

Understanding love is our theological paradigm

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Doing theology today is sparked by a basic drama present in the human condition. Specific realities are obstacles to love. Concerning this drama, exhortations made by St. Paul seem most relevant: Christ's liberation does not reach us through a particular law and its enslavement; what matters is faith that makes itself felt through works of love, under the guidance of the Spirit (cf Gal 5:1-26). In our latinamerican context, many persons are bound by religious and theological padlocks. But when we enjoy degrees of freedom, we do envision a new heaven and earth. This is due, in a special way, to relationships among and with the poor. We acknowledge the guidance of the Spirit in the hearts of the people of God and throughout creation. This fosters theology in the sense of an "intellectus amoris"; doing it with an adequate paradigm.

When one makes an assessment of the three decades of liberation theology, there is deep thanksgiving towards courageous and loyal fellow travellers. We have made mistakes, and at times we have been undialogical and invented new absolutes. On the other hand, there are fresh and urgent tasks ahead of us, in the midst of the crisis of modernity and of challenging signs of an unchartered epoch.

However, there are widespread misunderstandings: liberation theology (henceforth: LT) is defined as being socio-political, a product belonging to Latinamerica, work done by few experts whose truth is taught to ordinary christians; another type of caricature is to say that it lacks philosophical grounds, is partly or totally unorthodox, dangerous in church life, a mere fashion that is dying out. May this be an occasion to remove these misunderstandings. And, what is most important, may we acknowledge theological gifts that the Spirit of God places in the church, which is the sacrament of salvation.

Why does LT generate a new paradigm? Latinamerican and Caribbean theologies are special not because they nurture subversive ideas, nor because of their contextual spirituality. All good theologies include a critique of injustice and are prayerful ways of understanding. Our latinamerican model is due to persons and places of relationships. In epistemological terms: a radical interaction between spirituality, historical love, thinking the faith within the church and for the welfare of humanity. In working terms: we are members of christian communities that systematically examine their praxis of love in contexts of suffering and of passion for life. LT is done as a web of relationships, strengthening the faith perspective of marginalized and hope filled peoples. All of this is a way of doing theology; it is the soul of a revolutionary paradigm. Therefore, what really matters is not a political option nor a conceptual construction, but rather fertile relationships, understood in critical and dialogical ways.

When one makes an assessment of a multifaceted phenomena, one usually underlines trends and issues. This is being done, since the eighties, from different standpoints (1). One can also focus on a question: what is changing in Third World theologies?, as is the case of the symposium held in the Catholic University of Leuven/Louvain (2). My contribution is to outline a latinamerican paradigm (first part), laying out questions and issues -not in apologetic nor nostalgic terms- (second part), and I conclude with elements in our emerging agenda.

1) Words from the borders

The wellsprings (of Two-Third World's theologies) are the excluded from centers of power and knowledge. Their cry and wisdom of faith contradicts ignominious suffering, where they constantly border between death and life. Why does good theology come from the margins

of social and religious standards? There humanity encounters the God who saves, not because of our personal achievements, but rather because of unconditional divine love for the 'last ones', for everyone at the open roads and hedgerows (cf Lk 14:22).

In our latinamerican experience, what is the origin and character of theology? What steers reflection is the irruption of the poor who suffer and who are hopeful; on the grounds of this principle, LT is accurately described by Jon Sobrino as intellectus amoris, that is, understanding historical "love for the poor of this world, understanding love that is analogous to the reality of the revealed God" (3). Theology deals with faith, hope, and ultimately with love, since the latter is the definitive way of being (cf 1 Cor 13:13). We know God as love in the trinitarian relationship, as love in Christ crucified and risen, as a preferential love that saves the poor. This mystical and concrete understanding of love is the soul of LT.

What is the theological status of common people, of those in the borders between death and life? They are becoming participants in the process of understanding the christian mystery. This is so because God hides the mysteries of the Kingdom from learned persons and reveals them to the little ones (cf Mt 11:25). So, LT is not done in their name nor does it replace their contribution. In so far as the marginalized respond to the guidance of the Spirit of God, they may be called subjects doing theology (4). Thus, their theological charism is sustained, not by their cleverness, but by God's grace. However, any idealization of people's wisdom distorts reality (oppression maims the poor); every person needs to be open to salvation. In the following section we will return to these hermeneutics of the poor, women, indigenous, blacks and all the marginalized.

What then is our paradigm? Is it a comprehension of reality through human sciences? Has it been more socio-economic-political, and is it now focusing on culture, race, gender, ecology? The discourse about paradigm belongs to the philosophy of science (even though many use -and misuse- it for any kind of model or project). It is a major vision with its values and actions. In contrast to a European classical and medieval ontological paradigm, a universal and modern paradigm is historical and subjective. As a part of this we have the theological framework of the "history of salvation"; which is the background for LT.

May I state briefly the dimensions of our paradigm: 1) its principle is the irruption of marginalized peoples of the world, 2) it has hermeneutical features provided by theological subjects (poor, women, blacks, indigenous, etc.), with the mediation of social sciences, and of symbolic, ecumenical, and inter-religious perspectives, and 3) a theological nucleus: "understanding love" that is grounded on the revelation of God, to whom the church responds with her faith, teaching, celebration, and service to universal salvation.

