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 48-108. I have examined in detail Freudian and Durkheimian perspectives on the role of religion in this process; cf. L. Cormie, "The Social Sciences and the Problem of Religion in the Modern World," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1977).

²²C. Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 95.

of the economic, political and social structures which channel people's acting and thinking in patterned ways and the ongoing struggles over the shape of these structures; after all, sooner or later beliefs and values have to make sense in terms of the particular activities people engage in to produce the necessities of life, and whatever luxuries are available, and in terms of the particular ways they reproduce themselves and their patterns of life on a day-to-day basis.

Seen in this light, reason itself is a public phenomenon expressed in and through institutions; it is essentially a public, not a private, instrument. Of course, within a given social group there may be varying degrees of consciousness about the rationality which informs both ethos and world view. As Rasmussen points out, individuals may be fully aware of what they are doing; i.e., they are fully conscious of the social context of meaning—they can make sense of their behavior both to themselves and to others.²³ But they are less likely to be aware of the cultural context of meaning; i.e., they do not think about historically shaped rationality which shapes their identities and the social roles they play. In other words, this cultural rationality exists primarily at the level of the common sense world, the "world of thoughts, opinions, and actions in which people live their lives in a basically uncritical mode of awareness."²⁴ At this level, under the best of circumstances at least, the world is unproblematic; here people find a generalized world of meaning, and the foundations for the particular identities which they develop. It is within this world that people are given the basic tools for thinking about themselves, their relations with others, their personal and social problems. But they do not usually think about this level of meaning, and for this reason "interpretation at this level is analogous to the discovery of modalities of the unconscious."²⁵

In the light of this view of culture, I would like to suggest that the social sciences may be seen, along with theology and philosophy, as perhaps the most articulate expressions of a cultural rationality, and as examples of attempts at the increasing rationalization of it. In other words, in developing the basic tools for thinking about themselves, their relationships with others, personal and social problems, social theorists, like others in their culture, draw on the shared rationality which is experienced in and through institutions; and insofar as they contribute to policy decisions of governments, corporations and opposition political movements, they contribute to the increasing "rationalization" of the society. Thus, social scientific perspectives can be considered not only as intellectual responses to problems which have arisen historically within the respective disciplines. They certainly do develop in this way; but they are also exemplars of cultural rationalities which are diffused throughout the culture and which change in response to changes in economic, political, cultural and religious institutions. They are pre-eminent examples of societal reflexiveness.

²³D. M. Rasmussen, "Between Autonomy and Sociality," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 1 (1973), 7.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 7.

In his study of the development of the natural sciences, Kuhn points out that once a natural science has earned the label "normal science," its development is determined largely or solely by those within the field, and that this condition is in fact the prerequisite for its "progress."²⁶ But it is clear that none of the social sciences has yet achieved the status of a normal science. But perhaps, it is mistaken to try to fit the social sciences into this natural science mold. For social theories are more obviously and intimately related to the social theorist's own social world and self-understanding. As Gouldner has pointed out, "whether or not it 'should be,' social theory is always rooted in the theorist's experiences."²⁷ In other words, social theories, whatever else they are, are also attempts by concrete individuals to make sense of their own experiences, beliefs, feelings, hopes. Each social scientific perspective is, then, both a logic and a morality, and is adhered to in part because it resonates with the theorist's own experiences and vision of the world.²⁸

Something like a paradigm may develop within a discipline like psychology, history, sociology, anthropology, political science or economics, but only insofar as it resonates with the life experiences of many within the discipline. And for a discipline based on such a paradigm to win respectability and support within the larger academic community it must resonate with important elements in the life experiences of many within that social context. In particular, it must resonate with key elements of the culture's dominant ethos or rationality, or, more precisely, with that of its dominant class, racial and sexual groups in their efforts to interpret their own experience and to define the parameters of existence for society as a whole. In the history of the social sciences, then, we can see displayed the fundamental conflicts among meaning and values which exist in a society.

