

1: JOURNEY TOWARD FREEDOM

Freedom is a journey with others and for others toward God's future. Freedom can never be defined once and for all. Freedom defined is freedom no longer, because it always transcends all our definitions or concepts. It can be experienced and celebrated only as it breaks into our lives as new awareness of hope in God's future, and new confidence in the growing ability to experience and share love with others.

When we try to describe freedom in our lives as women and men in a world and church in change, we usually turn to the word "liberation." This is not because we can be any more specific about what it means, but because liberation helps us to focus on a *process* of struggle with ourselves and others toward a more open future for humanity. As we experiment with what freedom might mean, we discover that the struggle toward liberation varies with each person and with each human community.

If someone were to ask a woman *what freedom means for her*, she might answer the question with one of a variety of possible descriptions, depending on her situation and the influence of particular revolutions of freedom in which she is immediately involved. If she were a middle-class woman in the United States, she might simply list the present goals of the women's liberation groups which make up the organized part of the movement: freedom from exploitation in

the *labor market*, equal pay and employment practices, and quality child care for working women; freedom to develop more meaningful and creative styles of *family life* so that the woman is not left to living vicariously through her husband and children and is not trapped by domestic isolation from the public sphere and by enforced triviality in the thirty years of her life which remain after her children are fully grown; freedom from *sexual exploitation*, and degrading use of her body for entertainment and advertising promotion.¹

If she were a Third World woman in the United States, she might list freedom from her position of double disadvantage brought about by racism and sexism, asserting that "human rights are indivisible."² Or if she were a woman in India, she might list her goals in terms of freedom from arranged marriages, sufficient food to eat, a job for her husband, or education for her children. A woman in one of the African Portuguese colonies or South Africa might put freedom from white colonialism and intentional practices of genocide at the top of her list. And so the lists could go, on and on, in every part of the globe.

A woman might prefer to answer the question of what freedom means by simply saying she wants freedom to be herself and to be accepted as herself, a whole human being. Or she might even refer to the incomplete and ever-changing process of liberation itself by saying that she will not know what her freedom means until she obtains a small piece of it and can describe it, at the same time looking toward the next possibility of freedom that begins to show itself over the horizon. For the promises of liberation, like the promises of God, are not fully known except as they are experienced, and then they always have an "overspill" of longing that points to the next fulfillment.³

This *situation variability* of liberation means that in every situation, every culture, every subculture, the things *from* which people would be free and the things *for* which they long are different. For every woman who longs to be free

from the drudgery and boredom of her home, there is another woman who longs to be free from the drudgery and boredom of a job that keeps her out of the home, and another who wishes she has a home or a job!

So how can we talk of human freedom in a global perspective? Definitions and blueprints are out, and even situational descriptions can never even begin to do the job. Perhaps the only way is by sharing clues and stories of liberation which can help each of us to search out our own road toward the future which God holds open for us. Or perhaps by sharing our common longing and speaking in poetry and visions. In the words of the haunting jazz melody of Billy Taylor, each of us somewhere deep in our heart sings, "I wish I knew how it would feel to be free!" Out of the experience of black oppression the song cries out, "I wish I could break all these chains holding me . . . say all the things I should say . . . for the whole world to hear!"⁴

One way for us to begin as Christians is to return to another haunting description of the journey toward freedom which we find in Rom. 8:14-27. Remembering the Biblical story of liberation in the exodus and the resurrection, we can look together at how *groaning for freedom*, *discovery of freedom*, and *horizon of freedom* appear to be happening in the experience of women in today's world.

GROANING FOR FREEDOM

In Paul's description of the struggle toward liberation the first thing that strikes us is his vivid picture of the whole universe groaning for freedom. In Rom. 8:22-23 Paul tells us:

As we all know, up to the present time, the creation in all its parts groans with pain like the pain of childbirth. But not just creation alone groans; we ourselves, although we have tasted already the *ap ritif* of the Spirit, we groan inwardly because we are still anticipating our adoption as children and the full liberation of our human existence.⁵

Solidarity of Groaning. What a relief! We discover that there is a solidarity of groaning. We are not the only ones who feel trapped and frustrated. Our sisters and brothers, even our environment, share together in the oppressive structures of society. Paul explains, by reference to the Fall in which all nature was subject to dislocation because of human disobedience, that "the script of our frustration" has a very long history.⁶ In its state of mortality and decadence all the universe longs for the fulfillment of God's new creation when all the parts will be born again in harmony, when the New Age promised by God and begun in Jesus Christ will be fulfilled.

We also discover as Christians that we are not saved *out of* this groaning world, but as *part of* it. We are saved in hope which comes from having already tasted of the firstfruits of the Spirit of freedom (the *apéritif*). Insofar as we have a small foretaste of God's gift of freedom, we are also led to see more clearly that this gift is intended by God for all women and men.⁷ Our heightened restlessness and longing, brought about by this foretaste, can only direct us toward participating in God's solidarity with humankind. It thrusts us to join with Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," in order to be part of this journey with others and for others toward God's future (Phil. 2:7).

Oppression of Women. The women's liberation movement in the United States and other nations helps to underline this experience of solidarity in groaning. Through a steady flow of documents, papers, stories, and actions, women testify that they have discovered that male domination and the submission of women is a sign of personal and social groaning.⁸ This is brought about, according to the feminist perspective, not by God's original design for creation, but by human disobedience and dislocation.

Certainly this experience of oppression does not always involve the *classic forms* of political, economic, and racial oppression because women tend to share the social status of

their husbands. Where men have had access to the goods of life, women have not been bred to inferiority because they were destined to be the mothers of the next generation of sons. Women elites in every society have shared the social advantages of their class, and participated in the oppression of the other classes. Yet at the same time women have been culturally "programmed" to accept a life of subservience to father and husband. Frequently they have been denied access to the education and self-development that would make them capable of strengthening the self-development of their children and participating in public sectors of human life.

Domination of women by men is an ancient and persistent form of the subjection of one human being to a permanent status of inferiority because of sex. The famous quote of August Bebel in declaring that the changes of history can be marked according to the progress of women may not be completely accurate historically.⁹ Yet it expresses the not so accidental analogy between sexism, racism, and all forms of economic exploitation. "Woman was the first human being to come into bondage: she was a slave before the male slave existed."¹⁰ The oppression of women is the most universal form of exploitation which supports and perpetuates the other forms of exploitation in both church and society.¹¹

As Jürgen Moltmann has pointed out, there have been a whole succession of freedom movements that have expressed the human striving for liberation in Western society. Each new movement has continued the gains of previous ones and has attempted to overcome the continuing disappointments. But "so far, no one of them has brought about the 'realm of freedom' itself, but each one has opened a new front in the struggle for freedom."¹²

In our present world the rising expectations of many oppressed peoples has led them to participate in their own movements toward liberation. Women belong to one of the groups who find that the liberties gained have not been adequate. As an oppressed majority they seek to break the pecu-

liar chains of sexism which bind us all, both women and men. Aware of their solidarity with others in groaning, they want to add their own contribution to the revolutions of freedom.

Where some women have tasted the firstfruits of liberation they are even more persistent in declaring that token forms of equality are not sufficient. The taste of freedom leads them to join others who have tasted this "heady wine." They have joined the procession of their sisters in every age, in demanding freedom *from* dehumanizing social structures, in order that they might become free *for* participation in the social, political, and economic struggles for humanization which are taking place in our global society.

Freedom to Serve. For Christian women the experience of new freedom leads to new responsibility. Not only does the *apéritif* bring the "Spirit of freedom," but also it brings with it a commission (*oikonomia*) to act in ministry and service to the world with which they groan (II Cor. 3:17; 1:22). *They are being set free for service to others.* But what form should this service (*diakonia*) take? How can they use their new experience of groaning and longing to be free to work out better ways of expressing their solidarity with others?

The service of Christ is a calling to be instruments of God's help, not a calling to be subservient. Yet it is clearly also a calling to solidarity in working with others, and not to superiority. Solidarity in groaning and working with others to gain freedom to shape their future cannot be a form of dominance or manipulation. For, as many women now know from their own experience, service that perpetuates dependency is not service at all.

