

THE MAN OF WAR AND THE SUFFERING SERVANT THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION¹

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The theology of revolution in the west, the theology of liberation in the third world and among groups such as blacks in America who can identify with the third world,² are responses to what are seen as the facts of human life as it has to be lived today by peoples for whom oppression, injustice, deprivation, the absence of fundamental human rights, are basic facts of experience. For these victims of the constitutional violence of their leaders or of the west, such are the realities which make life (such as it is) what it is. If their situation is to alter this will require political changes of a revolutionary kind.

The question is, if this is how life is in the world for my neighbour, what does Christianity, what does being a Christian mean? What perspective does the Bible bring to this situation? How are we to go about 'Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation'?³

In this paper I want to look at how some Latin American theologians, in particular, have used the exodus story (Exodus 1–15) to throw light on their peoples' need of

¹ Tyndale Old Testament Lecture delivered at The Hayes, Swanwick, 2nd January 1976. Biblical references are to EVV versification; translations, where not otherwise attributed, are my own. *RBa* refers to *Revista Bíblica* (Buenos Aires); *EFMSB* to the *Evangelical Fellowship for Missionary Studies Bulletin* (London); *IRM* to *International Review of Mission* (Geneva).

² Notably J. H. Cone *A Black Theology of Liberation* Lippincott, Philadelphia (1970).

³ The original title (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975) of José Míguez Bonino's book referred to below.

'liberation'.⁴ The main works I shall be referring to are *A Theology of Liberation* by the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez⁵, the first of these Latin American works to be published in England; the Mexican José Porfirio Miranda's *Marx and the Bible*⁶; the Argentinian José Severino Croatto's *Liberación y Libertad*⁷; a survey by another Argentinian, José Míguez Bonino, whose English edition is called *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*⁸; the documentation of a dialogue on liberation in the Latin American Bishops' Council, *Liberación: Dialogos en el CELAM* (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano)⁹; and articles in the Argentinian journal *Revista Bíblica* and elsewhere.

My thesis is as follows

- (i) There are real parallels between the Israelites' situation in Egypt and that of oppressed peoples today, and the assertion that God also wills the latter's liberation is *prima facie* reasonable.
- (ii) The Latin American theologians' method as they draw out these parallels raises questions about hermeneutics, but their approach is in principle defensible, subject to the points that follow.
- (iii) The exodus story contains further features which can be missed by liberation theology. They may be summarized as a theocentricity, expressed in a stress on the action of God, on the service of God, and on the acknowledgement of God.
- (iv) The subsequent events of exile and restoration lead to a refinement of our understanding of the significance of the exodus. Isaiah 40-55 heightens the emphasis on man's inner liberation, through the ministry of the suffering servant, without losing a concern for the outward. God's most profound achievements come through the

⁴ To survey the whole of this theological 'growth industry' is beyond me – indeed I apologize for adding to the literature; I can only defend myself by referring to the fact that the plethora of works on the subject was not in such flow when I agreed to write this paper in mid-1973.

⁵ ET Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York (1973); SCM Press, London (1974).

⁶ ET Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York (1974).

⁷ Ediciones Mundo Nuevo, Buenos Aires (1973).

⁸ S.P.C.K., London, 1975; see note 3 above.

⁹ Documentos CELAM 16, Secretariado General del CELAM, Bogota (1974). Cited as *Liberación* (CELAM). I am indebted to Andrew Kirk for the loan of these Spanish works.

accepting of affliction, not the exercise of power. The coming of Christ adds to this emphasis.

- (v) A reinterpretation of the idea of the exodus which makes it conform more to how things actually are in Latin America — which, for instance, demythologizes the emphasis on God — is open to various objections. The church is called to propagate a concept of liberation which respects the way the idea of liberation develops in scripture. This will involve it taking the fruitfulness of affliction seriously.

I am not a Latin American Christian, and I cannot assess the situation there as someone inside it can. I do not write as a 'prophet' actually involved in the struggle for revolutionary change but as a 'scribe', a (for this particular purpose) fairly detached theologian, an exegete interested in the Biblical text for its own sake. But, as Hans-Ruedi Weber notes in connection with his study of Jesus as a revolutionary, 'truth can be gained in both ways. While at all times, there seems to exist a certain amount of tension between "scribes" and "prophets", the two must check one another and learn from each other'. Prophets can stimulate scribes; but then 'the insights gained by the "scribes" can . . . perhaps test and inform the work and struggle of the "prophets"'.¹⁰

I Egypt and Latin America

Exodus begins by describing how the Israelites¹¹ so increase in numbers that they seem to constitute a threat to their rulers, who therefore try to keep them down by forced labour as well as to limit their male numerical strength by pogrom-like barbarism (1: 7-22).¹² They 'afflict' them (*Cnh*, 1: 11-12), they treat them 'with ruthless severity' (*perek*, 1: 13-14 NEB). When the Israelites show signs of resistance, their overlords

¹⁰ 'Freedom Fighter or Prince of Peace', S/E 32 in *Study Encounter* 8:4 (1972) p.1. Cf. Míguez Bonino's insistence (pp 101-2) that liberation theology accept critical, exegetical study — without failing to make allowance for its bias!

¹¹ Many will regard the term 'Israelite' anachronistic when applied to the forebears of the Israelites in Egypt; here, as generally elsewhere in this paper, I leave aside such questions and use the text's own way of putting things. Similarly I leave aside the question of sources behind Exodus and deal with the text in its final form.

¹² Croatto (p. 38) compares Egyptian policy with the American suggestion that those who will not limit their families voluntarily should be sterilized.

increase their demands: without lowering their production rate, they also have to gather their own raw materials (5: 1-18). The pressure produces division among the oppressed themselves, shatters what remains of the high morale and commitment to one another hinted at by the opening chapter, and breaks the faith even of their leaders (5: 19-22). It was a 'house of bondage' (e.g. 13: 3) indeed: the scene is one of 'economic exploitation, political oppression and cultural disintegration',¹³ of a totalitarian denial of the most elemental human rights.

The paradoxical double effect, which one often finds in people in such a situation, is produced by this experience of 'affliction' (*coṇī*, 3:7, 17; 4:31), 'suffering' (*maḵ'ōb*, 3:7; the emphasis of the word is on physical pain), and oppression (*laḥaṣ*, 3:9; like the English word, the noun suggests literal, then metaphorical, squeezing, pressure, oppression). On the one hand, they express their distress in the groan (the verb *'-n-h*), the lament (*na'aqāh*), the cry (the verb *zācaq*; cf. *ṣ^{ec}āqāh* from the parallel *sācaq*, 3:7,9, and increased in 5:15), the plea for help (*ṣawcāh*), to which men gave utterance from the depth of their bondage (2:23-4). To interpret this expression of distress as a prayer is probably to read too much into it. Israel is too depressed and afflicted to be able to look up to God. And thus, although they cry out for help, the other aspect of the paradox is that when a response to their cry comes, they are unable to hear it 'because their spirit had been broken by their cruel slavery' (6:9 TEV). Croatto¹⁴ parallels certain Indians' observance of Holy Week *without the resurrection*. They thus give expression to their total loss of hope.

But one of the oppressed people, who through a strange turn of providence had been brought up among the oppressors, one day comes across one of his kin being beaten by an Egyptian. He acts decisively but circumspectly: 'he looked this way and that, and, seeing there was no-one about, he struck the Egyptian down and hid his body in the sand' (2:12 NEB). What thoughts, what broader purpose was in Moses' head we are not told. But certainly in this event he

¹³ A. F. Glasser in a speech at the Bangkok consultation on 'Salvation Today' (1973), published in *The Evangelical Response to Bangkok* (ed. Ralph Winter) William Carey Library, South Pasadena (1973) 104.

¹⁴ Pp. 36-7.

shows himself to be the stuff of which revolutionaries are made.

If revolution was in his mind, however, he soon has other thoughts. He had not been circumspect enough, he had been seen: and the witness does not recognize him as the leader of the revolution, but only as a killer. The matter comes to the authorities' knowledge, too, and Moses escapes for his life to the wilds. His behaviour there manifests the same instinctive and practical concern for the weak (2:16-17) and it earns him acceptance into a new community (2:18-22). And this might have been the end of the story: the potential revolutionary out to grass.

But now Exodus tells us of God's involvement in the situation. The Israelites groan under their bondage and cry out for help — and their cry comes up to God. He hears, he remembers, he sees, he knows (2:23-5).

His practical response is to make known, to the potential revolutionary whom we have already met, his purpose that the oppressed people should be liberated (3:7-8). In this connection he reveals to him his nature as 'Yahweh' (3:13-15)¹⁵, 'the God who is there', not only in that he exists, but there as the God who is with his people, with his servant (*cf.* 3:12), protecting, guiding, redeeming. Perhaps better still, 'the God who will be there', the God whose nature may not be fully known till he is known in action, but who will then be there making his presence felt, and who now (in the light of who he is) calls his people to live with him in history rather than trying to manipulate him by magic or cult,¹⁶ to live in the confidence that he is Yahweh — that is, a God who acts on behalf of the oppressed.¹⁷

So Yahweh declares that Israel is to be rescued from Egypt; and this experience will be determinative for her self-understanding, for her attitude to life, from then on (3:8; 6:6-7).

But it is not merely a release from bondage; it is also the granting of a new life of freedom in a land that she will be able to call her own (6:8), 'a fertile and spacious land' — that

¹⁵ On this see, for instance, B. S. Childs *Exodus* Old Testament Library, SCM Press, London (1974) 60-70; 74-7; J. P. Hyatt *Exodus* New Century Bible, Oliphants, London (1971) 75-81; and their references.

¹⁶ Cf. Samuel Ruiz G., 'Theología Bíblica de la Liberación' in *Liberación* (CELAM) 344.