In today's world, is there a change of paradigms? (5). It seems to me that modernity is a civilization present in all societies today; and it has a humanistic, rational, scientific, technical paradigm (and several versions -of this major paradigm- exist in the First and Two-Third worlds). One phenomenon (not strictly speaking a paradigm) is the post-modern exaltation of the individual and a fragmentation of reality. The modern world view is assumed by most theological inquiries; often in an uncritical way (f. ex. seeing modernity with the eyes of the elites and not from the underside of history).

A profound change has been taking place in all so-called third world theologies (and not only in the latinamerican catholic expressions of LT). Since the sixties theology begins to be done in a systematic communion with the marginalized (thanks to the "irruption of the poor", in Gustavo Gutierrez' words). They begin to take part, together with church leaders and with professional theologians, in the process of thinking the faith. Since the eighties (and earlier in some areas of the world), new hermeneutics are developed in terms of gender, race, culture, ecology, inter-religious dialogue. In our continent, silenced communities begin to share their God-language: afro-americans, indigenous, mestizos, women, youth, asian-americans.

All of this implies a deeper and wider LT paradigm. The original accents on praxis and

liberation are enriched with inculturation, ecology, gender, inter-religious responsibility on our common Earth. So, in general terms, it is not a shift from the political to the cultural. What really matters is the historical and spiritual presence of the marginalized and loving peoples, with whom church leaders and professional theologians are interacting and developing adequate methodologies. May I underline this point. It is not a matter of one or another scientific mediation, nor of a set of religious concepts. It is rather because relationships and understandings shape a paradigm that corresponds to the hopes of the downtrodden. In our case, it is day to day praxis of solidarity, compassion, struggle against hunger, sharing of joy; in these concrete terms we understand the Mystery of Love, that transforms our historical journey.

May I add some personal feelings and insights. When one exists (or opts for being) in the margins, modernity looks fascinating, but also ugly and in need of salvation. On the course of many years among marginalized peoples, I learn from them a critical participation in modernity and their alternative small paths. I admire their nuanced and non-unilateral view; as they select elements and also do a reconstruction of the modern human condition. As C. Parker puts it: their hemidern logic (6). So, with enthusiasm and also a critical and reconstructive view, one faces modern challenges. The cultural-religious experience of common people may be seen as the heart and goal of this new construction. I share with others this acknowledgement of the political and symbolic meaning of people's faith experience; and certainly, LT has to continue in dialogue with these realities.

Let us also recall that modernity is a universal model that historically establishes itself by a relationship of center-periphery (7); Amerindia, as one periphery, is at the origins of modernity, so it may also become one source of its re-orientation in the sense of a new paradigm arising from the margins.

On another hand, I grieve seeing how modernity maims common people, segregating persons and inducing more individualism; it also distorts identities of migrants into cities, and everyone is more or less dizzy with illusions, with the "ideology of progress, modernity's favorite `story line'" (GdS 41). Moreover, the poor are drawn into socio-religious forms of fundamentalism, and by fantasies supplied by economic publicity and political propaganda. All of this moves one to collaborate with people's critique of modern realities.

May I synthesize my convictions: fellowship with people in the borders of modernity has shaped the paradigm of LT. Instead of assuming uncritically the myth of progress, we believe and work within small alternatives; in terms of faith, we care for the seeds of the Kingdom and believe in the resurrection of humanity and creation. But hope is cautious, since today's "fields of action" are fragmented and lack a unifying force (GdS 31); so, one again affirms the original and permanent thrust of LT: a holistic, pluridimensional, liberation. Our paradigm, intellectus amoris, is characterized by praxis, symbolic comprehension of truth, people's life in the Spirit. (This differs from intellectus fidei which usually highlights concepts produced and communicated by the elite). Let us now continue examining basic concerns in LT, in our particular situations and in our dialogue among Two-Third World theologies.

2) Questions and issues

The process of LT is marked by the formulation of radical questions, rather than by apologetics (which is more present when there is social-ecclesiastical misinterpretation and repression against this christian reflection). It is also characterized by hermeneutical guidelines (rather than by closed statements). These guidelines are a loving praxis on the face of people's suffering, and a spectrum of insights into God's transformation of life on this Earth. But one has to be modest and realistic. LT exists in the borders of church and society; it is produced by minorities, who wish to reflect on the faith and wisdom of all peoples. If one examines the bulk of academic and pastoral theologies in Latin America, what one finds is imitation and reproduction of first world thinking. But bulky realities often are less important than new

beginnings. In our continent, LT is like a small, intelligent child, who is formulating and reformulating the best questions.

Some say that LT is in a state of comma, and dying. Has it abandoned its revolutionary orientation? Has it shifted from the socio-economic to the cultural (as is stated by GdS 1, 8, 31, 73)? What has happened in sectors of the catholic church (and made explicit in the Puebla and Santo Domingo events) is an accent on (christian) culture, in order to replace the option for the poor. But, that is not the case in the whole church, and particularly, it does not take place in our theological tradition. For example, one of the architects of the paradigm of inculturation, Paulo Suess, has made the proposal of "symmetrical social relationships, political participation, and, cultural differences in our societies, and also in theology, liturgy, evangelization and church institutions"; he also underlines that culture is not a sector of reality, and that we are committed to historical projects of the "other" (8). Let us now examine key questions and hermeneutical issues.