Voices from the Third World are clearly expressing this conviction when they distinguish between *micro-charity* and *macro-charity*.¹³ In a technological society the problem of charity has changed. In a pretechnological era, only micro-charity was possible in which people expressed love for their immediate neighbor through gestures such as almsgiving, or

individual forgiveness. In a technological society, on the other hand, all parts of the globe are linked together in impersonal structures of violence and injustice. In this situation it is macro-charity that addresses itself to liberation and justice for peoples caught in complex structures and human relationships which dehumanize their lives. The ethical issues become ones of global peace, development, nation-building, technological exploitation, and not just ways of helping our immediate neighbor in one community or nation.

Actually, of course, this is not new. There were always social as well as personal problems. There was always a need to work in solidarity with others on behalf of justice rather than in extending bits of charity. But now the question of how to carry out our work of *diakonia* has become urgent in the church and the world. It is urgent (1) because of the new hope of liberation and its social implications which have infected the hearts and minds of many people; (2) because of the demands of others that they find their *own* journey to freedom and shake off the shackles of dependency; and (3) because the credibility of the church stands and falls with its response to the groaning peoples of the world. Gutiérrez emphasizes this point in saying:

... the question regarding the theological meaning of liberation is, in truth, a question *about the very meaning of the Church*. . . . Today the seriousness and scope of the process which we call liberation is such that the Christian faith and the Church are being radically challenged. They are being asked to show what significance they have for the human task which has reached adulthood.¹⁴

Diakonia (service or ministry) has traditionally taken three forms.¹⁵ *Curative diakonia* is the healing of the wounds of those who have become victims of life; providing help to the sick, the hungry, and the homeless. *Preventive diakonia* is attempting to curtail developments that might easily lead to

restriction of full freedom for life; working through social action to provide vocational training centers, drug prevention programs, etc. *Prospective diakonia* is attempting to open the situation for a future realization of life; helping those who are outcasts from the dominant culture or society to participate fully in society or to reshape that society.

Until recently the church has specialized in curative or "Band-Aid" tasks, and women have strongly supported these causes. Gradually they have begun to realize that *diakonia* is genuine solidarity in groaning only when it moves toward preventive programs and finally into prospective advocacy of the rights of people to decide for themselves how to work out their political and social liberation. Prospective *diakonia* is what people want for themselves. The basic necessities of life, without a way to help in shaping life, do not necessarily lead to liberation. This means that serving young people, or the aged, or ghetto residents, or Third World and Fourth World people begins with *their participation* in setting the agenda, and picking the battles. As Paulo Freire writes:

This is why there can be no socio-economic development in a dual, "reflex," invaded society. For development to occur it is necessary: (a) that there be a movement of search and creativity having its seat of decision in the researcher; (b) that this movement occur not only in space, but in the existential time of the conscious searcher.¹⁶

Diakonia is a mutual action of people and not a giving of "things" to "things." This means a genuine struggle to see that the church takes steps to support prospective action on the part of those groups and movements working for their own liberation and development. Curative and preventive *diakonia* is always needed in the desperate situations of poverty, famine, and human psychological and physical damage or destruction, but it is not enough. Those who themselves have experienced a groaning and longing to be free must face up to the risky business of advocating human liberation

in the process of working out better ways for expressing solidarity with others.

DISCOVERY OF FREEDOM

If we return to Paul's story of the journey toward freedom, we notice a striking description of the discovery of freedom. In Rom. 8:18-19 he tells us:

I consider that whatever we suffer now cannot be compared to all the splendour as yet not revealed, which is in store for us. The created universe is waiting on tiptoe for the children of God, to show what they are. In fact, the fondest dream of the universe is to catch a glimpse of real live children of God.

Children of God. In his poetic image we find that everyone who is working and longing for freedom is eagerly longing ("waiting on tiptoe") to catch a vision of what "it means to be free." For to be set free is to become real live children of God and to be part of a universe inhabited by these real live children!

Because we are all on this journey toward freedom together, we do not know exactly what children of God look like. Certainly if the members of Christian churches are presumed to represent them in any finished character, there is little to be expected! Christians seem to find themselves in a *minus situation* in this regard.¹⁷ Just because they have received a foretaste of the Spirit, they realize how far they and others before them have fallen short of Paul's vision of living a life in Christ in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:23-29). This foretaste of the Spirit has also made them more conscious of the fact that *diakonia* involves being "less than others," submitting their plans to the plans of others they serve and to God.

At the same time they are called to live in a situation of groaning and longing in which the hope comes not from

foolproof plans or illusions, doctrines or traditions, mythologies or ideologies, but from confidence in God's promise of liberation. This hope is in something we cannot see and something we cannot verify until it happens (Rom. 8:24-25). The new creation which God brings as the *adventus* or coming future is so *new* that it will be fully understood only in the light of the fulfillment of the resurrection.¹⁸

But in spite of this minus situation in the light of past and present failures and unfulfilled future promises, we have received the gift of the Spirit which sets us free to live without security and aids us in our weakness and inadequacy.¹⁹

Now then: In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak that we are. We do not even know how to pray properly. The Spirit has to do the job for us, expressing our pleas in a way that could never be put into words. And God who X-rays our hearts, understands what the Spirit means in praying for God's own people in God's own way. (Rom. 8:26-27.)

The main clue that we have as Christians beyond this foretaste which both judges and comforts us is that of Jesus of Nazareth. In him we trust that God has made known the beginnings of the love, obedience, and true humanity which is the destiny of a restored creation. For women and men alike, Jesus embodies in his life, death, and resurrection what a truly human being (*anthrōpos*) might be like. One who would love and live and suffer for love of God and for others. He was not just a male (*anēr*); he was for us *all*, a real live child of God! He was the second humanity (Adam) and showed both parts of humanity, male and female, both the cost and promise of freedom (I Cor. 15:45).²⁰ Dorothy Sayre describes the relation of Jesus and women in saying:

Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized. . . . There is no act, no sermon, no parable in

the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything "funny" about woman's nature.²¹

In searching out how the life-style of this One child of God applies to our own life-style and journey toward freedom, we can know that there are no easy answers. After all, the cross was not an easy road to take toward freedom! Yet the Spirit of Christ does help us in our weakness and can give us "the ability to distinguish between spirits" (*diakrisis*, I Cor. 12:10). With the inspiration of the Spirit we can seek out the signs of the times in a critical manner and find where our calling to action lies.

Ferment of Freedom. One of the places to search is in the women's liberation movement and in other liberation movements. For the presence of the "ferment of freedom" among them certainly puts this question with ever-new urgency. What do real live children of God look like? What does it mean to be human? In spite of the gospel of liberation and the words and actions of Jesus, the church has too long supported the idea that nonwhites, non-Westerners, and non-males are slightly less than human. They contribute little to "real culture" and need to look up to the dominant political and ecclesiastical hierarchies to find out how they ought to act and think.

To free oneself from patriarchalism, colonialism, and imperialism it is necessary to discover that all human beings have a culture. All are capable of thinking about and interpreting their world and shaping their own histories with the tools at their disposal. In describing his work with peasants in Brazil, Freire writes that illiterates needed first to discover that they were *subjects* "in the world and with the world" and not just objects to be manipulated by fate and unseen powers.

*
call to
action

*

From that point of departure, the illiterate would begin to effect a change in his [or her] former attitudes, by discovering himself [or herself] to be a maker of the world of culture, by discovery that he [or she], as well as the literate person, has a creative and re-creative impulse.²²

Too long the myths about *class* have been used as self-fulfilling prophecy. Just because a group of people have a common expectancy of life opportunities represented by their economic capabilities in the labor and commodity market, this is no reason to accept the idea that those with less economic worth or potential in a particular economic system are, therefore, inferior human beings. The proletariat may have "nothing but their children," but the elites of society are also made less human by the structures of domination, exploitation, and dehumanization which they perpetuate.