¹⁷ Miranda (pp 78-81) emphasizes that this is precisely the implication of 'Yahweh'.

is, one 'where milk and honey flow' and one proved capable of supporting six peoples (3:8 TEV, JB)¹⁸. God promises not only *liberación* but also *libertad*, not just the end of oppression but the enjoyment of freedom, not just bringing them out of Egypt (*hōšē*) but bringing them into a new land (*ha^{ca}lāh*).

The purpose of God's speaking to Moses, however, is not merely to inform him of God's purpose, it is to involve him. 'The outcry of the Israelites has now reached me; yes, I have seen the brutality of the Egyptians towards them. Come now; I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring my people Israel out of Egypt' (3:9-10 NEB). The very verb that is used of God bringing Israel out of Egypt (*hōšē*) is applied to Moses' own role (3:11-12). This will involve him in confronting the leader of the oppressors and demanding freedom, indeed in forcing him to grant the freedom that he will certainly not allow willingly (*cf.* the plagues narrative). It will also demand his persuading the Israelites to accept his leadership, to accept his message that they are to be liberated, and to accept a share in the confrontation with Pharaoh (3:16 - 4:17; 4:29-31). The Latin American theologians refer to the need for a conscientization of oppressed peoples¹⁹ — for them to become aware of the unreasonableness of their condition and of the possibility of changing it — and it is an exercise in conscientization that Moses is called to.

But why is God on the side of Israel and against Egypt — smiting Egypt (3:20), laying his hand on her (7:4), raising his arm to strike her (6:6)? Exodus suggests two kinds of answers to this question.

One is that Israel is *his* people, and he is being faithful to her as such (*e.g.* 3:7, 10; 7:4). He is bound to be on her side. Or is he? In her later history, he often fought against her, when righteousness demanded it, and this suggests the second motivation for his activity on her side at this particular point. Egypt is the oppressor and Yahweh is responding to the cry of the oppressed. Thus his attacks on the Egyptians are 'mighty acts of judgement' (*šēpātīm gēdōlīm*, 6:7; 7:4 NEB).²⁰

¹⁸ See U. Cassuto *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* ET Magnes Press, Jerusalem (1967) *in loc.*

¹⁹ See Gutiérrez, pp 91-2, 113-4.

²⁰ 'Strokes of power' (JB) is misleading; *šāpat* means 'to judge' and a *šōpēt* is 'a judge' — thus the idea here (as in the stories of the 'Judges') is that God is acting in history as the one who uses his power to see that justice is done.

The act of God at the exodus was an act of justice, whereby the oppressed were released and the oppressors punished; appropriately the story begins with a cry on the lips of the Israelites; but ends with a cry on the lips of the Egyptians (12:30).

Miranda²¹ emphasizes this second type of explanation of Yahweh's act; the point is an important one because of its hermeneutical consequences. If Yahweh acts primarily out of loyalty to his own people, this may well cut the ground away from under the application of the exodus idea to a nation today – for no nation today is God's people as Israel was at this time. Can the pattern of the deliverance of Israel, God's people, be assumed to apply (for instance) to the oppressed people of Latin America?

It seems that it was *both* because Israel was oppressed *and* because she was his people that God acted. There were, no doubt, other peoples in the ancient world (even other oppressed foreigners in Egypt) who groaned under their bondage and cried to heaven for deliverance, but Yahweh responded only to the Israelites, because of his covenant with their fathers (2:24; 6:5).

And yet the same covenant with the fathers does link Israel to the rest of the world, in that God's plan for her is that she should be a paradigm of his purpose for every nation. He had promised that he would bless Abraham in a special way. But one of the objects of his blessing was that 'all the families of the earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed' (Gn. 12:3 NEB).²² Now God's concern here is to draw attention to the magnitude of Abraham's blessing; but the promise also implies that such blessing is also God's intent for all the world. This suggests that it is quite reasonable to understand the exodus story as a paradigm of how God might deal with any oppressed people.²³ Specifically, there is a *prima facie* plausibility about the claim that such a story encourages the

²¹ Pp 88-9; cf. Cone p 21.

²² Cf. E. A. Speiser *Genesis* Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York (1964) *in loc.*, for this translation of *wēnibrēkū bēkā*, which is theologically minimalist; contrast G. von Rad *Genesis* ET Old Testament Library, SCM Press, London (1961, 1972) *in loc.* But even if it is right, the context implies a concern with the whole world's blessing – cf. H. W. Wolff 'The Kerygma of the Yahwist' *ET Interpretation* 20:2 (1966) 137, 145-55; Peter Ellis *The Yahwist* G. Chapman, London (1969) 206-11.

²³ See also Miranda's further discussion of Gn. 12; 18; and other passages, pp 90 ff.

Latin American churches to involve themselves in their people's need of liberation on the grounds that the God who delivered Israel from oppression also desires liberation and justice in Latin America today.²⁴

II Hermeneutics and commitment

If in principle recourse to the exodus story is an appropriate response in a time of oppression, what the oppressed must be sure to do is to listen to the whole message of the exodus story. Their situation makes them open to hearing something that the church may long have missed, but it also makes them open to the danger of missing what at first sight does not correspond to their concerns, but what may be as important a part of God's word.

Some elaboration of this point about hermeneutics is appropriate.²⁵ Latin American theologians have been accused of reading their own concern with liberation into the Bible. Their response has been to claim that this concern is there already, and to return the accusation: the hermeneutical bias belongs to the exegetes of the west.²⁶ The latter have removed the political note from the Bible and treated scripture as if it were mere theological and ethical abstractions. They go about their scholastic theology in their academic institutions producing their supposedly objective interpretations of the Bible, and the whole operation is either an exercise in propping up the system of the west, or is merely an academic game which does not begin from real life, nor impinge on real life, and thus misses the point of the Bible. So what is needed today is not only a theology of liberation but a liberation of theology.²⁷ For theology, the knowledge of God and of truth,

²⁴ Contr., e.g., J. R. W. Stott *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Falcon, London (1975) 95-7 who, while accepting that liberation from oppression is God's will, refuses to regard the exodus story as relevant to this question.

²⁵ On what follows, see Míguez Bonino chapter 5; also H. Bojorge 'Para una Interpretación Liberadora' *RBa* 33:1 (1971) 67-71.

²⁶ Cf. José María Díez-Alegía's foreword to Miranda, pp vii-ix. Finding one's own face at the bottom of the exegetical well is, of course, the exegete's besetting temptation; Michael Walzer in 'Exodus 32 and the Theory of Holy War: The History of a Citation' *HTR* 61:1 (1968) 1-14 offers an instructive example from the work of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, of direct relevance to the present study. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

²⁷ Or a conscientization of theology! — cf. A. Kee (ed) *A Reader in Political Theology* (SCM Press London (1974) xi.

is not a mere academic exercise. Knowledge (*daʿat*) implies recognition and acknowledgement; truth (*ʿemūnāh*) involves faithfulness and constancy. One must, of course, beware of making this an either – or: there *is* an objective content to knowledge and truth.²⁸ But there is also the aspect of commitment.

The Latin American way of doing theology starts from where we are. It begins from how life is and how Christians are finding themselves led to act. It sees its task as one of critical reflection upon how in practice Christians are responding to their circumstances – upon their praxis.²⁹ This ‘praxis theology’, however, does ideally concern itself with *critical* reflexion upon how Christian commitment is being worked out. It does not reckon merely to rubber-stamp what it reflects on. It looks outside its present situation, for instance to the Bible, to see what judgement as well what justification may be found there for current Christian praxis. Of course it may fail to hear the Bible aright; but so may we all.

But it is, thus, current Christian praxis that suggests the questions with which the theologian comes to the Bible.³⁰ Now in a sense it is dangerous to come with our own questions to the Bible: we may then miss the questions that the Bible is addressing to us. We have to pay attention to the Bible’s agenda. And yet the only way in to listening to the Bible’s concerns is to come with one’s own, to see how it speaks to where we are, but also to allow our questions to be judged, as we find what are the other areas with which the Bible is concerned, about which it has not yet occurred to us to enquire. We must ask our questions, but we must also be wary of letting them be the criterion of how far the Bible needs to be listened to. When we find that there are parts of the Bible that do not speak directly to our concerns, this does not prove the Bible irrelevant; it opens up the possibility that we have not yet asked all the right questions. The image that

²⁸ Cf. F. B. Kloppenburg ‘Las Tenaciones de la Teología de la Liberación’ in *Liberación* (CELAM) 404-5.

²⁹ See Gutiérrez pp 3-15.

³⁰ For elaboration of the approach to hermeneutics reflected in this paragraph see, for instance, James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb (ed.) *The New Hermeneutic* New Frontiers in Theology II, Harper and Row, New York (1964); A. C. Thiselton ‘The Use of Philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics’ *The Churchman* 87:2 (1973) 87-100, and his chapter on ‘The New Hermeneutic’ in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. H. Marshall, Paternoster, Exeter (1977).

has been applied to this process by Hans-Georg Gadamer³¹ is of the 'merging of horizons': when I begin trying to listen to the Bible I am looking towards the same object as it is but from a different angle; my aim is thus that my viewpoint and my horizon may merge with its.

In the process of seeking to find the right questions, Latin American theology has consciously made use of non-Christian, particularly Marxist perspectives. This openness to Marxist analysis has earned Latin American theologians some opprobrium.³² In turn they might suggest that at least they begin from this non-biblical perspective consciously. All theology has non-biblical perspectives, as we have noted above: the trouble is that theologians usually pretend themselves to be objective and presuppositionless. A framework such as that of Marxism³³ offers a way of raising questions, a framework for understanding answers. It is not assumed to correspond *in toto* to the Biblical perspective. But it may open us to emphases of the Biblical message that we might otherwise miss or make too little of: for instance, the Bible's concern with justice, its awareness of the evils of capitalism, its understanding of man as a worker, its belief that this world is not finished, its stress on praxis and on the realization of truth through involvement.³⁴ It may also as a matter of fact provide at some points an accurate analysis of historical and social forces of which we need to be aware.³⁵ The Marxist analysis is open to correction, the Marxist ideology is to be rejected; but the Marxist concerns may stimulate our attempts to understand what scripture itself says on these issues.