In the view being sketched here, the coherence of the common sense world, and therefore of the rationality which informs it, is not based simply on some kind of systematic logic; rather, it emerges historically and is a response to the forces which have shaped the lives of those within a culture. Accordingly, various elements of the ethos and world view may appear incompatible, even contradictory, to an outsider without being experienced that way by an insider. We have already seen an example of this kind of antinomy in the importance attributed to religion by the classic social theorists alongside their frequent claims about its disappearance in the modern world.²⁹ Racism and sexism provide many more concrete examples of such antinomies, since Blacks, other non-white races and women are usually characterized as lazy and indolent on

²⁶T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 162-68.

²⁷A. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York: Avon, 1970), p. 8.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹Durkheim was an exception to this tendency, insisting that religion is, so to speak, part of the definition of human nature and society. However, even Durkheim was not totally ambivalent about this issue; cf. Cormie, pp 228-70.

the one hand and subversive and powerfully threatening the social order on the other.

I believe that in the intellectual history of the West, these attitudes toward women and Blacks, primitives and working people, religion and science have been closely linked, and that the dominant theoretical perspectives reflect contradictions embedded in the basic structures of the political economy of the modern world order. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to substantiate this hypothesis in any detail. However, I would like briefly to sketch the rationality of this dominant world view. Any of the antinomies I have mentioned would provide a point of entrance into its internal logic; however, I would like to choose one which I have not mentioned so far, the antinomy of the individual versus society. The whole history of social thought in the West since the seventeenth century can be written in terms of this antinomy.

The emergence of capitalism in the sixteenth century completely transformed the nature of individual and social life in Europe. And because this new mode of production was a world system from its beginning, the structures of daily life around the world were also changed. It is easy to overly romanticize the medieval period or a tribal society as a lost Garden of Eden in which all individuals were organically related to one another in guild, manor, clan or tribe. Nevertheless, even a more sober judgment finds that there was a fundamental break between the medieval period, in which "individual" meant "inseparable" and description of the individual meant description of the group of which he or she was a member, and the modern period, in which "individual" is thought of as a discrete, autonomous person in his or her own right.³⁰ These changes in thinking reflected and informed the emergence of a market economy in which, supposedly, individuals are free to sell their labor in the marketplace, no longer bound by reasons of birth to the land or to a guild, clan or tribe.

The social analysts of the time, however, were confronted with the problem of how to think about these issues. This task was complicated by the explosion of information about other cultures being brought back to Europe by merchant capitalists, military leaders, missionaries and colonial administrators, and by the similar explosion of information about the Europeans' own past being dug up by archaeologists.³¹ The paradigm which gradually emerged as the most influential way of organizing all this information was the evolutionary perspective in which the root metaphor is the notion of organic development.³²

Essentially this theory explains historical change as a process of evolution in the direction of increasing differentiation and complexification toward the goal of greater adaptability on the part of a society

³⁰ A. Dawe, "Theories of Social Action," in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet, eds., *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 376-77.

³¹ M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968) pp. 109-13.

³² For an analysis of the notion of root metaphor, cf. S. C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 91.

vis-à-vis the environment.³³ In theory there are many stages in this process, and any given society can be located at some spot along the continuum from primitive to modern. Generally, however, the two ends of the continuum are the major focal points. Not surprisingly, European nations (and only later the United States) are seen as manifestations of the highest stage of evolutionary development; other nations, and the European past, are seen as more or less "primitive." The characteristics of the modern society are the obverse of those of primitive society. For example, modern society is said to be characterized by individualism; no longer are individuals dominated by the group, bound by communal ties which, in forms like clan and caste, characterize primitive society. In other words, evolution witnesses the differentiation of the individual from the group.