The same type of myths have been used to enslave millions of people in demonic *caste* systems. These castes operate not only in certain religious traditions such as that of the Hindus in India, but also in modern systems of *racism* and *sexism*. Max Weber tells us that along with class that functions in the economic order, social status is a constantly interlocking factor in the social order of society. When this status or honor is fixed so that certain groups are placed in a closed caste (from which there is no exit), they become outcasts with permanent social inferiority.²³

This is what has happened to Third World people in the United States, who are not just separate ethnic groups, but "inferior human beings" with low status. The same dynamics are operative in relation to women who, by birth, find themselves as a separate and inferior caste in relation to male social norms and privilege. Caste is often even more insidious and dehumanizing than class because it is almost impossible to overcome one's sex or the color of one's skin. The only way to break through such a web of oppression is to insist not only on economic equality but also on full human equality and honor in society.

On every continent, but especially in North America, much has been made of the competition between the liberation movements mainly devoted to the elimination of racism, and those mainly devoted to the elimination of sexism. Two things are obvious about this discussion from the outset. One is, that as long as the most outspoken opponents of sexism represent white, middle-class women, the women who are committed first of all to the freedom of their own people, in whatever country or community, are right to be suspicious about the motives and results of such a movement. In this regard, Valerie Russell writes:

I am not saying that white women do not have a new vision which is non-oppressive, but it must be defined and demonstrated to be believed. Trust must be earned. *How such trust is earned should be a major focus* for any women's group seeking to deal with questions of liberation. . . . In their historical eye, the white woman has been their enemy. It is now necessary for white women to prove that just as they will no longer play the pampered, soft, sex-object role, they will also no longer play the role of being the enemy of their Third World sisters.²⁴

The other clear issue is that *all women* have so much in common, that the best tactic of the preservers of the status quo is to make sure that they convince different groups of women that they have nothing in common. This will prevent the use of their collective power for the elimination of racism, sexism, and classism in the building of a more humane society.

Black women are certainly divided on the issue of their role in the feminist movement. Many want to have nothing to do with this white women's affair. Yet, as seen in the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973, there is a growing awareness of the need for black women to struggle against the "double jeopardy" of their race and sex that places them at the bottom of the economic and social ladder. Black women are becoming aware of the

false myth that they should follow their men and become dependent and supportive. Some perceive it as a black male way of buying into the white male's image of the female role. They are determined to keep and develop their own self-reliance, forged in the fires of slavery and oppression, so that it can be employed on behalf of black liberation and strengthened by solidarity with women of all races and cultures who struggle against oppression.²⁵

Development of critical awareness among the women in the Fourth World regarding the divergence of race, culture, language, ideology, and tactics of groups working at different points to eliminate the web of oppression is essential in the struggle toward liberation. The struggle begins with woman in her own heart, mind, and actions as she learns to be *pro-woman*. But it must stretch around the world to all people (men, women, and children) who are looking for the freedom to shape their own futures and participate in the search for what it means to be children of God. Shirley Chisholm underlines this point in saying:

You must start in your own homes, your own schools and your own churches. . . . I don't want you to go home and talk about integrated schools, churches, or marriages when the kind of integration you are talking about is black and white. I ask you to work for—fight for—the integration of male and female, human and human. Franz Fanon pointed out in *Black Skins—White Masks* that the anti-Semite was eventually the antifeminist. And even further I want to indicate that all discrimination is eventually the same thing—antihumanism. That is my charge to you whether you are male or female.²⁶

Critical Discernment. Women in the church are called to share this critical process of discerning what it means to be human and trying to live out their discoveries of freedom. The ability to discern the signs of the time and thus be able to work toward freedom is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The word that Paul uses here for discernment is *diakrisis* (I Cor. 12: 10).²⁷

The function of *diakrisis* can help women and the church to take a prophetic stance over against society as they seek to discern God's actions and to *criticize* those parts of the world (including themselves) which deny God's plan and purpose of justice, freedom, and peace for humanity. In this way they can join others in helping to shape society and discovering new freedom, rather than being shaped by society and old cultural assumptions that close off the future.

In the past the church has frequently played roles or functions assigned to it by society. The church served the function of *public cult* in the Western Middle Ages, providing the heavenly "connections" for Christendom.²⁸ With the breakdown of Christendom in modern society it has been called to provide a *private cult*, serving the needs of the individual in industrial society in his or her private, religious sphere. In a world more and more becoming "post-religious" and not necessarily searching for its security in the sacred realm, such functions may become less necessary to society. This sets the church free to be itself over against the society, when this is necessary in the service of Christ and God's Mission in the world.

The *diacritical* role of discernment and critique is difficult to everyone, and especially for women who have been enculturated to spend time making people "like them." To begin with, it means having courage to be a *misfit* in society; acting and thinking with those who are groaning for liberation and working to disturb the status quo. The cost of this may mean becoming "marginal persons," those who don't fit with their peers or into accepted norms in either church or society.

Secondly, this type of Christian responsibility and critical awareness about the political and social realities of the world demands both *theological discernment* and a wide variety of *technical know-how*. This of course means that women will have to *do their homework* and be willing to take concrete actions for social change based on their *own* new consciousness of the social and theological issues at stake. For Christian women in this situation "doing theology" is not just an added

luxury after developing expertise in other disciplines. Doing theology is itself an act of freedom! It is a critical means of searching out the right questions about the Bible and ecclesial tradition, about God and faith. Instead of accepting a certain text (*lectio*) delivered from the "fathers," serious questions (*quaestio*) must be raised in order to try to discern what it means to be real live children of God.

In the past, churchwomen's groups and organizations have had to settle for the supportive and listening role in matters of theological and social research and leadership in the church. Now it is time to play the listening role of Mary; listening to *Jesus* and acting out the gospel of freedom, rather than remaining in the church kitchen with Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Where women's groups find that they cannot move away from sewing, bazaars, and occasional Bible study, toward new forms of *diakonia* and serious theological and social reflection, they may no longer be able to serve the cause of human liberation. The frequent result of this passive type of marginal role by such groups is that they fail to attract the very type of serious and committed women who are needed in this struggle. It may be that in such a circumstance new structures and organizations for women need to be set up in which they find ways to support one another in *diakrisis* (critical and prophetic action).

Meeting together as women is not enough. Even mutual consciousness-raising and discussion of problems is not adequate. The liberation process is a continued struggle to act together with others to transform society by any means necessary. In such a risky undertaking of *diakrisis* the constant help of the Holy Spirit is a necessity. But that Spirit will not make the way easy. In the words of the poet Julius Lester, our prayer is not just for a critical consciousness, but also for the constant disturbing power which can cut that consciousness like a *razor*, disturbing us, and forcing us to prophetic action.²⁹ Thus we pray,

O God,
RAZE my consciousness. Amen.

HORIZON OF FREEDOM

If we return once again to Paul's description of the journey toward freedom, we become aware that we live constantly within a horizon of freedom. In Rom. 8:20 he says:

The creation is in the grip of frustration and futility. Not by its own choice. God made it so, and, therefore, there is always hope that one day the universe will be set free from the shackles of mortality and decadence and share the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Hope in God's Future. The horizon of freedom is hope! Hope is the expectation of faith that God's promised future will become a reality.³⁰ This "hope is not the opium of the people, but an impulse to change the world in the perspective of God's promises."³¹

The situation variability of liberation leads to a constant shifting of our horizon of freedom. We might hope for liberation as freedom from outside coercion and causation, or for a spontaneous affirmation of selfhood. At another time our hope might be for freedom as an alternative possibility for change or for freedom of choice and freedom to act on that choice. Yet our human hopes as Christians are always based on the perfect freedom of God. It is God's perfect freedom which is exercised in *being for us*. According to Moltmann, "God is not our utopia, but we are God's utopia. We are hoping because God hopes for us."³² The Christ event initiates our freedom in such a way that we are drawn with all creation into the horizon of God's freedom by participating in the action of God on behalf of human liberation. Rubem Alves describes the horizon of freedom in saying:

The cross, then, which is fundamentally the symbol of the hopelessness and futurelessness that order and religion created, came to be seen as the beginning of a new possibility for history. If God suffers with and for . . . [us, we are] assured that God's personal negation of the negative in history is not a lonely voice. . . . Because . . . [God] suffers with and negates the unfreedom of today, it is possible to hope for a tomorrow in which . . . [we] will be made free.³³

The nature of a horizon is that it always disappears and a new one appears as we move toward it. The horizon of freedom constantly changes and looks different as we journey with others and for others toward God's future. Because of the problems and difficulties and plain mess of the world in which we live, there appears to be no hope. The horizon closes in and there is no vision. Often our best planning and efforts bring little change in the immense problems of our world and the great problems of our lives.

