

Statement by Enrique Dussel

I want to make a short theological reflection, departing from geopolitics and history. If we look at a map from the year 1492 we see that there were several imperialist centers in the world: Europe, the Turkish-Arabic world, India, China, and the Mayan-Incan worlds. Europe tried to conquer the whole world. The first attempt was the Crusades, under the aegis of St. Bernard. Later, in the sixteenth century, Russia conquered Siberia, while Spain crossed the Atlantic to conquer the Americas. At that moment the geopolitical reality of the world changed, because Europe was transforming itself into the center of world history. For example, an Englishman went out from the port of London to Africa; he bought a black with Indian money. With the purchase of the black with Indian gold, primitive capital was acquired from the English empire. The origin of capitalism was based on the accumulation of capital that came from the periphery to the center.

By the twentieth century, the world centers had become the U.S., Europe, Russia, Japan. The periphery is Latin America, the Arab world, black Africa, southeast Asia, and China. Of all these peripheral worlds, only China has been liberated.

The history of America began in the Caribbean when Columbus and the conquistadors arrived from Spain. It continued through Mexico. On the Pacific side it centered in Peru. The Portuguese conquered Brazil. And when the whole conquest was terminated in about 1620 another history began. At about that time the pilgrims arrived from England, and soon the two histories would meet. At the moment the U. S. won its independence from England, Latin America was still a Spanish colony. And then there began the conquest of the West: first of all, Louisiana, then California, New Mexico, and the other areas that were the northern province of Mexico. The U. S. won a million kilometers from Mexico. In 1850 a priest from Santa Fe named Martinez published a newspaper called *The*

Dawn of Liberty. The name seems paradoxical for those who remained within the conquered Mexican territory, for it was really the beginning of their oppression.

Little by little the Far West was won. Then began the conquest of the Caribbean. The Caribbean too came under the influence of North America. Latin America has remained under the sole disposition of the big brother to the north.

The geopolitical system that we have today is a totality, one system. The Bible refers to the "flesh." The flesh is the totality of the system. This flesh, this system, subjugates the poor one, who can be a nation, a social class, a race, women, children, youth. The poor one is not respected as the other, but is considered as a thing within the system, as something to be used-as the Indian was used in the colonial epoch of Spain, as the black was used in the slave system in the South in the *U.S.*, as Latin America today is being used, as the proletariat class today is being used.

The using of another as a thing is the *only* sin; there is no other. When the woman is used as a sexual object, when the child or youth is used as the recipient of ideology, this is sin, just as when Cain killed Abel, the other.

What did God do? He sent his Son into the system of sin; although of divine origin, Jesus took on the form of a slave. He became in a certain way the son of a despised race, a despised class, and a despised nation. Jesus, then, became oppressed; but he gave a consciousness, an awareness of liberation. He revealed this to the people and was condemned for having revealed it. When the people start to mobilize for their liberation, domination becomes repression. The passage from domination to repression is occasioned by the love of the poor for their liberation.

Love is not everywhere. I should hate the prince of this world, Satan. Love should not direct itself to Satan. And people are the angels of the prince of this world. The empire was represented by Pilate; Jesus died under Pontius Pilate. Herod represented the dependent national government. The gospel says that Herod and Pilate became friends on the day Jesus was condemned. In the gospel there is the empire, there are dependent nations, there are dependent races, there are dependent classes. Jesus was a man of the people, of Galilee, a dependent region within the Roman Empire.

The church in the Roman Empire made itself poor with the poor. The Christians were sent to the arena for being atheists; they would not worship the emperor. The Christians did not worship the god of the empire. The Christians were the atheists of the empire. I see on

the dollar bill a theological phrase; In God we trust. In which God? In the god of the empire or in the God who is different from every possible system? The God of Israel is the other of any possible system. The Christian is an atheist of every historical system. In 1551 a bishop in Bolivia said, "We lost this land in a very short time because the Spaniards offered to their god a great quantity of Indians and this god is the silver mines of Potosi. " In the sixteenth century the fetish of money reigned. To be an atheist of that god is today, both here and in Latin America, to be in danger of death. And I am not speaking metaphorically.

What is called liberation might be nothing more than integration into an unjust system. What is called liberation of the woman might mean that a woman becomes equal to a dominating male-with the poor still on the periphery. "Liberation" might mean the liberation of the Chicano to participate on an equal footing in a system that oppresses. It might mean the liberation of blacks to participate in a system that oppresses other nations.

Tactically , Christians in Latin America are experiencing the captivity and the exile. We are in Babylon or Babel, where the blood of martyrs, as the Apocalypse says, the blood of all the saints, the blood of all those who are immolated on the earth is found.

In Latin America the theology of liberation has arisen slowly. I will mention several stages.

First, from the Vatican Council to Medellin (1962-68). This is still the time of imitation of Europeans. This is the time of "development." We used to believe that a developed nation could be a model for an underdeveloped nation, and the question was to imitate the model of a developed nation.

From 1968 to 1972 is the time of the formulation of the theology of liberation. Gustavo Gutierrez wrote his first work. (If he is not here now it is because he is committed to the process of liberation; I believe his absence is the best lecture he could have given.) But during this time repression also intensified. Christians have been more and more persecuted.

There are saints in the new church. For example, in 1969, the martyr of Brazil, Antonio Pereira Neto, was taken, tortured, assassinated, stripped, and hung by his feet from a tree. He is a Christ figure. There is Father Gallegos in Panama. He lived like the peasants of Panama and for this he was assassinated. It is still not known where his body lies. In 1974 in Argentina there was a demonstration of students in which one was killed. Carlos Mugica, a priest from a poor barrio, prayed over the body. The following day he was killed with a

machine gun as he left church in Buenos Aires. This past month in Honduras, Father Ivan Betancoun was assassinated in Olancho, together with a North American priest. I believe that the bodies of two priest-martyrs in a hole form the basic foundation for our discussion.

When the church involves itself in liberation it suffers repression. This is the basis for our theology. We don't ponder things that are heard, but things that are suffered. Theologians who are here can recount what they have suffered. Yesterday I heard someone say that the Latin American theologians are a little old, but many of us have grey hairs when we are still young. One of those present has been expelled from Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Chile.

We cannot be good Christians unless we are good atheists of the fetish. Let it not be said that we Christians are atheists of the true God, atheists because we have not criticized the system, because we have lived within it with the spirit that gives us powers to function better within it. That spirit is not of God; it is of the devil. And the only criterion of discernment that our spirit is the spirit of God is if we struggle unto death for the poor. That is an objective, concrete Christological criterion: "I was hungry; you gave me to eat."