

The Bible, then, testifies to a different kind of power, a power rooted in love and mutuality and the struggles for justice. And biblical faith inescapably nurtures the irruption of the oppressed which we are witnessing throughout the world today in the struggles for liberation in their many forms.

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THESIS III

Communities are the infrastructure of all forms of social power, whether those forms be cultural, political, or economic. The dialectic of social power is rooted in the dialectic of community. Historically, communities have exercised alienated and alienating forms of dominative power (or force) insofar as they extrinsically imposed cultural, political, and/or economic meanings and values upon both their own members and other communities or groups. Such dominative power as exemplified in empires or superpowers is bound to collapse eventually since it ends up destroying its own infrastructure, i.e., community. Liberation theology is in the process of recovering a Christian redemption of social power to the degree that it empowers those infrastructural communities (com unidades de base) which are the foundations of any and all just and humane social orders.

There is a persistent tendency to reify social power, treating it as a force over against the human life-worlds which create and sustain it. This reification tends to reduce social power to variant forms of physical power. The persistent role of militarism in history testifies to the depth of this reification and the terrible consequences it has on natural and human life. The necrophilic growth of military-industrial complexes in the twentieth century, along with the nuclear arms races and the massively destructive wars, challenges us with the need to both expose and correct this reification. Otherwise it could quite literally destroy human life-worlds on this planet. The tasks of analysis and transformation are manifold, requiring both collaboration between all the human sciences and theology as well as promoting and extending those communities of reflection and action dedicated to transforming the social order.

Within the extreme brevity of this statement I shall outline a few of the avenues of analysis I am now pursuing. The intellectual or noetic praxis of self-appropriation articulated in Bernard Lonergan's turn to the subject is not a privatized project but is embedded within the social contexts of concretely existing communities of discourse and action. Just as the infrastructural foundations of all the differentiations of consciousness in common sense and theoretic universes of discourse can be appropriated in the related and recurrent activities of human subjects performatively engaged in the self-correcting processes of learning, so also the infra-structural foundations of all the vast differences in social and institutional organizations—with their varieties of technological, economic, political, and religious developments—admit of an ongoing appropriation in the historical movements from intersubjective communities to ever more conscious and differentiated interpersonal communities. The heuristic

structures of the human good, therefore, articulate the formal dynamics foundationally (or infrastructurally) operative in the manifold historical and social processes of moving from instinctual intersubjective communities (the archeology of all social organization) to the ongoing realizations of the concrete ideals of interpersonal communities as explicitly responsible sharings of communal experiences, meanings, truths, and values (the teleology of all social organization).¹ Community, similar to consciousness as its social analogue, is both the concretely factual origin of all social organization and is concretely constituted by imperatives toward ever more differentiated experiences, meanings, truths, and values, which imperatives are the infrastructural foundations for dialectically discerning genuine from alienated forms of social organization.

Social power and authority—whether technological, economic, political, cultural, or religious—are legitimate only to the extent that they foster the movements from the essential freedom embedded in intersubjective communities to the effectively responsible freedoms of ever more humanized and personalized communities of discourse and action.² These movements constitute the dialectics of community in which the linked yet opposed principles of change are instinctual intersubjectivity and interpersonally responsible intelligence. A particularly intense modern configuration of this dialectic is the conceptualistic extrinsicism whereby technological, economic, political, cultural, and religious forms of institutionalization tend to promote alienation (or what Lonergan terms the longer cycle of decline) by (1) repressing both the needs of intersubjective communities and the responsibly intelligent discoveries which would meet and transform those needs, and (2) by exploiting the desires and fears resulting from repressed intersubjectivity in order to legitimate basically immoral and unintelligent technological, economic, political, cultural, and/or religious policies and practices.³

The dialectics of social power rooted in such a dialectics of community are manifold. This context of addressing the issues of social power is not a romanticist simplification of side-stepping the complexities of contemporary issues by invoking anachronistically some myth of primitive communities (à la Rousseau). It would instead require vast critical collaboration in order to uncover the infrastructurally foundational presence of community in all social organizations of any kind and how those organizations are alienated and alienating to the extent that they repress or oppress, implicitly or explicitly, the imperatives of effective freedom constituting the developments of communities. A common feature of such critical collaborative efforts would be a concern to criticize radically all forms of instrumental rationality as conceptualistic deformations of responsible intelligence. Instrumental rationality in its various forms tends to promote both (1) organizations of social power alienated from infrastructural communities, which are *wrongly* regarded as anarchical, and dedicated to imposing extrinsically, by force if necessary, orders congruent with the biased interests of elite ruling groups (whether the elitism is economically determined, as in late capitalism, or bureaucratically determined, as in state socialism/communism); and (2) theoretical dichotomies which both reflect and promote such

¹Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 11th printing, pp. 207–44; *Method in Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 2nd Printing, pp. 27–55, 358–67.

²On essential and effective freedom, cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 619–33.

³On the dialectics of community, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 214–18.

alienated and alienating organizations of social power, e.g., the false dichotomies of *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*, *Zweckrationalität/Wertrationalität*, bureaucratic/charismatic authority, church/sect, etc.⁴

Liberation theologies are in the process of redeeming social power by radically criticizing its alienation, i.e., social power as domination. The critique is radical insofar as liberation theologies do not match physical force with physical force, but instead attend to the nurturing of ever more effective freedom within communities of the poor and oppressed victims of domination. The "popular church" or "basic Christian communities" are not tools or technical means towards goals or ends extrinsic to themselves. Rather they are contexts of communal praxis in which the goals or ends are intrinsic to the very activities constituting their movements toward more effective freedom. Such concrete practices of liberation embody both the notion of society as dedicated to the common good and also realize that social power is essentially empowerment for, by, and in community. Such an understanding of common good subverts those alienated and alienating tendencies whereby groups are extrinsically oppressed by forms of dominative power which would alienate them into means for ends destructive of human personhood such as classism, racism, or sexism. In accord with Judaeo-Christian traditions, liberation theologies recognize that the redemption of the social order revealed by God is not a redemption dominatively from the top down, instead it is an empowerment of the infrastructural foundations of any and all just and humane social orders by calling the victims into communities.⁵

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⁴Cf. Matthew L. Lamb, "Christianity within the Political Dialectics of Community and Empire, in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, vol. 1, n. 1 (forthcoming).

⁵Cf. Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); also Enrique R. Maldonado (ed.), *Liberación y Cautiverio: Debates en torno al Método de la Teología en América Latina* (Mexico City: Comité organizador, 1976); S. Torres & J. Eagleson (eds.), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981).