The Latin Americans' approach to Exodus, then, arising out of their own commitment to liberation, is not to be dismissed as misguided in principle. Our contribution, who live out of

³¹ *Truth and Method* ET Sheed and Ward, London (1975) 273-4; cf. Thiselton 'Philosophical Categories' pp 93-4, also W. Pannenberg *Basic Questions in Theology* I ET SCM Press, London (1970) 117 ff. The notion is referred to, for instance, by Croatto 'Dios en el Acontecimiento' *RBa* 35:1 (1973) 55; and by Florenzio Mezzacasa 'El hombre nuevo: Una síntesis' *RBa* 36:1 (1974) 12.

³² Cf. J. L. McKenzie's swashbuckling review of Miranda in *JBL* 94:2 (1975) 280-1.

³³ Or existentialism or Gadamer's hermeneutics or linguistic philosophy — cf. Thiselton *art. cit.*

³⁴ See Miranda *passim*; Míguez Bonino pp 108-9, and further his *Christians and Marxists* Hodder, London (1975).

³⁵ Cf. Míguez Bonino *Revolutionary Theology* 95-8, 125-30; also 'Theology and Liberation' ET *IRM* 61:1 (no. 241) (1972) 69-72.

the situation, but who belong with them to the body of Christ which seeks to live in subordination to the word of God, may be to help them to hear the totality of the Biblical message, the perspectives on the issues that confront them that they have not yet noted, the answers to questions that their own situation does not necessarily compel them to ask.³⁶

III Exodus: further perspectives

We thus come to Exodus again and ask: what else does it say about liberation? what other aspects of its message does Latin America need to hear?³⁷

Most importantly, the concern of Exodus, in a fashion typical of the Bible, is not solely with man, his activity, and his need (even when that need is desperate), but also and even primarily with God and his glory. The Bible holds together these two concerns with God and with man, and nowhere more markedly than in Exodus.

First, it emphasizes that the exodus was more an act of God than an act of man.³⁸ Moses has a significant role in relation to Pharaoh, but it is that of an ambassador rather than that of the general himself. The man of war in Exodus is not Moses but Yahweh (15:3). The battle in Exodus is not between Moses and Pharaoh but between Yahweh and Pharaoh.

The story underlines the relative insignificance of Moses' role negatively by emphasizing his feebleness. No other Old Testament character offers resistance to God's call on the scale of Moses: no-one else finds it so difficult to believe that

³⁶ Of course, Latin American theologians such as Míguez Bonino and Bojorge are striving for this themselves.

³⁷ See further J. H. Yoder 'Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation' *Missionalia*, The journal of the South African Missiological Society 2:1 (1974) 29-41; J. M. Breneman's mimeographed paper 'El Exodo como Tema de Interpretación Teológica', San José, 1973 (I am grateful to Dr Breneman for a copy of this paper, which is also published in *Liberación, Exodo y Biblia*, Editorial Caribe, Miami); P. Jorge Mejía 'La Liberación: Aspectos Bíblicos: Evaluación Crítica', *Liberación* (CELAM) 271-307.

³⁸ The distinction tends to be ignored by liberation theology: e.g. Gutiérrez p 149, Ruiz p 368, Croatto "'Liberación" y Libertad' *RBA* 33:1 (1971) 4. Croatto grants that the exodus is God's act but believes it is only recognized as such afterwards (p 5). Even when Rubem Alves talks about grace ('The Seed of the Future: The Community of Hope' *IRM* 63 4 (no. 252) (1974) 563-4 [reprinted from *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* Harper and Row, New York (1972)]) it is not clear that this distinction is actually being made. See further n. 45 and Section V below.

God can work through him (see 3:1-4:17; also 5:22-3; 6:10-13, 28-30). This Moses contrasts markedly with the potential revolutionary of some years previously (2:11-15). On that earlier occasion was Moses using the wrong method to reach the right end,³⁹ or rather manifesting the qualities of spirit worthy of one who is to be the means of Yahweh's smiting Pharaoh?⁴⁰ – so that he is the model for today's revolutionary?⁴¹ There are hints in the passage that point both ways: Moses acts out of a concern for justice, out of compassion, out of a concern for the oppression of his own people, and without concern for his own safety. But, acting with justice but without authority, he has to act secretly rather than openly (whereas Exodus is concerned that justice should be seen to be done); and he succeeds neither in maintaining secrecy nor in winning the allegiance even of those on whose behalf he acts, so that he has to flee for his life. The passage thus brings out, rather than resolves, 'the ambiguities in the act of violence'⁴² and comes to no moral assessment of the act of the guerrilla Moses.⁴³ In the Exodus narrative, the story is included to provide the background to the declaration of *Yahweh's* concern with Israel's plight and of his call of Moses,⁴⁴ in the desert to which Moses had to flee. Israel's situation is such that it provokes an action like this in a man like Moses; but the action is fruitless and only serves to underline how Israel needs the involvement of God which Exodus goes on to describe (2:23-25; 3:1 - 4:17).

So Yahweh confronts Moses (3:1-6). It is a quite supernatural event, and only the first of a series of supernatural events which characterize the exodus story and which underline God's own action in a positive way. He performs miracles to authenticate Moses' call (4:1-9). He multiplies 'signs and

³⁹ So R. A. Cole *Exodus* Tyndale Commentaries, Tyndale Press, London (1973) *in loc.*

⁴⁰ So Cassuto *in loc.*; cf. Heb. 11:24-7?

⁴¹ So Miranda pp 97-8.

⁴² Childs p 46; cf. G. E. Mendenhall *The Tenth Generation* John Hopkins U.P., Baltimore paperback (1974) 20-1.

⁴³ As so often, the moralizing concern is midrashic.

⁴⁴ Or the background to Moses' association with the Midianites – cf. G. W. Coats 'Moses in Midian' *JBL* 92:1 (1973) 3-10; it is still the case that the story is only there because of what it led to. An alternative suggestion is made by M. R. Hauge ('The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement' *ST* 29 (1975) 29), who sees Moses' action and exile as paralleling Cain's and the general fate of mankind; only his 'return from exile' makes him special.

wonders' before Pharaoh (7:8 - 12:36). He guides Israel by the pillar of cloud and of fire (13:21-2). He wins a climactic victory at the Reed Sea (14:1 - 15:21).⁴⁵

It is indeed characteristic of Yahweh war narrative to emphasize the significance of Yahweh's act, rather than that of the human army. But this paradigmatic example's emphasis on Yahweh's action to the exclusion of human involvement is unexceeded elsewhere.⁴⁶

A second theocentric emphasis of the Exodus story consists in the goal of Israel's liberation. It is not merely that she should escape from Egypt, or even that she should find free life in Palestine. She escapes from the service/servitude of Egypt that she may freely engage in the service of Yahweh. The verb *cābad* (to serve) and the nouns *ʿēbed* (servant) and *ʿabōdāh* (service) have a prominent place in the vocabulary of Exodus 1-15. The Israelites' oppression is first described as 'cruel servitude' (*ʿabōdāh*), as a being made to serve (e.g. 1:13-14; 2:23; 6:5-9). Egypt was 'the place where you were

⁴⁵ In this last passage, L. S. Hay ('What Really Happened at the Sea of Reeds?' *JBL* 83:4 (1964) 397-403) finds hints of a military encounter between 'the army of Egypt and the army of Israel' (14:20). If there was a battle, this only highlights the absence of actual reference to a military engagement in the final form of the story; cf. G. W. Coats 'History and Theology in the Sea Tradition' *ST* 29:1 (1975) 53-62. Coats warns, however, against an exclusive stress on Yahweh's act, and sees Exodus as a whole seeking to combine a belief in the power of God with one in human initiative; see further his paper 'Moses versus Amalek: Aetiology and Legend in Exod. xvii 8-16' in *Supplements to VT* 28 (1975) 29-41, also P. D. Miller's description of holy war as a 'synergism', 'a fusion of divine and human activity', though with the emphasis on the divine (*The Divine Warrior*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass. (1973) 156). And yet it surely remains significant that Exodus credits the constitutive act of redemption solely to Yahweh. Certainly scarce justice is done to its understanding by speaking of God's activity as *only* 'a "Transcendent Presence" in the events of real man', as Croatto seems to ('Dios en el Acontecimiento' p 54; cf. pp 56-7). Childs (pp 228-9, 237-8, 249) notes that the canonical form of Exodus 14 sees Yahweh's activity in both 'natural' and 'supernatural' events.

⁴⁶ See further M. C. Lind 'Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament' *Biblical Research* 16 (1971) 16-31. Discussion of 'holy war' has been dominated by G. von Rad *Der Heilige Krieg im Alten Israel* ATANT 20, Zwingli Verlag, Zurich (1951); he believed that the emphasis on Yahweh's act (which his people merely await and trust in) is a piece of theological reflection which belongs to the monarchy (pp 33-68) and is thus later than (humanly fought) holy war as a real event, in the time of the judges. As Lind notes, this understanding at least needs qualification in the light of more recent study such as that of Miller (*Divine Warrior* and other works referred to there) and F. M. Cross *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass., (1973) and refs; also R. Smend *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation* ET Abingdon Press, Nashville (1970). R. de Vaux (*Ancient Israel* ET DLT, London (1961) 258-67) offers a useful summary outline of the concept, though it antedates these more recent works.

slaves' (*ʿabādīm*) (13:3 TEV, cf. 13:14; the more familiar 'house of bondage'). The exodus would mean a new use for these expressions. The *service/servitude* of Pharaoh is replaced by the *service* of Yahweh (12:25-6 the passover; 13:5, unleavened bread). The process begins with Yahweh's revelation to Moses: after their escape from Egypt, the Israelites 'will serve God on this mountain' (3:12). A keynote of the challenge to Pharaoh then becomes, 'let my people go that they may serve me' (7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7; cf. 4:23); that they may offer sacrifice to Yahweh, that they may celebrate Yahweh's feast (e.g. 5:1, 3, 8, 17). There is an inextricable link between exodus and Sinai, between freedom from the service of the oppressor and freedom for the service of the liberating God.⁴⁷ The one leads directly to the other.