Consciousness itself becomes differentiated. One of the most important dimensions of this development concerns the differentiation of affect and cognition. No longer in modern society is human knowing corrupted by instincts and emotion; in other words, this is the age of objective, neutral value-free rational science. The obverse of science in primitive society is, of course, the irrational, emotion-charged knowing characteristic of religious myths and symbols. At the political level, democracy replaces various forms of coercion by the group. And at the economic level, a very differentiated and complex division of labor, capable of producing a wide range of goods and services, replaces a very simple division of labor in primitive societies, where everyone does more or less the same thing and where only a narrow range of goods and services is produced. With amazing consistency non-white races and women are found by these theorists to display traits and values characteristic of earlier stages of evolution;³⁴ generally poor and working-class people in modern societies are thought to share similar characteristics.³⁵

These grand evolutionary schemas have had their ups and downs in the development of social thought. They came under a lot of criticism in the United States in the early part of this century from those who

³³This version of evolutionary theory is clear in the writings of Herbert Spencer; cf. J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer, On Social Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). Durkheim wrestled throughout his writings with the conception of social evolution articulated by Spencer; in his *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. by G. Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1964; originally published in 1893) Durkheim most clearly reveals this influence.

³⁴According to Durkheim, the female form is "the aboriginal image of what was the one and only type from which the masculine variety slowly detached itself." In this view the male brain began to grow larger and larger in the course of evolution, and with it the differentiation between affective and intellectual functions; this development supposedly explains why women have withdrawn from public affairs; cf. *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp. 57-60. Freud saw social and psychic evolution in similar terms, as the gradual replacement of the matriarchal structure of society by the patriarchal one. In his view this development "signifies above all a victory of spirituality over the senses—that is to say, a step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a survival based on a deduction and a premise"; cf. *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by K. Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1967; originally published in 1939), pp. 145-46.

³⁵For a critique of recent influential theories concerning the culture of the poor, cf. C. A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968).

accused them of being too general and abstract, not empirical enough.³⁶ The important thing to note, however, is that the basic antinomies like individual/group, modern/primitive, male/female, scientific/religious, were retained even by those who rejected the evolutionary perspective *per se*.³⁷ And, in any case, the straightforward evolutionary perspective made a strong comeback in the post-World War II period in the United States, especially in the writings of the very influential Talcott Parsons.³⁸

The elements of this evolutionary perspective are the basic elements of something like a paradigm which has dominated the social sciences in the U.S., especially in the years 1945-1970, and in less clear forms for much longer. As I have indicated above, these elements are not always tied together in an explicitly evolutionary perspective; for this reason I would like, following Rasmussen, to refer to the rationality which consists of these elements as autonomous rationality. For it centers around the notion of the discrete, autonomous, rational individual who creates himself and his world of meaning, and for whom the category of freedom is primary. In this world, human problems are individual rather than social, and even social problems can only be solved in terms of the relationships among individuals. A key thread running through this ethos is the problem of identity; the self is problematic to itself.

These assumptions about human nature and society have dominated the social sciences in the United States, where most analyses start from the notion of the autonomous individual who rationally calculates the costs and rewards for various courses of action.³⁹ More research is necessary to clarify the exact extent to which this rationality has informed theology in the U.S., but initial indications are that it has deeply, for example in the efforts to develop a "scientific" theology based more or less on a classical notion of science, in the focus on the believer as an essentially rational, cognitive knower, in the celebrations of "man comes of age" in the modern world. Moreover, even where there has been a reaction against aspects of autonomous rationality, for example in the theologies of play and festivity, the rejection seems only partial

³⁶Cf. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-372.

³⁷Nisbet makes the same point concerning functionalist theories in anthropology and sociology; cf. R. Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 205.