In this case the future which we plan is always a problem. It is the *futurum* which we extrapolate out of the continued groaning of a world in pain.³⁴ The question we ask along with planners and futurists is, "When will justice, freedom, peace and dignity happen *if* they happen at all?" Yet for Christians this is not the last question. There is also always the future (*adventus*) which comes toward us from God as a *promise*. In relation to the *adventus* our question is not, "When will it happen, *if* ever," but, "How can we live *now as if* the horizon of that future has already broken into our lives through the Spirit of Jesus Christ?" The discovery of this new horizon of freedom leads us to actions because God hopes for us, and it is up to us to live *now as if* the "form of this world is passing away" and the new creation is already present in our lives (I Cor. 7:25-31).³⁵

Already on Their Way. The women's liberation movement illustrates some of the fundamental facts of the *already . . . but not yet* character of liberation. By their new thoughts

and actions women are saying that they are *already on their way* toward freedom. They know, however, that they have *not yet arrived* because no one is free until all are free. The horizon changes but does not disappear because a few people gain new privileges and responsibilities.

The stress on sisterhood stands as a constant reminder to women of the continuing responsibility for their other sisters and brothers in the world. Whatever gains women have made, they are only partial unless society and culture is restructured so that others have the same equal access to these changes, be they economic, political, social, or private. Those who have "made it," however they have made it, are coming to see that they have a responsibility to share the task of building new life-styles and a new society with all women and men and not just for themselves. Dana Densmore says to her sisters: "We are all one. All the same influences have acted upon us. If you have somehow escaped the consequences of your conditioning you are lucky, not superior, not different. We are all sisters."³⁶

Another perspective which women's liberation movements help to underline concerning the character of all liberation movements is that *they are not the cause of disruption* in our societies. The many myths that blame women for disrupting families, discrediting motherhood, defeating the "real revolutions" of the radical left, and promoting juvenile delinquency are projections of those who would like to preserve the status quo. Just as blacks did not cause the disruptions flowing from racism in society, women did not cause the disruptions which flow from sexism. They are responding to the results of oppression and dislocation that are already all around us and trying to make a contribution to correcting the problems.

Any move to change things is bound to cause further disruption with increased oppressive measures from the status quo and increased rage from those who cry out for change. Yet the plain fact of the matter is that nearly every society

in the world has already been altered by the technological revolution. Not only do the rich and powerful get more rich and powerful, and the poor and oppressed get more poor and oppressed, but also the fundamental social institutions of society are altered so that many customs and traditions are unable to hold the pieces together.

As a result of the technological revolution many family patterns are no longer helpful to husband, wife, and children. The basic function that women performed in traditional societies was the bearing and raising of children who could ensure the continued existence of the tribe, nation, or race. Now the continued existence of the human race depends on women and men refusing to have children in order to slow down the population explosion. The modern development of small and mobile nuclear families was necessary to industrial production, and now, in postindustrial societies, people discover that such work and life patterns are not able to bear the strains of isolation and alienation.

Some women and men are willing to face up to this and try to do something about it, beginning with their own patterns of family life. This causes tension, but it is certainly not the root cause of disruption. New life-styles of partnership are badly needed in society, for the old patterns of domination are not working even as well as they might have in a time when domination and submission was an accepted way of life between men and women, race and race, class and class, nation and nation.

Liberation is a long journey. It is a never-ending struggle by people to find out who they are and what they must become. For women and Third World people it is a journey that may have to go on for generations. But *liberation is not a passing fad*. The horizon of freedom will continue to beckon long after the current interest in the liberation movements of the twentieth century and the writing of liberation theology fades into history. As long as people are oppressed there will be a groaning for freedom, whether in actions of

rebellion or in actions to build a new future of justice for all.

It is the calling of men and women to stay on that road toward freedom and to keep the freedom rumor going; to live now *as if* the world is already on its way. God intends it to be so, and it is possible to begin acting out that intention here and now. This is not always a comforting journey, but the disturbance of the Spirit is already present and it cannot be ignored. At the Grailville Conference of Women Exploring Theology in 1972 a banner was displayed on which a beautiful butterfly was portrayed, stretching its wings in preparation for flight.³⁷ Around it lay the remnants of its old cocoon. And splashed across the banner were the words, "You can fly, but that cocoon has got to go!"

Anticipating God's Future. For women in the church, freedom began long ago and it is time to act now, as if they are free! They are called to live now within the horizon of the New Age. The expression Paul uses to introduce this life of "provisional freedom" is *hōs mē* ("as if not"). They are to live *as if not*; as if the facts of the situation are only provisional because of the horizon of freedom. The prolepsis or anticipation of the new world is breaking in and all other aspects of life cannot be taken with utter seriousness. The gift of God's liberation in Jesus Christ is the only really serious matter.

I mean, brothers and sisters, that the appointed time has grown very short; from now on let those who have wives live as if they had none, and those who mourn as if they were not mourning, and those who are rejoicing as if they were not rejoicing. . . . (I Cor. 7:29-30.)

Paul was a man with a commission. His mission was God's Mission: To carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. Therefore, his advice always reflected a concern for spreading the gospel. If a particular action of men or women was discrediting the gospel in the eyes of a community, his first concern was to change the practice so that the real offense of the

gospel could be heard. Everything else was *hōs mē*; not of ultimate seriousness. What was serious was the horizon of freedom which was breaking in; the New Age which was about to fulfill the first signs that "the universe will be set free."

It is this proleptic emphasis of Paul on the anticipation of God's future which gives a clue to the *already . . . but not yet* nature of the struggle for freedom. The Greek word *prolēpsis* means "anticipation."³⁸ Proleptic actions can anticipate the situation for which they work by living *as if* the situation, at least in part, has already arrived. The first dictionary definition of *prolepsis* is that of a chronological mistake; a dating of an event before it actually happened. It is the opposite of *anachronism*, which is a chronological mistake that dates an event after it actually happened. For a long time the church has often appeared anachronistic. Today the church is called to be a chronological mistake, but not a backward mistake. And Christians are called to make *proleptic mistakes* which establish signs of hope, horizons of the future, in the midst of the present.

There is no one way to create such signs, but it depends on where one lives, who one is, the need at hand, and the strategies available. Living *hōs mē* is more of an attitude toward life itself than a particular set of actions. It is a calling to look critically at what is going on in the world, to see the problems and then to act in such a way that the problem itself is in some way contradicted and people begin to be transformed. Many protests and demonstrations are of this nature. They press for concrete political changes, but at the same time they say that the problem has already begun to change because "*we* are changing." The act of breaking bread together as a community which crosses racial, sexual, class, and national lines is also a *proleptic* action. It not only says, "The barriers are already broken" but it also shows "forth the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26).