It is not, of course, a new relationship between God and Israel that will be expressed in this worship. Yahweh himself refers to the covenant bond between him and their fathers (6:4-5); he declares that he will take their side in the way that their closest relative is morally bound to do (6:6 *gā'al*). But as a result of this act of redemption they will be in a new sense his people, he their God: and they will recognize him for what he is (6:7). This last phrase introduces our third theocentric emphasis in the exodus story: its concern with the acknowledgement of Yahweh.

If the verb *ʿabad*, 'to serve', is one key word in these chapters, then the verb *yādaʿ*, 'to know', is another. But as we noted earlier, *daʿat* is not merely cold objective 'knowledge', but acknowledgement or recognition; here, awareness which leads to the taking of a positive attitude and the adopting of a positive commitment. The knowledge of God is the recognition of God by mind, will, and action.⁴⁸

The question of the recognition of Yahweh is first raised by Pharaoh himself, when challenged to release Israel for Yahweh's feast. 'Who is Yahweh? . . . I do not acknowledge Yahweh' (5:2). The battle of the succeeding chapters is over whether (or rather when) Pharaoh and Egypt will 'acknowledge that I am Yahweh' (e.g. 7:5, 17).⁴⁹ This acknowledge-

⁴⁷ Yoder (pp 32-3) notes that this serving of God will take place outside Egypt. Liberation involves not a takeover of the oppressors' power but a withdrawal from Egypt for the purpose of realizing an alternative society.

⁴⁸ Cf. Miranda pp 44-53; Coats 'History and Theology' pp 60-2.

⁴⁹ See further 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18. On the phrase 'I am Yahweh' see the researches of W. Zimmerli, utilized and applied by Miranda

ment is the goal behind the way Yahweh treats the Egyptians⁵⁰ and behind the way he 'uses' Pharaoh. Pharaoh takes even more convincing than his people: one minute he bows down the next he recants, and yet he is inexorably drawn to the acknowledgement, 'Go from among my people, you and the Israelites. Go and serve Yahweh as you asked. Take your flocks and your herds as you asked and go. And bless me' (12:31-2). And behind this acknowledgement by Pharaoh is the exposure of the Egyptian gods to whom he looked (in as far as he looked away from himself at all). The exodus is an act of judgement on the false deities that man worships (12:12). For 'who is like you among the gods, Yahweh? who is like you, exalted in holiness?' (15:11).

The Song of Moses brings us back to the theme of the oppressed themselves coming to acknowledge Yahweh. Israel had needed a more radical conscientization than the one we first referred to. She needed not only to see that her condition was unreasonable and could be changed. She needed a new awareness of herself as God's people and of Yahweh as God. And in some sense the event at the Reed Sea provides this (*cf.* 14:30-1), though the following chapters make clear that a more radical renewal of Israel is required than has yet been achieved. Nevertheless the Song of Moses provides the climactic acknowledgement in Exodus that Yahweh *has* effected Israel's liberation. Thus the exodus story ends not with the erection of a commemorative victory stele but with the singing of the praise of God's glory.

If, then, the theology of liberation is to appeal to Exodus, it should take full account of its references to the supernatural activity of God himself, to the goal of the service of God, and to the aim of the acknowledgement of God by oppressed and oppressor. These are parts of a biblical perspective on liberation.

IV The Man of War and the Suffering Servant

But the exodus was not God's last work or his last deed. It stands as a programmatic event, the beginning of a project to

pp 78-88 and by R. Rendtorff in W. Pannenberg (ed.) *Revelation as History* ET Macmillan, New York (1968) 38-46.

⁵⁰ The aim is in part achieved as the story develops (8:19; 9:20; 10:7; 12:35-6, 38), though finally only in the Egyptian army's death throes (14:25).

be brought to fulfilment. Thus the exodus puts the later events of Israel's history into a context and illuminates them. But it is also true that later events often bring out more fully the significance of earlier ones.⁵¹ Thus subsequent salvation history brings out and refines the meaning of the exodus. There is a version of the hermeneutical circle to be observed here: the exodus explains and is explained by later events.

It is not possible here to trace the whole 'trajectory'⁵² of the idea of the exodus as it passes through Old and New Testaments; but we can stop the film at the most significant point on that trajectory's path, at the exile and at the message of Isaiah 40-55.⁵³ It is fortunate that these chapters' use of the exodus motif and their other links with Exodus make them the natural focus for our attention: fortunate because they belong to the period which constitutes the other pole of Israel's history with Yahweh. In Old Testament theology the exodus has been given excessive prominence as the key event of Israel's experience, whereas that experience moves between these two poles of exodus and exile, redemption and punishment, success and failure, victory and defeat.⁵⁴ In the theology of liberation, too, there has been overmuch attention paid to the exodus compared with its meditation on the exile.⁵⁵ Here the story of God's people, liberated from bondage, covenanted to Yahweh, and enjoying freedom in the land of promise, reaches its lowest ebb: the covenant is destroyed, the land lost, the bondage re-entered.

Isaiah 40-55, addressed to a people demoralized by this situation, pictures Yahweh as the warrior as clearly as any part of the Old Testament. Several recent studies of Isaiah

⁵¹ Croatto *Liberación y Libertad* 32-4.

⁵² For the idea of trajectories see James M. Robinson and H. Koester *Trajectories through Early Christianity* Fortress Press, Philadelphia (1971), especially chapter 1 (= 'Dismantling and Reassembling the Categories of New Testament Scholarship' *Interpretation* 25:1 (1971) 65-77) and chapter 8.

⁵³ Whether these chapters come from a prophet who lived in the exile, or from Isaiah of Jerusalem, it is still the exile they refer to.

⁵⁴ Indeed it might be argued that the exile is Israel's paradigm experience; cf. Kazoh Kitamori *Theology of the Pain of God* ET SCM Press, London (1966), 69: 'Israel's history from her formation existed for the sake of the sixth century B.C. The days of "decline and fall" of Israel were the days of the "flourishing of heaven and earth" (Kitamori is quoting here from a Japanese poem). "If Israel had had no religion of Yahweh and no exile, its history would have been no different from that of Persia and Damascus," (a quotation from H. P. Smith).

⁵⁵ Cf. Yoder p 38-40, Bojorge p 70; see also P. Jorge Mejía *art. cit.*; and, from a different angle, Alves *art. cit.*

40-55 have stressed the 'nationalistic' rather than the 'universalistic' side to its message:⁵⁶ the prophet is primarily concerned to build up *Israel's* faith by declaring what God will do for her and how the nations will have to acknowledge it. The importance of the language of war in Isaiah 40-55 is one aspect of the data that lead to this emphasis.

One should perhaps not make too much of the allusion to Israel's *sābā'*, her period of military-style service, in 40:2. But even if this expression should be translated 'term of bondage' (NEB),⁵⁷ the section 40:1-11 — the prophet's inaugural vision or audition, as I regard it — has as its dominant image the preparing of the victory road of Yahweh as a military conqueror. The Lord Yahweh comes with might, his arm ruling for him; and he brings with him the booty of his battle victory (verse 10). The second section, 40:12-31, centres on the doubt that only becomes explicit towards the end: has Israel's current experience, her 'cause' (NEB, *mišpāt*), escaped Yahweh's notice? (verse 27). The prophet's answer to the question gives prominence to Yahweh's potential military might. This is hinted at by the assertion that, compared with him, the nations are as nothing (verse 17); it is plain in the claim that he brings princes to naught, blowing upon them so that they wither (verses 23-24). Here is the first allusion to the coming great reversal: Israel herself had felt blasted by Yahweh and withered (verses 6-7),⁵⁸ but the rulers of the earth can feel the heat of his breath too. A further military reference appears in the final assertion of Yahweh's lordship over the Babylonian star gods: they are only Yahweh's army, which he marshalls without one of them daring to be idle on parade (verse 26).

The military motif continues to be prominent in chapter 41. This opens and closes with trial scenes in which Yahweh seeks to prove that he, and not the Babylonian gods, is in charge of

⁵⁶ E.g. H. M. Orlinsky and N. H. Snaith *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah* Supplement to VT 14 (1967); A. Schoors *I am God your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL-LV* Supplement to VT 24 (1973); R. N. Whybray *Isaiah 40-66* New Century Bible, Oliphants, London (1975).

⁵⁷ Cf. Job 7:1. But P. B. Harner ('The Salvation Oracle in Second Isaiah' *JBL* 88:4 (1969) 426) takes it as a promise that there will be no more battle for Israel.