³⁸Parsons was undoubtedly the single most influential sociologist in the United States in the twenty-five years following World War II; cf. his *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

³⁹Cf. R. LeVine, *Culture, Behavior and Personality* (Chicago: Aldine, 1973); R. T. Hogan and N. P. Emler, "The Biases in Contemporary Social Psychology," *Social Research* 45 (1978), 478-534. Of course, this vision of human nature has had a profound impact on the interpretation of social scientific method. Concerning Weber's very influential perspective on method, cf. Rasmussen, *op. cit.*; A. W. Gouldner, "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-free Sociology," in J. D. Douglas, ed., *The Relevance of Sociology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 64-84; Dawe, *op. cit.*; A. Giddens, "Classical Social Theory and the Origins of Modern Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976), 703-29.

and incomplete—as if we are all really free to become fuller beings in our leisure time.

In some respects, however, the extent to which autonomous rationality informs theology may be secondary. For in the form of an evolutionary perspective on the development of consciousness and society, this rationality constitutes nothing less than a salvation history. Societies like the United States have virtually no remaining serious social problems, in this view; they are literally the good society itself in operation.⁴⁰ It is no wonder that theorists at this time proclaimed the end of ideology; in their view there were literally no serious problems left to debate, only technical problems which require the attention of experts. Of course, in the high technology, mass consumption society, problems of boredom and of what to do with leisure time will arise.⁴¹ But many people have wondered whether or not these would be problems in heaven too!

Of course, this is not a complete salvation history. There remain problems of individual suffering and death, and thus there is room for a religion which responds to these fundamental human concerns.

The problem with the discrete, rational, autonomous, individual, the very epitome of historical development in these theories, is that he doesn't exist and never has. This is not to say, however, that the structures of our society, especially economic structures, don't promote for some the sense of being discrete individuals. They do; but, the dark side of this experience has always been evident to the more sensitive social theorists, and in analyzing the functioning of a capitalist society like our own, they have sought to pinpoint those aspects of the system which mitigate its individualizing thrust.⁴² For example, most people survive even at a physical level in capitalist societies in the First World because of the government, through its role in moderating the economy ("fighting inflation") and in providing supplemental income to what people can earn in the market place ("welfare"). And liberal economists have blessed these developments in their notions of a "mixed economy." Rational autonomous man might be competent in the cold, hard world out there, the world of work, but he is also likely to be lonely, and in need of love and the ability to love;⁴³ indeed, in our society, narcissism, which is appearing with increasing frequency in therapists' consulting rooms, seems to be the natural consequence of everyday life within the structures of the middle-class world.⁴⁴ Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that social scientists have pointed to the family as the nurturing institution in a heartless world.⁴⁵ This solution also solves the

⁴⁰S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), p. 439. Cf. also D. Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

⁴¹W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 91-92.

⁴²Here I am following Gouldner's account of the development of functionalism; cf. his *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* pp. 61-163.

⁴³Cf. M. Maccoby, *The Gamesman* (New York: Bantam, 1978).

⁴⁴R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), esp. pp. 326, 331.

⁴⁵C. Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

"woman problem"; they are the ones who in instinct and disposition are the nurturers.⁴⁶ And politically, too, those responsible for making sense of modern politics were not content very long with the notion of the "invisible hand" miraculously coordinating the the discrete individuals' pursuit of private gain. Somewhat crudely, Hobbes turned to Leviathan, the supreme political sovereign, to prevent the "war of everyone against everyone."⁴⁷ Subsequent social theorists more subtly have turned to the notion of internalized values which are shared by a whole society and which are the glue which holds this society together, and to the notion of political pluralism, i.e., different interest groups each pursuing its own interests and values within the framework of recognizing the rights and interests of others to do so, too.⁴⁸ This solution also reintroduces religion as an important factor in individual and social life insofar as it can be identified with these basic values, thus blunting the critique of Freud and Marx, who saw such alienating aspects of it, and of positivists generally who held that science was to replace religion altogether.⁴⁹

These complements to the notions of discrete, rational, autonomous man might appear convincing and adequate. Indeed, they have appeared so to many; for something like a paradigm of this rationality dominated the social sciences in the twenty-five years following World War II. The problem is, however, that there are major contradictions in this ethos. What might be labelled the "pure" version of the evolutionary hypothesis relegated community, religion, the feminine to the primitive and infantile world, and left the discrete individual man alone in the marketplace in the modern world. As a theory, this view is logically consistent, even if it doesn't square with our experience.