A woman who is an ordained minister also becomes a sign

of the longed-for future of liberation and equality. At the same time her action is a reminder that much of the male clerical mystique is only a provisional arrangement to be taken *hōs mē*. Her presence in the pulpit or at the Holy Table helps to symbolize the presence of a coming God who is beyond all distinctions of male and female. The singing of a hymn in which a mixture of female and male pronouns are used to speak of God and the human beings present may have the same proleptic effect. The changing of language has the power to change the way people think about and name the world, as well as being a way of demonstrating in fact that "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

People can become signs in small or large ways by contradicting injustice, promoting peace, and standing in solidarity with the poor. By living out new life-styles of partnership among women and men in home, society, and church they can become proleptic signs. By working in critical and concrete ways along with those who are oppressed in other nations as well as their own, they can begin to build world solidarity now. They are already free. In the light of the gospel all other arrangements are provisional. Therefore they can act freely and responsibly together for others now. This is the *horizon of freedom*—hope in the future of God which is already now breaking into our midst. Our mandate is to live out that hope so that our actions become a prolepsis of freedom so "that the closed present is broken open in a new way."³⁹

In speaking about women and freedom I have been trying to describe what it might mean to *journey on the road toward freedom* with others, for others toward God's future. The clues I have given are few, because ultimately each person and community must live out their own story of the search for human liberation. Perhaps the clues I have suggested will be helpful to women and also to men in what finally becomes a journey in partnership toward human liberation. The universal *groaning for freedom* points toward

suffering and service as *diakonia* with others. The *discovery of freedom* can mean a continuing and *diacritical* search for how to be human beings; real live children of God. The *horizon of freedom* leads to hope against hope in God's promise for those who seek to add their own limited efforts to the business of prolepsis; anticipating the future in the present so that they can begin to know how it feels to be free.

"I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," by Billy Taylor, was first sung as a hymn by members of the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York City where I was working as a pastor. In using it in their service of worship, however, they added a last stanza:

I'm glad I know how it does feel to be free
 I'm glad I can break all these chains holding me
 I'm glad I can say all the things I should say,
 Say 'em loud, say 'em clear, for the whole world to hear!

Why did they do this? Was the tension between the *already . . . but not yet* overcome? Of course not. In that poverty area, racism, prejudice, neglect took their daily toll of broken lives. Residents continued to be dehumanized by the welfare program of assistance. Bad schools, corrupt landlords, police brutality, narcotics addiction, and inadequate health care were grim and present facts. Yet the people of that congregation wanted to express a different reality. They wanted to sing about God's Spirit pulling them and their neighbors into a new future. Together they had found the strength to hope, and the determination to shape their future. They were free because they were beginning to create "zones of liberation" right there in East Harlem as they joined one another to realize God's future for humanity, a future where men and women can be free at last.

Together we are already on that same road toward freedom; caught in the process of liberation with only an enticing *apéritif* of the Spirit. There are many different routes toward freedom and I cannot give you, or even myself, a map. All I

can do is point to Paul's haunting description of a solidarity of groaning for freedom among all our brothers and sisters of the world, and invite you who decide to be free to join in this universal symphony of groaning. In this way we can all *play our part!*

2: HUMAN LIBERATION AND THEOLOGY

Like Third World liberation theology, feminist theology is written out of an experience of oppression. It is an attempt to interpret the search for salvation as a journey toward freedom. There are as many liberation theologies as there are people committed to search for the meaning of human liberation in today's world. Wherever the rising consciousness of groups and individuals leads them to critical awareness of the contradictions in society and to actions toward change, the need arises to interpret their new understanding and actions. This challenge emerges out of particular circumstances and reflects a variety of traditions.

Yet, at the same time, for Christians there is a common motif in liberation theology. The action-reflection (praxis) arises out of a commitment to Jesus Christ and a desire to understand the meaning of the good news in the light of the changing world. The praxis of liberation is carried forward in a continuing dialectic of divine-human action. God's actions on behalf of humankind are the basis of reflection and insight in relation to the actions of communities on behalf of others.

There is always a tension between Christian tradition and the new experience gained by advocates of liberation in a specific situation of oppression. This tension can be the creative force of theology in which actions and experience are constantly viewed in the wider horizon of God's concern for all humankind. Interpretations of the gospel are tested by

the experience of Christian communities working with others in society. The actions of the communities are also tested by the Biblical witness to the meaning and purpose of human liberation as part of God's plan for all of the groaning creation.

There is also another tension which comes from the fact that human liberation takes on meaning in particular contexts. Liberation is always experienced concretely, as individuals and groups discover ways in which they have found new "room to breathe" in society. Therefore, the various visions of the meaning of humanization and liberation reflect their own situation. Sometimes that situation clearly places one type of liberation theology at odds with another. For instance, black theology may focus on the black experience of oppression to the exclusion of the oppression of women. Feminist theology may have a focus that is quite the reverse. This tension, however, can also be creative, because it leads each group to clarify its position, and provides a variety of perspectives that can illuminate our understanding of human liberation.

The purpose of this chapter is not to assert that all people writing liberation theology say the same thing, but that the dialogue between those concerned with the praxis of freedom is an important task. In spite of much disagreement, many of the goals are held in common and need to be worked on in mutual respect and solidarity. In addition, whatever these theologies may have to say, they make a contribution to the total theological enterprise of using our minds to reflect on the meaning of God's actions in the world. While recognizing that at every point differences can be identified, it is still a significant task to reflect on common methodology, common perspectives, and common themes which are shared by many liberation theologies. These motifs can then be explored from the feminist perspective, as we join together in the exciting and challenging search for more truly human community in a Christian context.

praxis of freedom

COMMON METHODOLOGY

Task approach purpose

Liberation theologies share certain methodological ingredients of task, approach, and purpose that are important to women and men in their theological reflection. Of course, there is *no one style* of theology. Each person is free to choose the particular style that develops out of tradition, education, and life experience. The styles vary according to the premises, perspectives on reality, and types of philosophy. In spite of these differences there is a growing consensus among liberation theologians in describing their task. What they are about is doing *theo-logy*: Using their *logos* (their mind) in the perspective of God, as God is known in and through the Word in the world. Thus Gustavo Gutiérrez tells us that "theology is critical reflection—in the light of the Word accepted in faith—on historical praxis and therefore on the presence of Christians in the world."¹

Genitive Theologies. This task is sometimes rather difficult to establish in liberation theologies because they have a tendency to be what are sometimes called genitive theologies: theologies *of* women, *of* blacks, *of* Latin Americans, etc.² When we speak of feminist theology, we sometimes think that it is not only *by* women but also *about* women.

Strictly speaking, feminist theology could be written *by* men. There are many men who are also actively engaged in trying to counter the prevailing oppressive situation in which both men and women are trapped. They too are advocating the equality and partnership of both sexes, and searching for new life-styles and structures in church and society.³ However, it takes a brave man to advocate such theology in the face of the social scorn of those who would label him as "feminine," and the ideological scorn of those who declare that liberation theology, at least initially, must be written from the point of view of those who have experienced a

concrete situation of social oppression.

Again, strictly speaking, feminist theology is *not* about women. It is about God. It is not a form of "ego-logy" in which women just think about themselves. When women do it, they speak of feminist theology in order to express the fact that the experience from which they speak and the world out of which they perceive God's words and actions and join in those actions is that of women seeking human equality. Another way of expressing this is to say that the *ecology of their theology* is that of a woman living in a particular time and place.⁴

The importance of women doing theology is the same as that of any other group around the world. They make a contribution to the *unfinished dimension* of theology. Women want to add to the understanding of the Christian faith, not to replace the other insights that have been contributed in the past. This is very important to a Christian church that has been dominated for so long by white, Western, male perspectives on God. Women add their small piece of experience about the way God is known to them to all the other pieces, so that theology becomes more wholistic and comprehensive.

Inductive Approach. In general, women, along with other liberation theologians, stress an inductive rather than a deductive approach. In the past much theology was done by deducing conclusions from first principles established out of Christian tradition and philosophy. Today many people find it more helpful to do theology by an inductive method—drawing out the material for reflection from their life experience as it relates to the gospel message. Here stress is placed on the *situation-variable* nature of the gospel. The gospel is good news to people only when it speaks concretely to their particular needs of liberation. For instance, it is no help to tell the blind woman that she can walk. Good news for the blind must deal with changing the oppressed situation of blindness.