⁵⁸ See C. Westermann *Isaiah 40-66* ET Old Testament Library, SCM Press, London (1969) for the punctuation of verses 6-8.

history. It adds a new element to the picture presented by chapter 40, in that Yahweh's general is introduced. Yahweh's military plans are put into effect by inspiring a human figure to fight. The name of the human warrior is not given — neither the deliverer nor the oppressor will be named for some time (43:14; 44:28). But there is no doubt that Babylon is in mind as the oppressor, and it is difficult to get away from the implication that Cyrus is in mind as the deliverer here (41:2-3, 25). One reason why he is not named is that the prophet likes to unfold his themes slowly and keep some dramatic tension. He knows it is a revolutionary message that he brings about Cyrus, one that the people will find hard to accept (45:9ff). So he proceeds discretely. On the other hand, the picture of the man from the east or north as well fits Abraham, and it may be that a further motive for leaving the warrior unnamed is precisely so that the picture can apply to either figure.⁵⁹ But even if Abraham is meant, it is his military exploits (cf. Gn. 14) that are in mind. The images used of his work are like those applied to Yahweh's own work earlier (with 41:2 and 29 compare 40:23-24). As Yahweh's power assures Israel that her cause (*mišpāt*) is indeed to be safeguarded (40:27-8), so the human warrior brings the triumph of right (41:2): at his every step he is greeted by *šedeq*. The modern translations use the word 'victory' for this word, and they thus bring out its military implications in this context. But the rendering is unfortunate because it obscures the fundamental notion of 'right' that holds together the varied nuances of *šedeq/šēdāqāh*. The warrior is Yahweh's agent in his restoring the rights of his oppressed people by the victories he wins.⁶⁰

This concern of Yahweh with his people's rights is asserted directly to her subsequently (41:10). The description of the nothingness (actual or imminent) of the nations and of the rulers (40:17, 23-24) and subsequently of the nations' gods (41:29) is applied specifically to Israel's own enemies (41:11-12); the context is unambiguously military, though the reference is, no doubt, to the attacks of persecution rather than of battle.⁶¹ Whoever the attackers be, they simply disappear — they do not even need to be defeated.

⁵⁹ Cf. Gwilym H. Jones 'Abraham and Cyrus: Type and Anti-type' *VT* 22:3 (1972) 304-19.

⁶⁰ Miranda (e.g. pp 81-8) emphasizes the concern with righteousness in Isaiah 40-55.

⁶¹ Cf. Schoors p 57.

'In the following salvation oracle (verses 14-16) Israel is promised transformation into a threshing sledges such as will crush the mountains to chaff. The picture could be a military one: Israel will crush her enemies (*cf.* Am. 1:3; Mi. 4:13; Is. 21:10; Je. 51:2). But if it is, this is the only reference in Isaiah 40-55 to Israel's own military activity. Now this is no conclusive reason for denying this interpretation;⁶² still less is it reason for omitting the passage as an interpolation.⁶³ But in 40:4 the mountains and hills are the obstacles that stand in the way of the return of Yahweh and his people to Jerusalem. We have already noted a number of verbal parallels between chapters 40 and 41, and this would seem to be another. Now the interpretation of this passage is of importance to the understanding of war in Isaiah 40-55 that I wish to outline, and I am aware of the danger of twisting a troublesome verse. But it seems reasonable to maintain at least the feasibility, and indeed the likelihood, that 41:14-16 refers to Israel's victory over the obstacles that separate her from her homeland; it does not directly refer to her own military action.⁶⁴

In chapter 42 appears one of the most striking descriptions of the battling Yahweh. He 'is marching out like a warrior, like the hero of many battles he will rouse himself to fury; he will utter a warcry, he will roar aloud, he will show himself mighty against his foes (verse 13, North).⁶⁵ The exile is wearing on — Yahweh has, as it were, been holding himself back; but now he at last allows himself to act on his people's behalf (verses 14-16). The laying waste of mountains and hills appears again, though the prophet goes on to speak of the drying up of rivers and islands — so here this particular metaphor does not seem to be a military one, and the passage tends to confirm the interpretation of 41:15 suggested above. The final paragraph of chapter 42 again alludes to the battle idea, here in describing the events that led to the exile. Yahweh had been fighting then against Israel (verse 25).

As we have noted above, with chapters 43-4 what was allusive becomes explicit. Yahweh is making war on Babylon

⁶² As Schoors (p 65) notes — though on the next page he uses this argument from uniqueness against a suggested interpretation in another connection!

⁶³ With Schoors (p 64) against Marti.

⁶⁴ So Harner (*loc. cit.*) and Westermann; *cf.* also 42:15.

⁶⁵ Christopher R. North *The Second Isaiah* Clarendon Press, Oxford (1964, 1967) 39.

(43:14) for reasons elaborated later (e.g. chapters 46-7). His victory will parallel, though throw into insignificance, even his former annihilation of Egypt (43:16-17; cf. 51:10-11). His agent in this achievement, his shepherd, his anointed, is the up-and-coming Persian Cyrus (44:28; 45:1-2).⁶⁶ After his victories the defeated nations will bow down and acknowledge that they have witnessed the activity of the real god and that he is the God of Israel (45:14;⁶⁷ cf. 49:22-6).

These opening chapters of Isaiah 40-55 almost amount to a midrash on Exodus, so systematically do they take up its themes. They speak to an oppressed people and promise them liberation from bondage and restoration to the land of promise, a new exodus achieved by the violent action of Yahweh the man of war, who fights on his people Israel's behalf. In speaking of Yahweh's working through an earthly agent, Cyrus, the prophet takes up the way figures such as Israelite kings and foreign emperors have been spoken of in the pre-exilic period, but he speaks only of God using the Persian emperor, and not of Israel fighting. The new exodus is the act of God; and (again as in Exodus) it aims at the acknowledgement of God — by Cyrus, by the other gods, by the nations, by Israel herself; for her own history now proves again that he alone is God, and she can again function as his witness, his servant.

'His servant'; the theme of the service of God, as well as those of the action of God and the acknowledgement of God, recurs in Isaiah 40-55. Indeed it is this theme which is developed most creatively by the prophet, and which becomes a key to understanding his message of liberation.

Israel was God's servant, and that was the guarantee of his continuing commitment to her (41:8-9). Now the calling of God's servant is to 'bring forth justice (*mišpāt*) to the nations', 'to open the eyes of the blind . . .' (42:1-7 RSV).⁶⁸ But it is only too clear that Israel cannot do this. She has *mišpāt* prob-

⁶⁶ The mountains appear again in 45:2 (though not in MT).

⁶⁷ It is a mistake to emend 45:14 so that it describes submission to Cyrus. The achievement of Cyrus is a secondary concern. The prophet's primary concern is with Israel, and Cyrus's victories make it possible for her to be acknowledged.

⁶⁸ I take 42:1-4 as a description of the servant's role. In itself it contains no hint of who the servant is. But the context (41:8-9; 42:19 ff) refers to Israel as the servant, and it is natural and gives good sense to take 42:1-4 as her calling. Similarly in the context 42:5-7 is a further description of the servant. We need not discuss here whether 42:1-7 suggests the gentiles' salvation or only their enforced acknowledgement of Yahweh.

lems of her own (40:27). The servant himself is blind and deaf and imprisoned (42:18-22). Now she can be liberated from her material bondage by Cyrus. But the deeper problem is her spiritual blindness. She has still not seen the reason for the exile (42:23-5). Indeed she has lost her faith in Yahweh (40:27).

The prophet's assessment of Israel's spiritual state is reflected in the formal genres which he uses — the trial speeches and the disputations, the salvation oracles and proclamations of salvation. Almost desperately he strives to convince Israel that Yahweh is God and that he is on her side. Aware of her continuing resistance, he becomes more colourful in his promises, more pointed in his indictments.⁶⁹ The development comes to a climax in chapter 48: Westermann's assertion⁷⁰ that the prophet's task is to proclaim salvation 'and nothing but salvation' to his oppressed people (taken up, significantly, by Miranda⁷¹) can only be maintained by attributing substantial parts of this chapter to a later writer.⁷² Israel in fact seems further and further away from being able to function as Yahweh's servant: and the prophet himself, in this context of his own rejection and Israel's intransigence, sees Yahweh's finger then to point to him. 'He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel who will bring me honour"' (49:3).⁷³ You are the one true Israelite who is responsive to me, you are the one through whom I will win Israel back to myself and then bring

⁶⁹ Cf. J. W. Miller 'Prophetic Conflict in Second Isaiah' in *Wort-Gebot-Glaube: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments: Walter Eichrodt zum 80. Geburtstag* ATANT 59, Zwingli Verlag, Zurich (1971) 77-9.

⁷⁰ P. 9.

⁷¹ P. 83.

⁷² Cf. Westermann's treatment of Is. 48.

⁷³ 'In view of the fact that in the prophetic books generally the subject of speeches in the first person singular, when it is not Yahweh and not otherwise indicated, is normally the prophet himself, it is remarkable that this identification should have been contested in this case by so many commentators'. (Whybray *in loc.*) One reason for this strange phenomenon is historical: the understanding of the chapter has been dominated first by the view that it is messianic (interestingly, it is not quoted in the New Testament with reference to Christ, but only to the ministry of the apostles, in Acts 13:47) and then by the view that it is to be interpreted in association with the other 'servant songs' and not in its context in Isaiah 40-55 (in my view, the difficulty of interpreting the songs in their context is as nothing compared with the impossibility of interpreting them on their own). The other reason is the fact that the servant is identified as 'Israel'. Whybray deletes the name; but 'no-one would ever have deleted the name were it not that it is suspect on dogmatic grounds. It must therefore be retained' (North *in loc.*). But the identification of the servant as Israel cannot mean what it at first

light to the nations (49:5-6). But he also realizes that the acceptance of personal affliction is the price of the servant role which he is already paying (49:4) and which becomes more rather than less demanding (50:4-9).

In these two 'servant songs' – however the servant is identified – a very different means of Yahweh's achieving his purpose in the world is outlined from the one which dominates much of the rest of the material, especially the earlier chapter – though it is one hinted at even in the first 'song' which speaks of the servant's not crying out⁷⁴ and of his not failing or being discouraged (not burning dimly or becoming bruised) (42:2, 4). These comments suggest that there will be factors to make him do all those things.

This view of how Yahweh's purpose is put into effect comes to clearest expression in 52:13–53:12.⁷⁵ God's servant goes through undeserved oppression and affliction, pain and suffering, attack and rejection; but these are not merely evils to be shrugged off or avenged. They are themselves the means of bringing wholeness and healing to others (53:5). And in the suffering of the servant (difficult though the prophet acknowledges it will be to believe it) 'Yahweh's arm is revealed' (53:1).