2.1- How can LT be classified? Several types of evaluations (made by those who produce LT) reach a consensus: since the 80's, significant alterations in our regional and world context are posing new theological concerns and themes (9). Some establish a sequence: foundation in the 60's and early 70's, development in the 70's and 80's, reformulation and plural ways of doing theology in the late 80's and the 90's (see R. Oliveros, J.B. Libanio, P. Richard and others). One can see LT within church renewal: the periods of Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo (A. Bentué); or in reference to social options: a class analysis, a political revolution, people and culture (J.C. Scannone). Another typology emphasizes mutation and creativity, due to emerging subjects and themes -women, ecology, etc.- (V. Codina, P. Richard). Some acknowledge particular methods and a common concern: understanding and celebrating God through the reality of the poor (F. Taborda, myself and others).

In these evaluations it becomes clear that LT is a process with plural developments. If we speak accurately, "the" (monolithic) LT is non-existent. Today, this is most evident. LT is like a rainbow with different shades.

2.2- We may reconsider the question: what is changing in LT in terms of historical vision and action? Georges de Schrijver addresses four sets of good questions: a- social analysis, b- culture, race, sex, c- the proposal of a christian culture, and, d- popular religion (GdS 79-80). It seems to me that theology today is exploring more dimensions of our intricate reality; LT does not abandon politics in order to concentrate in cultural and subjective concerns. Today we are more critical towards interpretations that social sciences offer to theological inquiry. Clodovis Boff honestly states: concrete mediations have to be modified, since today there is no certitude about analysis, social project, strategy; but our roots do not change: God and the poor (10).

On another hand, we are not naive in our discourse on culture, in the context of globalization and of a total market and its idols (11). G. de Schrijver summarizes a critical apprehension of contemporary phenomena: the cultural dynamics of post-modernity, globalization, the impact of the market in cultural diversification, mingling of local and universal cultures, and other factors (GdS 47-60).

2.3- May we now take stock of deeper questions raised in our theological communities. They clearly point towards the roots of the paradigm. It is not a matter of clever arguments nor of church procedures. It is a matter of persons in all their lacerated and hopeful human condition. It is in their terms, and in a committed relationship with them, that theologians state questions so as to walk forward together.

The basic question places our faith in the God of love vis a vis dehumanization. Gustavo Gutierrez has said: "in our latinamerican context, how do we thank God's gift of life in the midst of an early, unjust death?, how do we express the joy of being loved by the Father, while our brothers and sisters suffer?, how do we sing when the pain of people...?", and, "how do we speak of God who is revealed as love, in the midst of poverty and oppression?" (12). This shows how

theology is born and sustained by love; not in sentimental ways, but rather an authentic love with spiritual and political dimensions.

New strands of LT also provide radical questions. The identities of the marginalized constitute the grounds of faith. In indigenous theology (a process where I have been present since 1981) it is often said: can we be indigenous people, and, christian? In black theology one hears: "is it possible to be black and be a christian?"(13). Women's theology formulates a radical question concerning God's gift of life when women and men are denied (in historical terms) their human condition (14). In ecological reflection there is an explicit demand that christian salvation be for the benefit of all living beings (instead of having an anthropocentric religion); here a sharp question is: how is Christ and the christian community a sign of holistic salvation?

So, these questions of faith are a way of understanding the Ultimate in reference to everyday concerns: being impoverished, being black, indigenous, women, ecologically responsible, people of God. Evidently they are not questions arising from the "center" of today's world; they are rather ways of discovering truth in the "borders" where we are made free and joyful.

2.4- Furthermore, a survey of the main issues manifests how the irruption of the marginalized sets the course for theology. Issues, that is, LT's manifold production, is not a list of rational thesis nor an encyclopedia of matters of faith. An adequate image is that of a "caminhada" (portuguese word that is used to mean a concrete journey of the people of God). It is the movement of a community in terms of solidarity, struggle against evil, common dreams, forging life, understanding love. This reality (participating in the "caminhada") is a pre-condition for any relevant theological work (on the part of us who are considered professionals). When this is the case, production is not logocentric (15); theological production is a building of bonds as we name the Mystery who is revealed to us (in spiritual terms: we walk into the Mystery and respond to it in contemplation), and, as we discover the rationality of being human and being cosmic (in terms of science and philosophy).

I will give an account of two levels of theological production. One is hermeneutical, and it may be compared with walking on wide and far reaching avenues. We have various hermeneutics, that is ways of comprehension and communication, by which christian revelation is accepted with faith and put into practice with love and hope. The other level is confrontational, since there is a continuous dialogue and dispute with other forms of doing theology; this may be compared with walking on difficult paths; we draw lines and make distinctions, but we also receive insights from those who think in a different manner, and learn to reformulate our points of view.

2.4.1- The hermeneutical production has universal and regional features. I underline the fact that comprehension of christian praxis belongs to many communities throughout the world (not being done first nor better in Latin America), it has ecumenical quality (barely present in our so-called catholic continent), and is an eco-human and inter-religious responsibility (due mostly to Asian and African contributions).

This accomplishment forms part of Third World experience (now called Two-Third World's experience); it is a rich interaction, that has formal moments. I pay attention to a first series of international dialogues, and to the recent general assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (16).