For this reason liberation theologies recognize that persons and societies find themselves in different situations of oppression, and they try to address themselves to concrete experiences that can illuminate their own experience and can be shared with others. They try to express the gospel in the light of the experience of oppression out of which they are written, whether that be racial or sexual, social or economic, psychological or physical. Such a method draws upon the contributions of the many disciplines that help to illuminate the human condition and not just on a particular theological tradition. This point of view is reflected in Rosemary Ruether's *Liberation Theology* when she writes:

... a fuller integration of the sciences necessary for the fullest reflection on the question of human liberation today cannot be done by a single scholar. It waits upon a multi-disciplinary teamwork that can integrate the many sources of data and types of reflection and symbolization around the core of theological reflection. Only with such a multi-disciplinary integration of human sciences can we begin to speak of the basis of a theology of liberation adequate to the present human situation.⁵

This inductive approach is *experimental in nature*. It is a process of seeking out the right questions to ask and trying out different hypotheses that arise. It becomes a theology of constantly revised questions and tentative observations about a changing world, rather than the type of theology described by Thomas Aquinas as a "science of conclusions."⁶ In trying to develop new models for thinking about God in a Christian context, women discover a vast quantity of questions addressed to Biblical and church tradition and to the concepts of creation, redemption, sin, salvation, and incarnation. The experimental nature of this inductive theology leaves no doctrine unchallenged in the search for a faith that can shape life amid rapid, and sometimes chaotic, change. "These doctrines are no longer taken so much as answers

than as ways of formulating the questions."⁷

Such an experimental or inductive approach is very much dependent on the *corporate support* of the community of faith and action out of which it grows. Just as Latin-American liberation theology grows out of the small struggling communities working with others to face up to their revolutionary situation, so black theology grows out of the American black community and black churches. As Rubem Alves, a Brazilian theologian, says, "The seed of the future . . . [is the] community of hope."⁸ This approach is also important for the corporate style of the women's movement. Not only is much of the work of women done on a multidisciplinary basis, but also in small communities who experiment together in actions and reflection both in groups and through the constant exchange of materials and ideas.

Theology as Praxis. This communal search is doubly important because liberation theology is intended to be put into practice by those who join in the search. The purpose of this type of theology is *praxis*, action that is concurrent with reflection or analysis and leads to new questions, actions, and reflections.⁹ In this format theology flows out of and into action. It is a tool for doing something that can become a catalyst for change among those who believe in the Biblical promises for the oppressed. The direction of thought flows, not only "downward" from the "theological experts" but also upward and outward out of the collective experience of action and ministry.

For this reason liberation theology is not usually *systematic theology*. The purpose of doing it is not to place all the discoveries or conclusions into one overarching system, but rather to apply the discoveries to a new way of action to bring about change in society. Therefore, when things become difficult in a particular situation, or when there seems to be little immediate hope for change, people have a tendency to say: "Liberation theology is finished. It didn't work." Yet as

long as the Bible speaks of God as the Liberator of the oppressed, and as long as the situations of oppression continue to exist, there will be those who seek ways to express their faith and confidence in God through whatever means are open to them.¹⁰

This form of *practical theology* brings action and reflection together. As Bonhoeffer is reported to have said, "We shall not know what we will not do." Certainly the thinking must be systematic in that it tries to be logical, consistent, and documented, but the purpose of the thinking and its verification is found in praxis (action and reflection), and not in the writing of fat volumes of systematic theology. Ethics and application are not simply the ways of relating thought to social situations, because the thought itself is denied if it does not arise in the context of action. Gutiérrez underlines this point in saying, "All the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation, are not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited classes."¹¹

Whatever the movement, be it a Third World or Fourth World, if its focus is on human liberation, its inductive methodology will be one of thinking about God in the light of concrete oppressive experiences in order to find ways to express the purpose and plan of God for creation in the building of a more humane society.

COMMON PERSPECTIVES

In addition to a common inductive and experimental methodology, liberation theologies also share at least three common perspectives in reflection on the experience of God in the world.

Biblical Promise. The first perspective is that the Biblical promises of liberation are an important part of theological reflection. Two major motifs of the Bible are those of *liberation* and *universality*.¹² God is portrayed in both the Old and

New Testaments as the Liberator, the one who sets people free. God is not just the liberator of one small nation or group, but of all of humankind. This theme of liberation is, of course, not the only theme, but it is an important part of the Biblical understanding of God's *oikonomia* or action for the world in the history of salvation. Joseph Comblin writes:

The theologians of liberation theology do not say that the Bible teaches a doctrine of liberation for all men [and women] of every age, of all time, and all nations. But they are convinced that in the world we have today the Bible's precept of charity can be interpreted only through a theology of liberation. Any other interpretation would fall short of the demands of charity as it is presented in the Bible. Those theologians aren't in the slightest claiming that their reading of the Bible is valid for all times. But they say it is the right one for the society we live in today—and that is all that matters.¹³

God's *oikonomia* or plan for the world provides an eschatological perspective concerning the future of humanity. Because Christians see themselves as part of "God's utopia" they participate in the work of liberation. Paul points out in I Cor. 9:17 that they are "entrusted with a commission (*oikonomia*)." Participation in God's work is the way in which they express hope and confidence in God's intention of liberation and salvation for the whole inhabited world (*oikoumenē*). No longer are lines drawn between Christian and non-Christian, or between one confession and another. Instead, Christians join with all those involved in the revolution of freedom, justice, and peace. As Moltmann writes, "It is time now for all the different freedom movements to cooperate in a brotherly [and sisterly] way, for the misery of humankind has not become less urgent."¹⁴

Liberation theology places stress on the fact that the Gospels tell of the good news of liberation. Christ has set the captives free and, therefore, there is future and hope. This hope stems, not just from human actions and strategies that

are often weak and misguided, but from God's promise for all humanity. Ernst Käsemann says:

I see the whole of the New Testament as involving the cause of Christian freedom, and I have done my best to show that the cause is developed in much diversity, because it exists only in terms of practical mundane affairs, in relation to Christian selflessness, stupidity, misrepresentation and denial, and changes its spearhead from time to time.¹⁵

In the women's liberation movement there has been a lot of rejection of the Bible as the basis for theology because of the patriarchal, cultural attitudes that it reveals.¹⁶ Yet those who would do Christian theology cannot abandon the story of Jesus of Nazareth. They find instead that they must use the best tools of scholarship to wrestle with the texts, and to find how liberation and universality apply to their own experience of longing and groaning for freedom.¹⁷

World as History. The second perspective is that of the world as history. Most liberation theologies are written from the modern point of view that both humanity and the world are to be understood as historical, as both changing and changeable.¹⁸ The Bible views the world as a series of meaningful events that are moving toward the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose of salvation.¹⁹ In the same way, modern thinkers view the world as events that are subject to human intervention, planning, and change. Each human being is made up of her or his individual history, and society is formed out of collective events or histories.

To view the world as history is to think of it not just as a record of past events but also as a process of change from past, to present, to future. This is a process that takes on meaning through the interpretation of events that shape our future.²⁰ The future that evolves out of the past (*futurum*) is placed at the disposal of women and men who are aware of their own historical possibility and seek out political, eco-

nomic, and social ways or planning for tomorrow. For Christians there is also a vision of a future that comes toward us (*adventus*) and that God places at our disposal.²¹ Through *hoping* in the coming of God's future they find new courage and strength to enter into the difficult process of *planning* and acting on behalf of human liberation.