The activity of Yahweh's arm we are familiar with. It had redeemed Israel from Egypt and dispossessed the Canaanites of Palestine (Ex. 6:6; 15:16); now it is raised in turn above the Babylonians, ready to crush them (Is. 40:10; 48:14; 51:9; 52:10 – note especially the last in the immediate context of Is. 53). But here is a quite different manifestation of the power of God, made perfect in weakness, and restoring man's rela-

sight seems, for the servant Israel is said to have a mission to Israel (verse 5). Thus, however the servant in chapter 49 is understood, he cannot be identified with the nation *simpliciter*: some entity other than the actual nation has the name Israel attributed to it. The suggestion that this entity is the prophet himself rather than a remnant or some other individual is, as Whybray notes, the commonsense view. See further E. Voegelin *Order and History* Volume 1 *Israel and Revelation* Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge (1956) 508 ff; Miller, pp 78-80.

⁷⁴ *sācaq*, cf. the use of *zācaq* and *ṣāqāh* in Ex. 2:23; 3:7,9, etc; the word must refer to a cry of anguish, as it generally does, and not to a cry of triumph (or of a hard-sell evangelist!).

⁷⁵ Who is the servant here? No longer the prophet, surely, for the same commonsense reasons as the ones we applied to Is. 49: he speaks in the third person (and there is no hint of a change of author, such as Whybray, for instance, presupposes, *in loc.*); except in the sense that the picture applies to any servant, and may thus be applied to the prophet. The presentation more resembles chapter 42, and (as here) may be intended implicitly to describe the calling of the restored servant Israel. But perhaps the prophet knew what the Christian believes, that the specification was such that 'God himself would have to provide the sacrifice'.

tionship with God. Who indeed could have recognized it as this (53:1)?⁷⁶ And yet 'that God can do this, all of this, is his power; that he freely wills to do this for his creatures is his love'.⁷⁷ In some sense even in the Old Testament Yahweh is 'the crucified God'.⁷⁸

Isaiah 40-55, then, takes up major themes of Exodus. It, too, depicts the involvement of Yahweh, the man of war, in history, bringing his oppressed people political and material liberation from bondage and new life in her own land. And what Yahweh achieves by this means is real. First, his commitment to involving himself in human history, in deed and word (and therefore in war, alas an everpresent feature of that history), signifies his willingness to take the risk of exposing himself, of inviting public assessment. The trial scene *Gattung* in Isaiah 40-55 makes this point well: Yahweh is willing to stand in open court. At the bar of history he claims to prove that he alone is God. Secondly, his action in history brings public judgment on those nations and their gods who pretend to the status that belongs to him alone. The arrogance of Egypt, Pharaoh, and their gods, of Babylon, its king, and their gods is punished. Further, lest it should be thought that he has favourites, his activity in war is also the means of his public judgment of his own people — this was what the exile was about. Thus, as Jeremiah put it (27:6). Nebuchadnezzar had been his servant. Finally, political history — and therefore war — is the scene and means of Israel's restoration as well as of her chastisement. Yahweh's military might is applied positively to the liberation of the oppressed, as well as negatively to the punishment of Babylon.

The understanding of Yahweh as the God of War is not a primitive one — it runs through the whole Bible. It is a notion which has not been taken seriously enough in theology.⁷⁹ But

⁷⁶ Alves (pp 565-6) makes creative use of Is. 53, but without noting quite the depth of what the passage asserts is achieved through the servant's affliction. See also J. Moltmann *The Crucified God* ET SCM Press, London (1974).

⁷⁷ G. D. Kaufman *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* Scribner's, New York (1968) 221; see further pp 219-22 and pp 91-2.

⁷⁸ Miranda rather seems to avoid the thrust of this point; his references to the 'servant songs' (pp 88, 129, 222) note only that the servant brings justice and release to others.

⁷⁹ See further G. E. Wright *The Old Testament and Theology* Harper and Row, New York (1969) chapter 5; Miller pp 1-7, 170-5 and his 'God the Warrior' *Interpretation* 19:1 (1965) 39-46; and, of course, the theology of liberation itself (e.g. Miranda pp 111-27).

it is limited. For seven hundred years, from the exodus, political history was a main sphere of Yahweh's action and a main means of his revelation. He introduced his people into politics by turning her from an oppressed social/ethnic group into a nation.⁸⁰ In her political existence she had to stand up for herself. Yahweh did not normally grant her victories without her lifting a finger. He was with her: but she had to fight. The exodus was achieved solely by Yahweh the man of war, but shortly human heroic military leadership makes it appearance (17:8-16),⁸¹ and throughout the pre-exilic period God works through his people's and his agents' violence – aggressive and not just defensive, revolutionary and not just constitutional.⁸² Israel was called to be the agent of Yahweh's fulfilling his *righteous* purpose, but she had to live in the world by the world's methods.⁸³ This became even more clear when the theocratic nation became an institutional state. Religious leadership and political leadership were one in the person of the Davidic kings – Yahweh's sons, Yahweh's anointed ones.

But it did not work. The means of revelation became the obstacles to revelation. 'The politics of God and the politics of man'⁸⁴ were ultimately incompatible. The Kingdom of God could not be established by political means. As J. H. Yoder puts it,

The Old Testament is the history of a people which did have a special relationship to God and which sought to express that special relationship by justifying its national self-defense. The witness of the Old Testament

⁸⁰ On what follows here, see further my paper on 'History, Culture, Mission, and the People of God' in *EFMSB* 5 (1975) 1-30.

⁸¹ See Coats 'Moses versus Amalek' (above, n 45).

⁸² See Joyce Baldwin's survey in 'God and Social Structures in the Old Testament' *EFMSB* 3 (1974) 22-36; she notes that even Israel illustrates Ellul's dictum (*Violence* ET SCM Press, London (1970) 84) that every state is founded on violence and cannot maintain itself save by and through violence (p 28).

⁸³ See also P. C. Craigie's discussion '“Yahweh is a Man of Wars”' *SJT* 22:2 (1969) 183-8; he remarks, 'If God is to meet man in history and act on his behalf, it must be in the world as it is . . . [War] is a part of the world.' (p 186). Further R. Goetz 'Joshua, Calvin, and Genocide' *Theology Today* 32:3 (1975-6) 263-74; in a more adventurous argument Goetz suggests that on the one hand 'God's loyalty is the loyalty of a parent who stands by children irrespective of their deeds, God wills their righteousness but makes do with whatever they come up with', but then that the enormity of some of these events with which he associates himself means that 'only if God shares our totally ambiguous lot can God in love demand that we endure it' (pp 273, 4). See also Wright pp 133-4.

⁸⁴ The title of another book by Ellul, *ET Eerdmans, Grand Rapids* (1972).

is that that attempt failed and that God's people's proper self-defense consists in defenseless suffering. What Judaism did not finish learning, Jesus Christ himself confirmed as being the heart of God's way with his people. This would seem to teach that the more closely a people is related to God, the more closely a people is conscious of and faithful to its divine calling, the less the existence of that people can be tied to the political integrity and institutional prosperity of any state structure.⁸⁵

So with the exile the people of God ceases to be a politically independent or militarily active entity.

There is some conception such as this behind the understanding of Israel and Cyrus in Isaiah 40-55. Foreign rulers have been regarded as Yahweh's agent before, but the prophet's description of Cyrus is unprecedented (and, as we have noted, it will be hard for his hearers to accept — cf. 45:9-13). Cyrus is not only Yahweh's shepherd but Yahweh's anointed, his *mēšīah* (45:1). The one through whom Yahweh operates now on the political scene is the gentile ruler, not an Israelite political figure such as Zerubbabel. There is no place in Isaiah 40-55 for the individual Davidic messiah, for the branch — the only reference to David extends his covenant position to the whole people (55:3-5).⁸⁶ Even Israel as a whole, as we have noted, plays no *active* part, has no military role, in fulfilling Yahweh's purpose. Yahweh has turned away from political action as the means whereby he effects his ultimate will. His purpose (*hēpeš*) to restore Jerusalem (44:28) will be fulfilled that way, by Cyrus; but he has another 'purpose' for the suffering servant (53:10). Even with the redemption from Babylon and restoration of Zion, Israel has no complete *šālôm* (48:22); *šālôm* comes through the affliction of the servant (53:5).⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Karl Barth and the Problem of War Abingdon, New York and Nashville (1970) 79.

⁸⁶ See further Westermann *in loc.*

⁸⁷ For the distinction between the roles of Cyrus and the servant cf. N. K. Gottwald *All the Kingdoms of the Earth* Harper and Row, New York (1964) 330-46; also Wright *Isaiah* Layman's Bible Commentaries, SCM Press, London (1964) 114; but I think my understanding of these chapters is firstly indebted to (though not identical with that of) my teacher J. A. Motyer, and I am glad to acknowledge this debt.

One does not want to make a false distinction between the material and the spiritual, but in some sense the man of war can effect the former kind of restoration, but only the suffering servant the latter. A military victor can bring the Jews back to Jerusalem; but their history has exposed the depth of the problem of their sin,⁸⁸ and it will take a suffering servant to bring them back to God.

It is striking how the notion of the call to suffering all but disappears after Isaiah 40-55. The closing chapters of Isaiah, for instance, include what is in effect another servant song (61:1-3), a prophetic testimony like those in Isaiah 49 and 50; but it does not make the connection between the accepting of affliction oneself and the ending of the affliction of others. Zechariah 12:10-13:1 speaks of one being pierced and of the people being cleansed, but the two are not explicitly connected.⁸⁹ Closer verbal parallels with Isaiah 52:13-53:12 appear in Daniel's final vision, relating to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 11:33-12:3),⁹⁰ but the correspondence of actual thought is closer to the mainstream post-canonical Jewish approach,⁹¹ which sees the servant's suffering as a negative (he must be restored) rather than a positive (he thus redeems others). On the other hand, although Daniel speaks of victory over Israel's enemies, it is a battle he expects Yahweh to fight.⁹²

The Maccabaeans themselves were willing to take up war again in Yahweh's name, and I and II Maccabees reflect a theology of war that goes back to before the exile. Islam, too, continues to take this realistic approach to the relation be-

⁸⁸ The problem is, of course, recognized in the Exodus story: 'embedded at the heart of the sacred tradition lies Israel's disobedience and rebellion' (Childs p 579).