In general terms, it is a hermeneutics within humanity's "irruption": "aspirations of the oppressed towards their full humanity", "historical irruption of the poor", "irruption of the Third World", "irruption of the image of God from the standpoint of the poor" (17). Theology is done within this fascinating and demanding historical and spiritual process. In so far as sources and methods, these international dialogues show that theologians do not reduce their work to a highly specialized interpretation of sacred texts. They rather do a contextual hermeneutics (listening to challenges that the social, political, economical, cultural, sexual, racial, religious realities place

before theology), and have as sources primarily the Word of God, the Church and its communities, spirituality and praxis of liberation, social, anthropological, and religious signs in the world of today, women, ecumenical concerns, ecology (18). It is also noteworthy how the cultural and religious go together with the social and political dimensions: one of the Asian conferences calls for a synthesis of the religious-cultural aspects with the socio-economic aspects (19). Assuming these hermeneutical principles, the Third General Assembly of EATWOT takes a great step forward in terms of spirituality: the manifold cry for life (poor, women, black peoples, indigenous movements and religions, hispanics in the first world, ecological movement, etc.) is read in reference to Christ and the Spirit, and as a "cry for God"; and there is a realistic concern for alternatives: "we see the Spirit in our bonding...hope we offer each other; visioning, struggling, empowering" (20).

Likewise, hermeneutics done in Latin America is embedded in new events: the downtrodden look for good human conditions, christian communities grow spiritually as they work for peace and justice; these and other factors renew our theological inquiries. It is not the case of a mental exercise. What we seek to understand are the signs of the times, and particularly the irruption of what has been silenced. Here we need the mediations of the human sciences. The heart of this process is to be nourished by the sources of faith, by the Word and by the Spirit present in human history and in the whole cosmos.

Methodologically there is a common course and there are several specific hermeneutical avenues. A good outline is drawn by Clodovis Boff (21). Usually there are three moments, three kinds of mediations: human understanding of history (socio-analytical mediation), reflection on faith and the living Word that moves us to personal conversion and historical transformation (hermeneutical mediation), and, liberating action and contemplation (practical mediation).

A careful appraisal shows a plurality of hermeneutics; it is a spectrum of different theological communities with their particular insights, concepts, symbols, celebrations. Each hermeneutics is a comprehension and communication of the faith response to God's mysterious revelation and salvation given to humanity. (Some speak of hermeneutics only as interpretation of the Bible; here we have a wider concept.)

It seems to me that LT has developed four main avenues; and others are being built: eco-hermeneutics, mestizo perspective, etc. Each of these four are generated by specific communities of faith with their respective ways of understanding God, of celebrating the Sacred, of being in Love. Among all of these there is a common option for life, feelings, concepts, projects; but we also have incommunication and lack a common theological agenda.

May I briefly present these four major hermeneutics (22).

1- Common people who are evangelicals, or catholics, are systematically reading the Word. They joyfully discover God's power to change their lives and their environment. With the assistance of exegetes (notably Carlos Mesters and innumerable "biblical teams") these communities develop a method of prayer, biblical reflection, and human commitments.

2- Women have constructed their hermeneutics, from the grounds of everyday experience and liberating relationships and praxis. In this response to God's Presence, androcentric reality is confronted and a full humanity is affirmed. A gender perspective reconstructs political, sexual, artistic, ecumenical, cosmic, mystical and other dimensions; which are relevant for women and men.

3- Black communities -inspired by african and north-american theologies- are examining their history of salvation. In spite of racism and self-denial of their identity and religion, black christians generate a christological, ecclesial and spiritual understanding that has its own dynamics and symbols.

4- Indigenous reflection -according to its representatives- is concrete, holistic, symbolic, mythical, communitarian, and builds life for all. Ritual, and communion with the Earth, is an essential component of reflection. Indigenous wisdom is relational, affirming reciprocity between different elements.

Thus, we have plural, emerging, open hermeneutics. It is not a system to be learned and reproduced mechanically, nor a new monolithic "summa". It is rather an on-going and beautiful mosaic, the fruit of compassionate and intelligent work done by women and men.

2.4.2- A confrontation with other types of theology takes place in a global scenario. Its immediate context is the internal church struggle, but it is mainly due to ideological and religious conflicts within our societies. So, the inter-theological dispute is secondary; what is most important is the christian responsibility vis a vis evils that harm humanity.

Third World dialogues are mostly concerned about colonialism, all forms of oppression, racism, sexism, religious and cultural domination; and, a critique is addressed to churches and theologies in so far as they are complacent and collaborators with those evils. In the Conferences previously mentioned, African theologians opt for methodologies which are different from the dominant ones in the West; and Asian theologians question instruments and concepts closely linked to western culture and capitalism (23).

In our latinamerican context, the first series of polemics were with liberal, progressive forms of thinking; and since the eighties there is more controversy with the neo-conservatives (in the historical churches and in new christian movements). Both of these discussions deal more with social implications of the faith and of theology, and scarcely with biblical and doctrinal issues. G. Gutierrez made the famous distinction between a theology in dialogue with the modern spirit (the effort by progressives to speak of God in an adult world) and a theology in dialogue with the oppressed, those considered non-persons (the perspective of the poor) (24). P. Richard points out that within our continent there is a strong theology of oppression; and draws a sharp contrast between thinking in the center -with its salvation through law and concepts- and thinking in the periphery -with its salvation through faith and resurrection (25). To these we have to add internal debates, mainly about ecclesiology, and, about social mediations: use of marxist categories and strategies, the meaning of poor and of people, cultural and political priorities, patriarchy, racism, ecological categories.