For Christian women the planning of the future as *futurum* must be based on the "rewriting of history" to include "herstory" in the total picture of the way history has evolved. Out of the strength gained from past accomplishments and the warnings of past defeats comes a new energy to be put to use in changing the social realities of oppression that they face. At the same time, "the horizon of hope" in God's coming future (*adventus*) prevents discouragement and disillusionment when the struggle for liberation is frustrated by powerful, androcentric social attitudes. They enter into the struggle without any guarantee of success, knowing that not only their sisters and brothers but they themselves will often stand in the way of the development of a humane society of partnership. Women enter the struggle because they hope in God's promise of liberation and because according to Dorothee Sölle they are driven by the knowledge that the "Gospel's business is the liberation of human beings. . . . Having faith, we put our wager on the liberation of all people."²² They continue the struggle because to be human is to take part in this historical process or *historicity* and to have an opportunity of transforming the world and shaping the future.²³

To view the world as history is to become involved in the development of ideologies or sets of ideas that can be used to change and shape this reality. Christians, along with others, make use of these interpretations of reality and history in order to participate in "the revolutions of freedom." Christian women make use of the ideology of women's liberation. Black liberation theology owes much of its perspective on reality to the ideology of the black liberation movement.

Many Latin Americans look to some socialist ideology to provide helpful conceptual tools for change.²⁴

The difficulty of this dangerous but important "mix" between faith and ideology is that all ideologies are only partial and, therefore, distorted descriptions of social reality. Yet ideologies gain their power to change the actions and thoughts of human beings just because of their intention to change the situation in line with that one set of ideas.²⁵ For Christians all ideologies must be subject to constant critique in the light of the gospel. In fact, they do not know exactly what the future will be like. Neither God nor ideologies provide them with a "blueprint." God's promise leads to a confidence that the future is open, but not to an exact knowledge of how liberation will be accomplished or what it will look like.

Because ideologies are helpful in dealing with and shaping the *futurum*, they play an important part in liberation movements. Yet they are always partial in the light of faith in God's coming *adventus* and they present a danger for those who must live with "humble agnosticism" about the future. Women, like other people, are often swept up in the currents of ideology, yet as Christians they remain an undependable part of liberation movements, because they must live by the horizon of the *adventus* and not by a blind commitment to any ideology.²⁶

Liberation theologies view the world as history and make use of ideologies because their purpose is to participate with God in changing the world to advocate the right of oppressed people to share in building their own "house of freedom." The impact of this common perspective can be seen clearly in the actions of Christian women both in the church and in society. For instance, the Women's Caucus at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches which was held at Detroit in 1969 presented a statement to the Assembly which reflects this point of view.

Women's oppression and women's liberation is a basic part of the struggle of blacks, browns, youth, and others. We will not be able to create a new church and a new society until and unless women are full participants. We intend to be full participants. . . .

So women are rising; that is our first point. We are rising, black and white, red and brown, to demand change, to demand humanity for ourselves as well as others. . . .

Secondly, we wish to present some facts which illustrate the situation of women. Nowhere is the situation of women better illustrated than in our male-dominated and male-oriented churches.²⁷

Salvation as a Social Event. The third shared perspective of liberation theologies is that of salvation as a social event. In Christian theology today there is a new awareness of human beings in their body, mind, and spirit and in their social relationships with others.²⁸ This has led to a broadening of the understanding of individual salvation in the afterlife to include the beginnings of salvation in the lives of men and women in society. Often the Old Testament concept of salvation as *shalom* or wholeness and total social well-being in community with others is stressed.²⁹

Emphasis is placed upon the longed-for eternal life as a quality of existence in the *here and now*. It is expressed through the actions of sharing God's gift of liberation and blessing with all people. In a historical view of the world, salvation is not an escape from fated nature, but rather the power and possibility of transforming the world, restoring creation, and seeking to overcome suffering. This stress is especially clear among those searching for ways of expressing the gospel message as good news for the oppressed, the hungry, the alienated of our own sorry world. In liberation theology salvation is understood as good news because it includes concrete social liberation in oppressive situations. James Cone states:

Because God's act for . . . [humanity] involves . . . [human] liberation from bondage, . . . [human] response to God's grace of liberation is an act for . . . brothers and sisters who are oppressed. There can be no reconciliation with God unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given to the poor.³⁰

In this perspective sin also takes on a different meaning. Sin as the opposite of liberation is seen as *oppression*, a situation in which there is no community, no room to live as a whole human being. Dorothee Sölle reminds us that sin cannot be understood only as a private matter. "Sin to us is eminently a political, a social term."³¹ It includes the sins of our own people, race, and class in which we participate. Therefore, we are faced with responsibility not only for admitting our collaboration in such social sin, but also for working to change the social structures that bring it about. Ruether describes this responsibility in saying:

We need to build a new cooperative social order out beyond the principles of hierarchy, rule and competitiveness. Starting in the grass-roots local units of human society where psycho-social polarization first began, we must create a living pattern of mutuality between men and women, between parents and children, among people in their social, economic and political relationships and, finally, between humankind and the organic harmonies of nature.³²

There are probably other perspectives shared by many women and other people working out liberation theologies in an experimental way, but at least these three (Biblical promises of liberation; world as history; salvation as a social event) are important to their praxis. Feminist theology is not alone in bringing these perspectives to bear in the dialogue between faith and the world, but it has a part to play in contributing to the ongoing development of a more complete theology.

COMMON THEMES

Liberation theologies arise out of concrete circumstances in every part of the globe. These circumstances give rise to a wide variety of "accents" and themes. Yet some common themes, along with common methodology and common perspectives, can be identified that are also important in feminist theology.

Humanization. One theme of the gospel of liberation, which emerges as a matter for constant action-reflection, is that of humanization. In situations of broken community, of oppression, of defuturized minorities and majorities there is a constant longing to be a whole human being. In society people are so often treated as *things* that they become pawns of social fate, unable to exercise their human ability to shape their own world in community with others. These people express the longing and alienation both destructively and constructively as they search for ways to change their condition, or for ways to escape out of this world. In their hearts and communities they really do wish they knew "how it would feel to be free!"

There is no one definition of what it means to be human. Each culture or subculture, each ideology, each religion explains the reality of human nature in its own way. One person's freedom or dignity may not be the same as another's. In Maoist China people work to create a new social human being. Third World groups in the United States are creating a new understanding of human dignity and worth by seeking the heritage of their past. Psychologists and social scientists present varying and conflicting views of human nature. Women search for a way to combine their biological and cultural identity as women with an affirmation of full partnership in humanity. In spite of the variety of understandings, the social definition of human worth and dignity is of

crucial importance for every person seeking wholeness and meaning in life.

Although there is no one definition of what it means to be human, it seems clear that some of the key factors are to be discovered in the area of human relationships of love, freedom, and respect. Human beings need *support communities* in order to find out who they are. The task of finding who they are can only be done by themselves. They are the ones who must build their own house of freedom. Yet at the same time they can only find their own sense of being and worth in community with others. Human beings need some *possibility of participation* in understanding and shaping the world in which they live. They are "historificators," those who become themselves in building their own individual and collective history and world. Human beings need to be *accepted as subjects* and not as things or objects of someone else's manipulation. They are not simply functions or roles in society and organizations.

For this reason the writers of the Vatican II "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*) relate their concern for equality and reverence for the human person to the search for social justice.

. . . with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized by men.³³

Biblical anthropology seems to indicate that a human being is to be understood as a subject of God's love and concern and, therefore, as a responsible subject of her or his own

individual and collective actions. Just as God is known through actions in history, so women and men are known and understood by their activity in creating their world and their history.³⁴ As responsible persons they are known through what they do and how they think and act. If this is so, then there are many ways of being human, for people are human in relation to history and the world in which they live and with which they interact.

One of the struggles of women and Third World peoples is to demand freedom to be human in just this sense. They are not interested in being defined simply in terms of categories of race or sex. These categories have been used against them in a racist and sexist world that tends to perpetuate the myth that white, Western males are more fully human. One seldom hears references to a "white engineer" or a "male minister." Yet one does hear statements about a "black engineer" or a "woman minister." Whatever people do, it is not necessary to label it with biological categories if they are all equally members of the human race.

For Christians the most important image of humanity is Jesus Christ who was incarnate in human flesh so that we might know God's intention for humanity. In Christ we see a human being able to relate to people in love, regardless of how society has defined their being or status. In Christ we also see an integration of word and deed so that love, righteousness, and obedience were lived as well as spoken.³⁵ It is this lived relationship that helps to inspire Christian men and women to join others in integrating their words and deeds of love and liberation.