⁸⁹ O. Plöger *Theocracy and Eschatology* ET Blackwell, Oxford (1968) 85 refers to this as 'a transformation of the theme of the suffering servant'; see further Th. Chary *Aggée-Zacharie-Malachie* Sources Bibliques, Gabalda, Paris (1969); Douglas R. Jones *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* Torch Bible Commentaries, SCM Press, London (1962) *in loc*.

⁹⁰ Cf. Plöger pp 16-17.

⁹¹ Cf. the targum of Isaiah 53; cf. S. Mowinckel *He That Cometh* ET Blackwell, Oxford (1959) 325-33.

⁹² Cf. J. J. Collins 'The Mythology of Holy War in Daniel and in the Qumran War Scroll' *VT* 25:3 (1975) 603. Collins notes the prominence of the idea of holy war at the three crisis points of exodus/conquest, exile, and Maccabean period (pp 596-7). See also de Vaux pp 265-7 on the Maccabees and the War Scroll.

tween religion, politics, and war,⁹³ following indeed in the way marked out by Mohammed himself. His response to rejection was to fight for the truth; Jesus's, however, was to accept rejection and leave matters to God.⁹⁴ This difference makes clear how the drift of the New Testament is along the line hinted at by Exodus and developed by Isaiah 40-55. In particular, the motifs of exodus, redemption, and liberation become predominantly spiritual: redemption from sin is the central idea, because man's weakness and wilfulness is his deepest problem, without which his political, social, and economic problems cannot be solved. At this point, of course, Christianity confronts Marxism.

A biblical theology of liberation will seek to hold together the various insights we have noted. There are two mistaken emphases to be avoided. One is to give an unbalanced emphasis to the New Testament's perspective by understanding God's salvation in exclusively spiritual terms — only a spiritual exodus, only a liberation from sin.⁹⁵ This is unbalanced because it is not Biblical enough. It is true that Christ's central concern was with saving men from sin. But we must not be 'Christomonist'⁹⁶ — speak as if Christ were all God had to say. The Old Testament shows that God's concerns, even his saving concerns, are broader than the 'spiritual', and the New Testament should not be treated as invalidating the natural meaning of the Old.⁹⁷

Our use of the O.T. is not limited solely to what is reiterated in the N.T. or to what speaks clearly of Christ On the other hand, as Christians we cannot read, interpret, and apply the O.T. as if Christ had not yet come Although our use of the exodus is not necessarily limited to the way the N.T. uses it, any contemporary use of the theme ought to take seriously the N.T. use and ought to take seriously the framework of reference which the N.T. gives to Christians.

⁹³ Cf. K. Cragg 'The Qur'an and the Contemporary Middle East' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11:1 (1973) 1-12.

⁹⁴ Cf. John V. Taylor *The Go-Between God* SCM Press, London (1972) 188.

⁹⁵ Cf. Stott, pp 95-100. The passage concludes with a reference to the New Testament's attitude to slavery, which is suggestive for an understanding of liberation. The New Testament is concerned with the deeper problem of spiritual liberation and does not campaign for an end to slavery. The theological basis for the abolition of slavery lies in the Old Testament's understanding of man.

⁹⁶ Cf. Wright *Old Testament and Theology* chapter 1.

⁹⁷ See A. A. van Ruler *The Christian Church and the Old Testament* (ET Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (1971) especially 88-91.

This comment by J. M. Breneman⁹⁸ draws attention also to the contrary mistake. We must not give an unbalanced emphasis to the New Testament's perspective; but nor must we simply ignore the further insight on liberation which is offered by the later parts of the Old Testament story and by the New Testament. We cannot take the Exodus story on its own – particularly understood in the light of contemporary praxis in the way that Croatto suggests – as a paradigm for today. If we will not learn from history, we must repeat its mistakes. If we will not learn from the story of how the people of the exodus become the people of the exile, then we will have to go the same way. For the physical, material, social, economic bondage of oppressed people is real and God wishes to liberate them. But the oppressed are as sinful as their oppressors, and material freedom without spiritual liberation is a dead end.⁹⁹ 'It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians'.

V A hermeneutic of the new event?

But do we have to understand the exodus as the Bible does? In speaking of God's activity in history we have noted that later acts of God bring out more fully the meaning of earlier ones. Croatto infers that the Latin American experience thus makes it possible to see more fully the significance of the exodus events.¹⁰⁰ He alludes to the biblical pattern whereby an old understanding of release from bondage is transformed in the light of new events such as the exile and the coming of Christ. Now if God is the God of the event, Latin American

⁹⁸ P 27. Breneman quotes with approval John Bright's thesis that, having discovered the message of an Old Testament passage, we take it to the New Testament 'for verdict' (*The Authority of the Old Testament* SCM Press London (1967) 211. It seems to me that the notion of the New Testament passing judgement on the Old is a misleading one, however.

⁹⁹ Partly, no doubt, lest religion should again be used as the opiate of the people, the theology of liberation gives little prominence to the question of man's relationship with God, though it does not ignore it – e.g. Gutiérrez p 159, and also in *Liberación* (CELAM) 379 in response to the neglect of this theme in the contribution by Ruiz (see n 16)! See also Kloppenburg pp 405-9.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, *Liberación y Libertad* chapters 1 and 2; also 'Dios en el Acontecimiento' 52-60; '“Liberación” y Libertad' 3-4; cf. Ruiz pp 347-9; with the critique of J. A. Kirk 'Hermenéutica Bíblica y Hombre Nuevo' *RBa* 36:1 (1974) 47-58 and 'A New Theology from Latin America' *The Churchman* 88:2 (1974) 108-15.

history (for instance) is the locus of his revelation. Thus we do not learn God's truth and God's will merely by cerebrating on the *depositum fidei* but by having our eyes open to what God is doing, our ears open to what he is saying, our will committed to what he requires.¹⁰¹ The former is the approach of myth, which makes the past constitutive of the present. But Christianity rescues us from myth and shows us God involved in history.

Croatto's approach points also to a de-mythologizing in the familiar sense of that word.¹⁰² The primary reality in the exodus story is the event itself (experienced as of special and promissory significance) which reveals that God is at work, and engenders a conscientization of man (Ex. 14:31) — an end to the hopeless acceptance of oppression and an understanding of God's purpose of redemption. The event comes first and its interpretation only subsequently. But the new awareness is then back-projected and mythologized — as we can now see — in the picture of Yahweh appearing to Moses: Moses was not really a leader because he was called; he is 'called' (*i.e.* there is a call narrative attached to him) because he was a leader. Symbolic and mythical images such as the plagues, the miraculous sea-crossing, and the pillar of cloud give further metaphorical expression to the conviction that God was active in the event.

Croatto makes a series of assertions here which contain truths, but whose overall effect is unbalanced.

1. To begin with the last point made above: we may grant that in the Old Testament 'natural' events or objects may sometimes be interpreted symbolically, and the pillar of cloud (for instance) could be an example of this process.¹⁰³ But it is doubtful whether the notion of 'mythologizing' ought to be used as a blanket explanation of the Old Testament's references to the manifestation of the supernatural. One reason for this is that the Bible is quite capable of des-

¹⁰¹ Cf. Kirk's quotation (in another critique, 'An Initial Exploration into the So-called "Theology of Liberation"' *EFMSB* 3 (1974) 5) from Assmann: 'the theology of liberation is understood as a critical reflection on the actual historical praxis . . . The 'text' . . . is our situation' (Kirk's ET from *Liberación-Opresión: Desafío a los Cristianos* (Tierra Nueva, Montevideo, 1971) 144). Kirk comments 'in the place of the Scriptures, then, he places the highly ambiguous concept of the "actual historical praxis"'.
¹⁰² *Liberación y Libertad* 29-34, 52-6.
¹⁰³ See Cole, *in loc.*

cribing God's activity 'non-mythically': the beginning of the exodus story (Ex. 1:1-2:22), and the Joseph narrative which precedes this passage, recognize God's immanent activity, his purpose worked out through human decisions. Thus, when on other occasions the Bible describes events as directly 'supernatural', it does not do so as the inevitable result of a mythical way of thinking. It does so by choice, and it is logical to infer that it does so in response to something different about the way the events were experienced.

This leads into a second consideration, which is that the tag 'myth' too easily uses what happens to be (certain) twentieth-century men's experience (or non-experience) as the criterion for deciding what must have been the experience of men in another age.¹⁰⁴ A more objective, phenomenological approach to descriptions of experiences such as the guiding by the cloud or the call of Moses will respect them as religious experiences to be understood rather than myths to be dismissed or re-interpreted:¹⁰⁵ the cloud, for instance, is a way of describing a manifestation of God's presence which has parallels in other ancient near-eastern religions.¹⁰⁶

As regards Yahweh's call of Moses before Moses exercises leadership, and his declaring Yahweh's word about the exodus before the event of the exodus, these accounts are in line with a process we see repeated frequently in the Bible. The prophets experience a call and they declare God's word before his actual act comes; it seems unreasonable to assume that this cannot have been the historical order in the exodus too.¹⁰⁷

2. God did not cease his activity at the end of the biblical period, so we may indeed look for it now; and Christians have been slow to ask what he is doing in contemporary

¹⁰⁴ Clearly the principle of analogy is important, but see Pannenberg's discussion in *Basic Questions* I 40-50. Cf. H. J. Kraus's objections to Bloch's approach to the Moses story in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* ('Das Thema "Exodus": Kritische Erwägungen zur Usurpation eines biblischen Begriffs' in *Biblisch-theologische Aufsätze* Neukirchener Verlag (1972) 103 ff). Kraus refers to G. van der Leeuw for a phenomenological approach.