In the revised version, however, these theorists want to introduce elements of the primitive and infantile world into the life of autonomous individuals. Apparently this has not felt contradictory to many theor-

⁴⁶B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *For Her Own Good* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1978); S. M. Rothman, *Women's Proper Place* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

⁴⁷Dawe, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

⁴⁸Parsons claims that there is a convergence in Durkheim's and Freud's writings concerning the role of internalized values, a convergence so striking that it "deserves to be ranked as one of the truly fundamental landmarks of the development of modern science"; cf. *Social Structure and Personality* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp. 19-20. Parsons' whole perspective hinges on this notion. His appeal to Durkheim and Freud, however, must be questioned, for he seriously misinterprets both in the process of describing the convergence between them; cf. Cormie, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 187-90; W. Pope, "Classic on Classic: Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim," *American Sociological Review* 38 (1973), 399-415.

For critical views of pluralist theory, cf. W. E. Connally, "The Challenge to Pluralist Theory," in W. E. Connally, ed., *The Bias of Pluralism* (New York: Atherton, 1969), pp. 3-34; C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

⁴⁹Parsons contends, for example, that by the roundabout route of differentiation, i.e., modernization including the aspects generally summed up under the label "secularization," there now exists a more Christian society than even before in history; cf. his "Christianity and Modern Industrial Society," in *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

ists;⁵⁰ but at the level of theory, it is indeed very contradictory. For example, the notion of social order, and indeed of the social system itself, involves some notion of constraint or restraint on infinite human freedom. But how does this square with the notion of virtually absolute autonomy at the heart of autonomous rationality?⁵¹ We may say that the twin experiences of virtually limitless freedom on the one hand and of being at the mercy of forces beyond our control (big business, red tape or the bureaucracy) on the other are both foundational experiences in the modern world, and that theories in embodying these antinomies merely reflect this reality.⁵² Certainly this is coherent with the view of the social sciences developed at the beginning of this paper. But this does not help us to understand better this experience, or to make the world a better place to live in. Some groups have experienced an urgent need to do both.

C. B. Macpherson has pointed out that "... two-thirds of the world has rejected the ontology and the ethics of the capitalist market society..."⁵³ He is referring to the fact that many people tried to change their world, to develop in the image of First World nations as this was articulated and explained by developmentalist and evolutionary theories and incarnated in the foreign policy of the United States government and international institutions like the International Monetary Fund. And they failed. Development has occurred, but it has been very uneven, favoring an elite few who can afford affluent lifestyles, while the great majority struggles just to survive on the margins.⁵⁴ From the point of view of the majority, the evolutionary perspective, and variations on this theme which may be characterized as developmentalist, are not only wrong; they actually distract attention away from the real issues.⁵⁵ These theories and the rationality which informs them must all be rejected if the majority is even to survive. As Macpherson indicates, nothing less than a new ontology is necessary.⁵⁶

⁵⁰Maccoby, for example, notes that the structures of work for upper-level managers promote a heightened sense of autonomy, but that closer analysis reveals that this is autonomy within very precise limits, limits which are seldom questioned; cf. *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁵¹Dawe, *op. cit.*, suggests that the whole history of social thought can be written in terms of this antinomy.

⁵²Cf. *ibid.*

⁵³C. B. Macpherson, "Reflections on the Sources of Development Theory," in M. Stanley, ed., *Social Development* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), p. 218.

⁵⁴Cf., for example, Report from the São Paulo Justice and Peace Commission, *São Paulo: Growth and Poverty* (London: Bowerdean Press, 1978).

⁵⁵Thus, as Portes points out, "sociologies of development dominant in the West thus come to posit a transition from a fictional stage to an impossible one"; cf. A. Portes, "On The Sociology of National DEVELOPMENT: Theories and Issues," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1976), 74.