It seems to me that all of these discussions, although at times very painful, have strengthened LT and motivated a critique among ourselves and within our faith communities. I also see much work ahead of us in a crucial debate: christian response to modern forms of socio-economic-cultural idolatry, and the problem of theological sustenance of the "total market". An ecumenical institution in Central America -DEI- and specially Franz Hinkelammert and Jung Mo Sung are opening up this urgent debate (26). It is not the case of making modern market economy synonym to evil, but rather we need a critique of economic-religious factors and a design of human alternatives with the depth of christian liberation.

Conclusion: an open agenda.

In a process of LT we walk at the rythm and in the fellowship of the marginalized. Our basic agenda arises from people's voices and wisdom, from their silence, from their cry for life and joy. One critically and openly listens to these voices. One reads the signs of our times, relying on the guidance of the Spirit of God. We also have specific tasks, within christian communities and church structures, and, tasks as professionals who place our leadership at the service of humanity's salvation. May I conclude with components in the agenda of our paradigm: understanding love; as we continue to join innumerable efforts against oppression, for the sake of a holistic liberation. All of this is, if we speak from the heart, a way of doing theology for the glory of God.

This agenda is organized according to the three dimensions of our paradigm: its principle, hermeneutics, its theological nucleus.

First, peoples -in particular contexts and within a universal modernity- have concrete life-projects. Here we find concrete signs of global alternatives. They are like seeds in rocky land;

small and fragile, but growing and hopeful. They are signs of a new humanity, in so far as they are ways of sharing basic human needs, instead of destroying each other and our environment (as it now happens in our "world order").

In many ways, as persons and communities, we affirm and transform life for ourselves and others. These life-projects are potential contributions to larger alternatives; they have to establish links among each other and jointly carry out a holistic program. This open agenda demands intelligent imagination and no phantasies; the planet where we reside, and our human condition, seem to be going towards a dramatic future; this reality urges our responsibility for the survival of everyone and everything.

In our world, future scenarios are not grey. Common options have a variety of colors. Even the (supposedly) universal framework has different versions. People say that there is one technology, educational system, market, media, organization of modern society; certainly there are world standards, but at the same time one sees pluriformity within the dominant framework. On the other hand, there is widespread malaise, since progress does not satisfy the human heart. At times this malaise goes together with a longing for realistic alternatives. This is expressed by religious language, humanistic ethics, art, new social movements.

There are also reasonable global proposals. Anthony Giddens argues for a "post-scarcity order", and a "life-style pact" between North and South, spelling out a viable development program (GdS 67-71); it takes into account local and global issues, politics, family, health, women, ecology, economics, self-help groups. Leonardo Boff correlates a planetary concern with the point of view of the poor and excluded; we have to change the course of civilization, with the logic of the well-being of all the earth; this may be done according to an emerging paradigm (27). Paulo Suessex explains political aspects in the church's strategy in terms of an inculturated liberation: democratic participation, different human projects, ethics in politics, economic rights, people's identity and autonomy, structural changes that go hand in hand with socio-cultural alternatives, struggle for justice with the logic of hope (28). These and other blueprints show an intelligent imagination, and disagree with a post-modern skepticism.

Another realm of open discussion is the staggering question about modernity. Has the market-society become a monolithic paradigm? Or do we in fact have economic-political-ethical plural possibilities? Is modernity in such a radical crisis that we have to move into another paradigm: a new spirituality? (29). I share the opinion that considering modernity's two basic orientations: material progress and instrumental logic, and, the dimension of human freedom and its rationality, if the latter sets the pace for the former, then we may reconstruct a healthy modern agenda (30). Another key question is how people's cultures are transforming modernity; as Juan C. Scannone speaks of "a synthesis between people's wisdom and modernity, that transforms each of them from within" (31). In all of this, we are reshaping a principle: irruption of the poor in modern contexts; this principle is the fertile earth for a liberating paradigm.

A second conclusion deals with hermeneutics. A rich spectrum is being developed in so-called third world theologies (and in our particular latinamerican reflections). This is due to classical LT and to new theological communities who are working on challenging themes and perspectives. Paulo F. C de Andrade and others are emphasizing the following: gender, ecology, rituals and celebrations, art, healing, death and life, subjectivities (identity and relationships according to each economic-cultural milieu), day to day experiences and utopias, mysticism, people's wisdom and their symbolic production (32).

Theology as "understanding love" is nurtured by communities of believers, according to the construction of one's particular identity, history, spirituality. This is happening in people's biblical hermeneutics, in communities of afro-americans, of indigenous peoples, and in the explicitly holistic way generated by women. Let me underline this last point. Pilar Aquino presents a synthesis of latinamerican women's work as a "logic that gives life...that faces universal problems and seeks well-being and justice in the whole world" (33). In this sense, epistemology developed by women tends to be both concrete and universal, and thus offers a

foundation for other hermeneutical projects.

Urgent debate and inquiry has to be carried out in neglected areas: a pluri-cultural church, symbolic thinking, inter-religious dialogue. In so far as the church acknowledges its pluri-cultural constituency and mission, hermeneutics may not remain mono-cultural. How can the people of God and its authorities promote different interpretations of God's message to humanity? (34). Another urgent task is to leave room for symbolic knowledge in our professional work. People's wisdom is characterized by insights on rituals, icons, narratives about day to day experience, biblical imagery, art, and so on. This not only enriches other forms of understanding; in comparison with conceptual frameworks, symbols touch hearts and minds of every person; they also are better mediations for a comprehension of God's mystery in history and the cosmos (35). Moreover, we need a hermeneutics of salvation that takes into account sensibilities and ideas of different religions; and that can also be enriched by the pluri-religious reality within the christian tradition (36). In these three areas it is possible to discover holistic, ecumenical, catholic, perspectives.