¹⁰⁵ See Mendenhall chapter 2; also Lind pp 21, 27-8.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. T. W. Mann 'The Pillar of Cloud in the Reed Sea Narrative' *JBL* 90:1 (1971) 15-30.

¹⁰⁷ B. D. Napier (*Exodus* Layman's Bible Commentaries, SCM Press, London (1964) 27-9) notes how the story of Moses call fits into a pattern of accounts of overwhelming call experiences such as those attributed to Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.

events. Nevertheless, within the total purpose of God for world history a special significance attaches to the events described in the Bible.¹⁰⁸ Not that they are a series of salvation events which happened on some different plane from the rest of the history that we know and experience, nor that they are *generally* acts of God in a sense that other events are not. But they are particularly significant acts for the revelation of God's purpose and acts with particularly important consequences for the destiny of man. The universality of God's involvement in history should not be allowed to obscure the particularity of his working through certain specific events.¹⁰⁹ And the events of the life of Israel and of Christ have an archetypal significance for the people of God – they provide the framework or the clues for understanding experience. In this technical sense the biblical story does function as the Christian 'myth' – its *historical* myth!¹¹⁰

3. Nor did God cease speaking when the last of the documents that were included in the canon was completed;¹¹¹ Christians may have been slow to listen for his voice in their own day. But the canon retains its significance as the recognized record and interpretation of the events on which Christianity is based. As such it has a twofold function: it both directly stimulates our theological understanding and our preaching, and it acts as a check on theological understanding which is not actually derived directly from scripture, and on our prophecy. In fact, it makes 'critical reflection on praxis'¹¹² possible. Croatto himself notes that faith today must be 'in tune with the archetypal revelation'¹¹³ – if the God of the exodus was a liberator it cannot be that he accepts oppression now. But Croatto regards the 'archetypal revelation' as only the

¹⁰⁸ This issue was raised in connection with the conference on 'Salvation Today' (cf. n. 13 above); see T. Wieser's 'Report on the Salvation Study' *IRM* 62:2 (no. 246) (1973) 171-2.

¹⁰⁹ This paragraph reflects discussion of the notion of 'acts of God' by L. B. Gilkey *Journal of Religion* 41 (1961) 194-205, S. M. Ogden *op. cit.* 43 (1963) 1-19, reprinted in *The Reality of God* SCM Press, London (1967), G. D. Kaufman *HTR* 61 (1968) 175-201, reprinted in *God the Problem* Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass (1972); but see also Pannenberg's essays in *Basic Questions* I.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Pannenberg 'The Later Dimensions of Myth in Biblical and Christian Tradition' *Basic Questions* III (1973) e.g. 31, 70. Croatto (Dios en el Acontecimiento' 53) seems to trade on the ambiguity of the word 'myth'.

¹¹¹ Paul assumes that there will be a need of such gifts as prophecy until we see face to face (1 Cor. 13:8-12).

¹¹² Gutiérrez pp 11-15.

¹¹³ 'Dios en el Acontecimiento' 55.

event to which scripture testifies: this event makes demands on us, but the interpretation given to this event in scripture need not bind us.¹¹⁴ Rather we ourselves interpret the exodus event, which was the actual primary reality, in the light of our experience — for it is a radical event with an inexhaustible 'reserve of meaning'.¹¹⁵

This approach, however, makes it impossible for scripture ever to judge us. If the Bible is to facilitate critical reflexion on praxis in the light of the word, then it has to be treated as something objective and fixed which stands over against me and addresses me. If what it says is subject to re-interpretation in the light of my experience, then the possibility of my being confronted by something other than myself is removed. We have noted that we cannot but use where we are as a way in to what the Bible may have to say to us.¹¹⁶ But Croatto has in effect abandoned even this attempt to relate the Bible in its own right to actual life, and equated the two by assimilating the first to the second. There is no real possibility of a creative tension between the two. The present is the measure of all things, and all our theologizing may only be the result of contemplating our own navel. The danger of praxis theology is a hermeneutical vicious circle: it finds in scripture only the echo of itself.¹¹⁷

4. But perhaps, nevertheless, this *is* the Christian's position: perhaps he does simply have to live by faith at this point? This leads us to a further observation about Croatto's method.

We have noted that there is insufficient reason to discard the picture presented by Exodus of the act of God being accompanied by words from God which declare the event's significance. There is a further element in the picture here, however. The background to the exodus is not only the specific words of Moses but the general words of the 'tradition' — the stories of the patriarchs, God's promises to them, and so on. The event does not happen without a context. It is not true that event leads to word; if anything, the reverse is the case — or perhaps one should rather see a dialectical relationship between word and event.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Cf. R. Tomes 'Exodus 14: The Mighty Acts of God: An Essay in Theological Criticism' *SJT* 22:4 (1969) 455-78.

¹¹⁵ *Liberación y Libertad* 29.

¹¹⁶ Section II above.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Míguez Bonino *Revolutionary Theology* 86.

¹¹⁸ I have discussed this question in *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972) 58-71.

Thus what actually happened in Israel is that the word-plus-event of the exodus comes to join the already existing tradition which accumulates through the biblical period and ever provides the context within which God's people — whether or not at any particular moment they receive a specific, new word — interpret what happens in their day; a process validated by Jesus in his acceptance of the canonical tradition of his day.

So the church has to allow itself to be confronted not just by the exodus event but by the biblical interpretation of that event. Both the exodus event itself (there was no exodus event without the context of general and specific words of interpretation),¹¹⁹ and Jesus' attitude to the written scriptures, point this way. The stress on contemporary events, on starting from where we are, must not be allowed to lead to an abandonment of the insights of scripture — to a loss of the word.

5. It might be disputed in principle whether we do have the right to follow the biblical writers' example in re-interpreting biblical events in the light of our later experience. Perhaps their re-reading of earlier biblical events is *sui generis*.¹²⁰ In fact this may be only an academic question, for there is no 'un-engaged' reading of the Biblical text; we all re-read it in the light of our present situation.¹²¹ The question is, however, whether our re-reading is in line with the understanding which God's people have been led to before — for instance, in the time of the exile and of Christ. And what was the drift of that re-interpretation I have sought to outline. The exodus itself involved the activity of God, the service of God, and the acknowledgement of God. The exile reflects the fact that God's people have not functioned, and cannot function as his servant, that man's basic problem is himself, and that God's ultimate purpose is thus not going to be achieved through political history. Although in his 'common grace' God himself continues to be involved in that history, he does his deepest work through the affliction of his servant. Thus, Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering servant *par excellence*, showed how the calling of the servant is literally a

¹¹⁹ A. O. Dyson ('Dogmatic or Contextual Theology', SE/29 in *Study Encounter* 8:3 (1972) 6-7) notes similarly how the beginnings of Christianity were a response to an event, an experienced context (i.e. Jesus); but the response was couched in an existing general framework of belief. Modern contextual theology is inclined to ignore this framework.

¹²⁰ So Kirk 'Hermenéutica Bíblica' 52-3; 'A New Theology' 113.

¹²¹ Cf. Míguez Bonino p 99.

call to die, and he returns this vocation to the people of God. They are called to a ministry of reconciliation which will deal with man's deepest bondage.

Not that Christians have grounds for spiritualizing away God's concern for the outward liberation of the oppressed: both in the exodus and in the exile he *is* so concerned, and the New Testament's concentration on the deeper issue of reconciliation with God does not invalidate that point. Thus Christians, too, must be concerned for the liberation of the oppressed: it is *part of* his salvation. So is there a theology of *violence*? The Old Testament periodically both condones – indeed demands – violent action in war and in revolution, and also indicates that the way of violence is a dead end. And yet violence was an inevitable corollary of being a political entity. In as far as liberation involves politics, does it, too, inevitably involve violence? 'We are at the frontiers of the church here, within the sphere of a world not yet redeemed. To live in this world and to obey God in it means, indirectly or directly to take part in the exercise of violence'.¹²² The church is called to live by the Sermon on the Mount, but it cannot expect the world to: Old Testament laws speak more to the world's situation. Violence can sometimes be the only possible action. But it can never be the right one, it can never be safe, and it can never bring ultimate achievement. There remains an ambiguity about violence.¹²³

And the decision about violence therefore has to be contextual. Someone outside the situation cannot declare what someone in it must do. To be more specific, I cannot tell Latin American Christians how to go about being Christians in their context. But I can point them to the drift of the Biblical teaching on liberation, and ask them to take serious note of where it differs from non-Christian approaches.

For the church will not expect to find herself merely rubber-stamping the world's concern for liberation. Theology is indeed called to a 'transition . . . from the role of baptizer

¹²² Karl Barth *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* ET Hodder, London (1938) 231, but quoted from ET in Moltmann, 'Racism and the Right to Resist', SE/21 in *Study Encounter* 8:1 (1972) 4.

¹²³ Cf. the discussions in Ellul *Violence* 134-42; Míguez Bonino pp 114-30; also the statement of the World Council of Churches' sub-unit on Church and Society, on 'Violence, Non-Violence and the Struggle for Social Justice', with the WCC Central Committee's resolutions in response to the report, *Ecumenical Review* 25:4 (1973) 430-46 (also as an offprint, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1973).

of the world as it is, to prophet of the world as it will be';¹²⁴ but if she finds herself giving unqualified support to any vision of man, she has probably only changed the conditions for baptism (to include the left rather than the right, for instance).¹²⁵ She needs to beware of being a chameleon — always assimilating to her surroundings.¹²⁶

And the qualifications the church brings to the world's desires may not be welcome. She may well be crucified for her trouble. But those are the insights; crucifixion is quite likely the price of bringing them, and indeed the response which probably proves that they *are* authentic. For the world has a way of recognizing the truth by crucifying it. Yet God has a way of making even that contribute to his purpose of liberation.

¹²⁴ Kee p xi.

¹²⁵ See further Kee pp xi-xiii.

¹²⁶ Cf. Moltmann *Crucified God* 11.

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