In liberation theologies we see the attempt to follow the injunction of Jesus to "continue in my word . . . and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). In the integration of thought and action there is a constant attempt to find out more fully the nature of the incarnation and of true humanity. Gutiérrez writes:

It is important to keep in mind that beyond—or rather, through—the struggle against misery, injustice, and exploitation the goal is the *creation of a new man* [and woman]. . . . This aspiration to create a new . . . [human] is the deepest motivation in the struggle which many have undertaken in Latin America.³⁶

Conscientization. Another important theme, which emerges out of the analysis of the world as history, is that of conscientization. If human beings have responsibility for shaping their own individual and social history, then they need a process of coming to self-awareness that helps them to learn their own potential for action in shaping the world. This process of coming to new consciousness and new ability to take action has become popularly known as *conscientization*. The word is current in Latin-American theology and has been popularized in Brazil and other countries by the writings of such people as Helder Camara, Paulo Freire, and Gustavo Gutiérrez.

According to Freire, conscientization is an *ongoing process* of “learning to perceive social, economic and political contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”³⁷ It is not an educational methodology or technique, for the way to go about doing this might be quite different among Brazilian peasants, Hong Kong city dwellers, or middle-class women. Rather it is a description of the importance of coming to awareness about the particular world in which people dwell in order to contradict the dehumanizing elements in that world. Nor is conscientization just a psychological technique for helping people “feel better.” Its built-in purpose is collective social involvement, leading to personal and social change.

With the worldwide expansion of technology, communications, and transportation there is a “revolution of rising consciousness,” not only among the “consciousness-raising” groups of women, but also in every corner of the globe.

Everywhere people look to their religious or cultural heritage to help them express the convictions that *they are somebody* and that they have a share in the world. This process can easily lead to disillusionment and bitterness or become frozen into another type of bureaucratic reform. Yet at the same time, when it is a continuing process of new actions (however small) and new reflections and learning, it expresses a way in which people can participate in developing their own future as *futurum*. By reflecting on and working in this process of conscientization, liberation theologies can aid oppressed peoples to join in the affirmative chant used in black liberation rallies in the United States: “I am Somebody. . . . I am Somebody. . . . I am Somebody!”

Dialogue and Community. The third theme, which emerges out of search for social salvation and liberation, is that of dialogue and community-building. Liberation theologies do not spend all their time talking about the oppressors and oppressed as though liberation is a simple process of identifying a common enemy and reversing the roles. Ruether emphasizes this in saying: “What this means is that one cannot dehumanize the oppressors without ultimately dehumanizing oneself, and aborting the possibilities of the liberation movement into an exchange of roles of oppressor and oppressed.”³⁸

Liberation theologies of all types are aware that sin, produced by social contradictions in church and society, results in new barriers of mistrust and polarization between individuals and groups. In response to this, many people are searching for new ways of dialogue among groups of Christians and non-Christians, as well as groups in the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Worlds.³⁹ Such dialogue can be based only on mutual trust and the devising of shared tasks and not just on “monologues” about doctrines, ideologies, and dominance. This type of dialogue is well described by Paulo Freire as an encounter between people, mediated by the world in

order to name and transform the world.⁴⁰

Dialogue or the building of new human community calls for overcoming *vertical violence* between oppressors and oppressed: men and women; rich and poor; white and black; ministers and laity. The structures that cause sexism, classism, racism, and clericalism are violent by their very nature, and they evoke counterviolence unless there is a new way to work together for change.

Oppressed groups are not in a position to dialogue with the oppressor groups because the process of dialogue only functions where there is a situation of equality and trust. "If you want to talk with me, take your foot off of my neck!" First, the oppressed groups must develop their own power base of mutual support, new identity, and new possibility for collective action. They must search together for their own liberation according to their own agenda, because liberation is not a commodity to be given away. It is a process of new awareness and action that grows out of new personal and collective consciousness.

For this reason, dialogue depends on the overcoming of the *horizontal violence* used by oppressed groups to express their own frustrations and their low opinion of themselves and of one another by putting each other down and selling out to the image of their inferiority projected on them by the existing status quo of society.⁴¹ This often happens in developing countries where "new elites" emulate the colonialists in despising and oppressing their own people. It happens among American blacks who turn their rage on one another in competing for the crumbs left over from white consumption or in turning their internal rage into destruction of their own ghetto community. It happens among women who defeat one another and mistrust each other rather than learning to be *pro-woman* so that they can become *pro-human*. In the case of women's liberation it is well known that women are often their own worst enemies as outspoken supporters of the status quo. Mary Daly writes: "The new con-

sciousness implied in sisterhood requires an ejection by women of the images internalized in patriarchal society which limit their aspirations and turn them against themselves and each other."⁴²

As oppressed groups begin to develop their own identity and power in overcoming horizontal violence they know that eventually the structures of society and church that result in vertical violence have to be changed. Only in this way can a new form of human life be born in which both the oppressor and the oppressed are liberated from the former structures that have polarized and dehumanized both groups. Liberation theology seeks to deal not only with the fact of social, political, and economic barriers but also with the reality of the ultimate intention of God that all people be reconciled with one another.⁴³

Women and men, black and white, poor and rich have to move into a new relationship with each other in which oppressor groups are not only advocates of the oppressed but also willing to come to a new understanding of how their access to power perpetuates the old social contradictions. Out of the self-liberation of oppressed groups can grow a possibility of shared world and tasks and new forms of dialogue. Dialogue becomes possible when members of both groups begin to see a new shared task in which they have some form of equality in working together. Around a specific action in changing a particular social structure or custom it is possible to dialogue—but only if the oppressor groups see that the way to accomplish change is to respond to the leadership and initiative of the oppressed and to work together in transforming the world.

A new position of consciousness, confidence, and leadership can give women and Third World people an opportunity to dialogue in a relationship of equality and growing trust. Such a situation is particularly important for women and men because women live daily with their oppressors. Women live with men, work with men and are men's moth-

ers. They have to take initiative in new forms of partnership and dialogue if they are going to help men change the social structures and customs that are often so dehumanizing.

Contrary to popular myth, women who advocate women's liberation are frequently happily married mothers who, nevertheless, are aware of the deep pain which comes into the relationships of family and work when there is no communication or partnership. Together with each other and also with their husbands, friends, and employers, their goal is first to become feminists themselves, second to help men become feminists; and last to carry on genuine dialogue so that the world will be transformed to the point where no feminists (male or female) are needed because there *is* social, economic, and political equality of the sexes who become equally human.

Liberation theologies, including feminist theologies, are particularly important to the life and health of the church. Here, sexism, racism, and classism have been legitimized by hierarchical ecclesiastical structures as well as by doctrinal teachings. In such a situation there is little hope for dialogue, let alone for community, until the structures of oppression are confronted and transformed into a situation of true partnership. The church seems to be one of the last institutions in society to hear and respond to its own Gospel mandate for living in a New Age "to preach good news to the poor . . . proclaim release to the captives . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Women form the vast majority of those who find themselves oppressed in Christian communities. Yet hope for change and renewal of the church for the world can come only as new forms of human community, new life-styles are developed which eliminate domination and submission and express cooperation. As this begins to happen, women will be set free to use their God-given gifts in the service of ministry for others.

In the Christian perspective, liberation theologies lift up

common methodologies, perspectives, and themes that can help women and men on all six continents to develop a more complete theology. Certainly these approaches are not the only ones, yet they can make a contribution to the doing of theology as a way of acting and reflecting on what it means to be a Christian and a human being in concrete social situations.

Their themes arise, along with others, out of a deep human longing to be free from oppression. They are not new, for they find many echoes in the Biblical story of a creation and a people groaning for liberation. In another age we might have talked more about salvation instead of the process of *conscientization* and conversion; of incarnation instead of the search for *humanization*; or of communion instead of *dialogue and community*. Now we must talk of our common faith and our common world in whatever way that illuminates our common task together as women and men in a Christian context.