⁵⁶Third World authors, like Miguez Bonino, see this rationality, which he labels bourgeois culture, in a profound crisis: "... the great and admirable social and cultural achievement that we call Western bourgeois culture is reaching the end of its run." These developments have inescapable consequences for theology; in Miguez Bonino's view, "the imposing and noble theological tradition which has accompanied, at times inspired, sometimes humanized and always expressed it, is also running out"; cf. J. Miguez Bonino, "Whatever Happened to Theology?" *Christianity and Crisis* 35 (May 12, 1975), 111.

A similar tale could be told from the point of view of Blacks and women in the United States. Located, like Third World peoples, in the periphery, i.e., in the world of primitives and infants, by these theories, they have struggled to succeed in its terms, and failed. To take just one indicator of this failure, the gap between the income of Blacks and women on the one hand and the income of white men on the other is increasing, not decreasing; it is larger today than it was at the end of World War II, and growing larger. This experience of failure has generated a fundamental critique of dominant theories and the rationality which informs them. Such a critique is in fact relevant in the lives of a majority of Americans, for most of us are struggling just to get by. There are in fact very few of us who live in the so-called "middle-class" lifestyle which so dominates the media; when the quality of mental as well as physical survival is taken into account, most of us are not doing very well at all.⁵⁷

These experiences are generating new visions, revitalized values, and a new rationality. History will ultimately be the judge of how successful these are in replacing the old, and, in particular, how the experience of each of these different groups, i.e., women, poor, and non-white races, informs that of the others in the struggles to unfold a new social order, ultimately on a world scale.⁵⁸ However, I would like to point to three elements of this new rationality which I see emerging.⁵⁹ In contrast to autonomous rationality, this could be labelled a rationality of sociality.

First, there is a renewed awareness that human nature is essentially social. It has been the experience of the members of these different groups that their lives, and their deaths, are largely determined by their membership in that group, i.e., as women, Blacks and/or Third World persons, and that they confront their freedom primarily in their struggles to change the structures which channel them in these ways. In this view,

⁵⁷Cf. E. Liebow, *Tally's Corner* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967); R. Parker, *The Myth of the Middle Class* (New York: Liveright, 1972); L. B. Rubin, *Worlds of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

⁵⁸For example, the more far-reaching proposals for a new international economic order reflect the needs and experiences of the world's poor majority. Yet the fate of these proposals seems to depend at least as much on the economic, political and perhaps even military power of poor nations to force changes in the world economy as they do on the "truth" about poor people's experiences within present structures. Cf. R. Falk, "Satisfying Human Needs in a World of Sovereign States: Rhetoric, Reality, and Vision," in J. Gremillion and W. Ryan, eds., *World Faiths and the New World Order* (Washington: Interreligious Peace Colloquium, 1978), pp. 109-40.

⁵⁹Such a perspective, which is emerging in different ways across the social sciences, draws heavily on the writings of Marx. There are good reasons for this; as Gouldner points out (*The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, pp. 111-12), Marxism, in finding its constituency among the outsiders, the marginal, the lowly, disreputable and relatively powerless, "made the most basic rupture with all previous social theory, which, from Plato to Machiavelli, had addressed itself to and sought the support of Princes, elites, and socially integrated strata." The subsequent development of sociology and anthropology can be understood in terms of the encounter with Marxist thought, sometimes in critical debate with it, often as an escape from it and its implications. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 116, 123-24; I. M. Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968); Harris, p. 249.

there never was any change from community to individual with the emergence of capitalist society, but simply a change in the details of the inherently communal nature of our lives, profound changes, to be sure, but not changes that can be understood in terms of social versus individual.⁶⁰

The second element of this emerging rationality is a fuller notion of reason. Meaning is more than simply cognitive. On the one hand, it is rooted in human biology, in our instincts;⁶¹ on the other, it is shaped by the institutions in which we live. This means that rationality is historical, and that it always has a political dimension, since groups of people are often in conflict over the shape of the institutions within which they live. The economy is especially important here, because the ways in which people organize themselves to produce and to allocate all that they need to survive affect every aspect of life. In this connection, one of the central tasks for social scientists pursuing these insights is to understand the interstructuring of the structures effecting class, racial and sexual divisions in the current world system.⁶² In general, the notion of cultural rationality I sketched at the beginning of this paper is an effort to incorporate these insights into a theory of religion and of the social sciences.