A third conclusion refers to the heart of the paradigm: understanding love. Two-Third World theologies blend the human and the divine: "love among the poor and towards its enemies...shows the presence of the Father's love ..., the commandment of love among brothers and sisters means being disciples of the Lord"; as churches we have "the mandate of Jesus to take the message of love and service to all the peoples of the world" (37).

This is not an emotional enterprise, that abstains from holistic praxis, and promotes closed human, spiritual relationships. Nor is it an empty call for a "civilization of love" (without a critique of contemporary idols). Rather it is a paradigm that creates and transforms life. Doing theology is one expression of "following Christ by loving" (Ef 5:2). As St. Paul draws concrete implications for this "imitation of God", so it may be said that the work of understanding revelation and salvation today is done "by loving". For example, by loving-thinking oneself as mestizo, as indigenous, as white, as black Christ; by loving-thinking Christ as woman and as man, since we all are a part of the body of Christ; or, by interpreting the communion of the saints in terms of ancestors -in an african, native american, etc., perspective-; and so forth.

To live-think this way may be seen as a gift of God's Spirit. What does "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead... living in you" (Rom 8:11) imply for theology? In LT -as in other forms of reflection- it implies that we receive new life and comprehend such a life. When we think-live in the Spirit there is no spiritual enclosure; because each believer-receiver of life also becomes a believer-giver of life. This pneumatology is present in women's interpretation of the divine Presence (as well as in other interpretations about Life).

All these languages of faith are revealing old-new dimensions. Black theologians see God as community (38). Indigenous peoples acknowledge the divine as Mother Earth (39). People's hermeneutics understand discipleship in day to day "caminhada" towards the Ultimate celebration. Women do theology, as Ana María Tepedino says: with "another music", with a "praxis of love"(40).

A poliphonic humanity is naming God; this sustains our paradigm: "intellectus amoris". Theology is first and primarily the way a community speaks to God, who is all in all. No concept nor symbol about the divine can be a final word. What really matters is mutual communication, and silence, when we enjoy love.

NOTES:

*During the 90 's and also in the first decade of this century, networks and institutions are reconsidering theological paradigms. My input, in Leuven 1996, and later, is in connection with what is being done in several areas of south and central america.

1. See general assessments: Encuentro Latinoamericano de Teologia, Liberacion y

- Cautiverio (E. Ruiz, comp.), Mexico, 1975; R. Oliveros, "Historia de la teología de la liberación", en I. Ellacuría, J. Sobrino (eds.), Mysterium Liberationis, I, Madrid: Trotta, 1990, 17-50; F. Taborda, "Metodos teologicos na America Latina", Perspectiva Teologica, 1987, 293-319; J.C. Scannone, "La teología de liberación, caracterización, corrientes, etapas", Stromata 38/1-2 (1982), 3-40; P. Richard, "La teología de la liberación en la nueva coyuntura...", Pasos, 34 (1991); J. B. Libanio, "Panorama de la teología de América Latina en los últimos veinte años", en J. Comblin y otros, Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina, Madrid: Trotta, 1993, 57-78; A. Bentué, "Panorama de la teología de A.L. desde el Vaticano II a Santo Domingo", Teología y Vida XXXVI/3 (1995), 159-191; F. Hinkelammert, "Taking stock of L.A. liberation theology today", COELI 76 (1995-6), 17-31; D. Irarrazaval, "Nuevas rutas en la teología latinoamericana", Revista latinoamericana de teología 39 (1996); V. Codina, "Une theologie a partir du Sud", SEDOS 28/2 (1996) 54-56; L. Boff (org.), A teologia da libertacao, balance e perspectivas, Sao Paulo: Atica, 1996; M. Fabri dos Anjos (org.), Teologia e novos paradigmas, Sao Paulo: SOTER/Loyola, 1996. See also dialogues with other forms of theology: two conferences in El Escorial (Spain) in 1972 and 1992, published as Fe cristiana y cambio social en América Latina, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1973, and Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en America Latina, Madrid: Trotta, 1993; and the international dialogues organized by EATWOT, published in Voices from the Third World, XVIII/1 (1995), 28-34, 59-78, XVIII/2 (1995), 38-42, 102-112, XIX/1 (1996), 37-51, 106-137.
2. Symposium at the Centrum voor Bevrijdingstheologie, Facultet Godgeleerdheid, Leuven; with its statement paper by Georges de Schrijver (GdS), The paradigm shift in third world theologies of liberation, 1996. (This statement paper is quoted -throughout my paper- as GdS and page number).
 3. Jon Sobrino, El principio misericordia, Santander: Sal Terrae, 1992, 49-50, 70-71. Likewise, Clodovis Boff: our starting point is, not an idea and method, but rather compassion and struggle with all who suffer, our "encounter with the poor as subject" ("Epistemología y metodo de la teología de liberación" in Mysterium Liberationis, I, 88-90).
 4. As J.I. Gonzalez Faus has stated: the poor are "a theological locus due to the action of the Spirit" (in Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina, page 355); in this way he summarizes the debate over people as subject (in terms of inculturation) and as objects who are oppressed and need emancipation.
 5. The philosophy of science offers the best discourse on paradigms. In simple terms, a paradigm is a major model of knowledge and action (and not merely any type of framework, as it appears in ordinary -and misleading- language). Thomas Kuhn made the key distinction between science that accumulates knowledge, and, periods when paradigms change (The structure of scientific revolution, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1962). See first steps in a dialogue between science and theology (concerning changing paradigms): Fritjof Capra, D. Steindl-Rast, Belonging to the universe, explorations on the frontiers of science and spirituality, S. Francisco: Harper, 1992; Leonardo Boff, Principio-Terra, Sao Paulo: Atica, 1995 -where he spells out 10 characteristics of a new holistic paradigm, pages 76-80.
 6. See Cristian Parker, Otra lógica en America Latina, Mexico: FCE, 1993, 375-382.
 7. A global-critical vision is well drawn by Enrique Dussel, "Sistema-mundo, dominacao e exclusao", in CEHILA, Historia da Igreja na America Latina e no Caribe, Petropolis: Vozes, 1995, specially 46-58. Marginalization and exclusion are at the core of modernity; so, it is not only reason, science, technology, nation states, market, progress (see the five pillars of GdS 8-15).