The third element concerns the matter of method itself. In light of the above considerations, it is clear that there can be no absolute fact-value distinction. All knowing is interested knowing, reflecting the experiences and concerns of particular people at particular places in the social system. In other words, it always informs and is informed by particular historical projects. This insight is summed up in the claim that all theorists are priestly or prophetic, that you are for the system or against it. The choice, then, is not between neutral, value-free science on the one hand and committed, value-laden "ideology" on the other, but between theorizing unconscious of its commitments and therefore a slave to them and theorizing which relies precisely on a reflexive consciousness about its own commitments to promote greater objectivity.⁶³ The specific commitment informing the thrust toward a rationality of sociality is identification with the oppressed in the struggles for justice and liberation.⁶³

⁶⁰Dawe, p. 410; cf. also R. Lichtman, "Symbolic Interactionism and Social Reality: Some Marxist Queries," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 15 (1970), 75-94; Rasmussen, *op. cit.*

⁶¹This was Freud's great insight, although, of course, his conceptualization of this relationship is problematic; cf. n. 21 above.

⁶²For samples of these kinds of analyses, cf. R. C. Edwards, M. Reich, and T. Weisskopf, eds., *The Capitalist System* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978).

⁶³Although widely misused, the term "praxis" sums up this relationship; for the implications of this understanding of the relationship between theory and practice among theologians, cf. D. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 237-58; M. Lamb, "The Theory-Praxis Relationship in Contemporary Christian Theologies," *CTSA Proceedings* 31 (1976), 149-78; A. Dulles, "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relationship to Justice," in J. C. Haughey, ed., *The Faith that Does Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 10-46. F. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Political Theology as Foundational Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 142-77; and E. Schüssler Fiorenza,

In conclusion, I have suggested that the sensibilities and notions embedded in the ethos of autonomous rationality are profoundly inadequate to deal with the lives and deaths of the poor and oppressed majority of the world especially, and in the end, of all people. Indeed they are in significant ways part of the problem. Following Gutierrez, this means that we are also unable to speak about the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this light the battles in the social sciences over the basic frame of reference in terms of which we interpret ourselves and our world are not merely academic. To the extent that they influence government policies, opposition political movements and international institutions, they are battles over the necessities of life for millions of people, and over the quality of life for all. For these reasons the social sciences are indispensable in our efforts to develop a more adequate theological anthropology and understanding theological method, and in general to interpret the meaning of Christian faith and hope today.⁶⁴

LEE CORMIE
University of Chicago
Divinity School

"Feminist Theology As A Critical Theology of Liberation," in W. J. Burhardt, ed., *Woman: New Dimensions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 29-50.

On the general relevance of Marxist analysis for Christian theology, cf. Dom Helder Camara, "What Would Thomas Aquinas Do If Faced With Karl Marx?" *New Catholic World* 220 (May/June 1977), 108-13. For an analysis of a convergence between Christian thought and Marxist thought at the point of identification with the oppressed, cf. L. Cormie, "The Hermeneutical Privilege of the Oppressed," *CTSA Proceedings* 33 (1978), 155-81.

⁶⁴ Similarly, Baum points to the fact that "the sociological tradition contains basic truth absent from philosophical and theological thought, truth that actually modifies the very meaning of philosophy and theology. I am thinking here especially of the relationship between mind and society." G. Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist, 1975), p. 1.