8. P. Suess, Evangelizar a partir dos projetos historicos dos outros, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 1995, 217 and all chapter 10. He spells out the political agenda in the paradigm of inculturation (235).
9. In this section I refer to assessments mentioned on footnote 1.
10. C. Boff in L. Boff (org.), A teologia da libertacao , 102.
11. Latinamerican theologians can today dialogue with critical views of our global scenario: P. Morandé, Cultura y modernizacion en America Latina, Santiago: U.C. de Chile, 1984; N. Garcia C. (ed.), Políticas culturales en América Latina, Mexico: Grijalbo, 1987; F. Hinkelammert, Democracia y Totalitarismo, San José: DEI, 1987; Nestor García C., Culturas híbridas, estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad, Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989; J.J. Brunner, América Latina: cultura y modernidad, Mexico: Grijalbo, 1992; G. Bonfil, Identidad y pluralismo cultural en América Latina, Buenos Aires: CEHASS, 1992; M.C. Bingemer (org.), O impacto da modernidade sobre a religiao, Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1992; G. Arroyo y otros, Por los caminos de América, Santiago: Paulinas, 1992; C. Parker, Otra lógica, Mexico: FCE, 1993; R. Ortiz, Mundializacao e cultura, Sao Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994; J. Larraín I., Modernidad, razón e identidad en América Latina, Santiago: A. Bello, 1996.
12. G. Gutierrez, Beber en su propio pozo, Lima: CEP, 1983, 19; and Hablar de Dios, Lima: CEP, 1986, 19. Likewise: L. Boff and C. Boff, Como fazer teologia da libertacao, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986, II ("the most important question: how do we live as christians in a world of miserable people?"); and, J.B. Libanio: "what is the meaning of the christian faith in a world of oppression?", in "Panorama de la teología...", 59.
13. Antonio Aparecido da Silva in Concientizacao, organizaca, fe e luta, Sao Paulo: Asett, 1993, 13. Likewise: Marcos Rodriguez: "is it possible to be black within the catholic church?", "Negritude e espiritualidade", Grande Sinal, XLVIII (1994/3), 305.
14. Maria P. Aquino asks: "how is full life in God announced to those who live in the borders... people denied their human integrity, with what language are they told about their being sons and daughters of God?", Nuestro clamor por la vida, teologia latinoamericana desde la perspectiva de la mujer, San José: DEI, 1992, 33.
15. It may be said that we do not build on the cornerstone of modernity. G. de Schrijver reminds us that "the basic characteristic of modernity can rightly be called logocentrism" (GdS 15). Neither is our cornerstone pre-modern nor post-modern; it is within modernity and goes beyond it.
16. The first five international conferences take place in Tanzania (I), Ghana (II), Sri Lanka (III), Brasil (IV), India (V), between 1976 and 1981; see their statements in Teologia desde el tercer mundo, San José: DEI, 1982 (my quotes are from the paragraphs of this publication); the third and latest General Assembly of EATWOT (Kenya, 1992) has a moving document: A cry for life, the spirituality of the third world (my quotes are from the pages of the official publication following that assembly). Unfortunately, few persons may participate (due to financial limitations); more deplorable is that few third world theologians communicate with each other and read their works.
17. Teologia desde el Tercer Mundo, III 28-30, IV 6-26, V 26-31, V 52.
18. Concerning context and methods: I 3-14, II 21, III 5, IV 6-26, V 9-31, emergent methodology: V 38-44; and concerning sources (in a wide meaning of sources in theology): II 21, III 34-35, V 42, II 23, IV 19-26 53-64 74-77, V 49. Concerning use of social sciences, and social analysis: I 7, 32, III 33, V 43.

19. See V 44, 73 ("the socio-economic and the religious-cultural are essential components of an integral liberation"); and also I 6, 27, III 25, 32, V 53-60. Regarding this point, several conferences admit the existence of differences, together with common perspectives: I 36, V 7, 44.
20. Nairobi, Kenya Document: A cry for life, pages 2, 3-6, 9-11.
21. Clodovis Boff, "Epistemologia y método de la teología de liberación, Mysterium Liberations, I, 79-113.
22. These hermeneutics are described in my "Nuevas rutas...", *loc. cit.* May I recommend some basic works. People's biblical hermeneutics: Carlos Mesters, La biblia, el camino de un pueblo, Buenos Aires: Paulinas, 1987; G. Marchand y J. Mizzotti, Metodologia, lectura pastoral de la biblia, Lima: Centro Mariano Montfortiano, 1992; and the journal Revista de interpretacion biblica latinoamericana (published since 1989). Women's theology and gender perspective: U. King, Feminist theology from the Third World, SPCK/Orbis, London/NY, 1994; Through her eyes, women's theology from latinamerica, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989; Ana M. Tepedino, M. Brandao, "Teología de la mujer en la teología de liberación", Mysterium Liberationis I, 287-298; Pilar Aquino, Nuestro clamor por la vida, teología latinoamericana desde la perspectiva de la mujer, San José: DEI, 1992; Ada M. Isasi Diaz, En la lucha, in the struggle, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993; Ivone Gebara, Teologia em ritmo de mulher, Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 1994. Black hermeneutics: Franziska Rehbein, Candomble e Salvacao, Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1985; Q. Duncan et alii, Cultura negra y teologia, San José: DEI, 1986; Marcos Rodriguez, Teologia afro-latinoamericana, Quito: Centro C. Afroamericano, 1990; Antonio A. da Silva (ed.), Concientizacao, organizacao, fe e luta, Sao Paulo, 1993; Agustín Herrera, Teologia afroamericana, Quito: Centro C. Afroamericano, 1994; Indigenous Theology: CENAMI, Teologia India I, Quito: Abya Yala, 1991; Manuel Marzal (coord.), Rostros indios de Dios, Lima: PUC, 1991; Vine Deloria, God is Red, Golden: North American Press, 1992; CENAMI, Teologia India II, Quito: Abya Yala, 1994; A. Peelman, Christ is a native american, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995.
23. See Teologia desde el tercer mundo, II 22, V 32-37.
24. G. Gutierrez, La fuerza histórica de los pobres, Lima: CEP, 1979, 307-365; in the midst of these debates, he says that what matters is not theology but that people be free (393).
25. Pablo Richard, La iglesia latinoamericana entre el temor y la esperanza, San José: DEI, 1980, 17-33.
26. See DEI, La lucha de los dioses, los ídolos de la opresión y la búsqueda del Dios liberador, San José: DEI, 1980; Franz Hinkelammert, Teologia del mercado total, La Paz: HISBOL, 1989; Jung Mo Sung, Deus numa economia sem coracao, Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 1992. Hinkelammert warns that philosophy speaks of a crisis of paradigms, but reality shows there is one universal paradigm: the market ("Determinismo y auto-constitución del sujeto", Pasos 64 (1996) 18ff).
27. See L. Boff, "Da libertacao e ecologia: desdobramento de um mesmo paradigma", in M. F. dos Anjos (org.), Teologia e novos paradigmas, 75-88, and Principio-Terra, Sao Paulo: Atica, 1995, 76-80.
28. See P. Suess, Evangelizar a partir dos projetos historicos dos outros, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 1995, 234-235.
29. Concerning this point, see L. Boff, Nueva Era: la civilizacion planetaria, Burgos: Verbo Divino, 1995, 85 ff.

30. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "El fin de qué Modernidad?", Pasos, 64 (1996), 10-17; and Jorge Larraín, Modernidad, razón e identidad en América Latina, Santiago: A. Bello, 1996 (he argues -following Habermas- that communicative reason has to give direction to instrumental reason; both are necessary, but the former has to be cultivated more -pgs. 247-248).
31. J.C. Scannone, "El debate sobre la modernidad en el mundo noratlántico y en el tercer mundo", Concilium, 244 (1992), 124-125.
32. Paulo F. Carneiro de Andrade, "Novos paradigmas e teologia latinoamericana", in M. F. dos Anjos (org.), Teologia e novos paradigmas, 61-62; see also P. Richard, "La teología de la liberación en la nueva coyuntura, temas y desafíos nuevos para la década de los noventa", Pasos 34 (1991).
33. Pilar Aquino, Teologia feminista latinoamericana (manuscrito), 1996, pg. 5, 24.
34. Marcelo Azevedo rightly says: "we may no longer justify a monocultural christianity. Rather, the results of an inculturated evangelization will be a multicultural christianity" ("Cristianismo, uma experiencia multicultural", Revista eclesiastica brasileira, 220, 1995, 779).
35. On symbolic thinking, see Victor Codina, Crear en el Espiritu Santo, Santander: Sal Terra, 1994, 175-179; and my "Repercusión de lo popular en la teología" in Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina, 186-191.
36. Faustino Teixeira gives a deep, radical proposal: "Novos paradigmas resultantes do dialogo inter-religioso", in M. F. dos Anjos (org.), Teologia e novos paradigmas, 105-133.
37. Teologia desde el Tercer Mundo, IV 42 and 52, and A cry for life, EATWOT, pg. 11.
38. Marcos Rodriguez, Teologia afro-latinoamericana, 123.
39. Teologia India II, Final Document: "in this good hour for amerindian peoples and for all peoples of the world, we wish that Mother Earth be again full of flowers...(and the Catholic Bishops present in this meeting add)...that christianity may be enriched, due to indigenus religions, with a respectful relationship with Mother Earth", pgs. 184, 187.
40. Ana María Tepedino y M.L.R. Brandao, "Teologia de la mujer en la teologia de liberación", Mysterium Liberationis, I, 293-294.