APPENDIX to the Report of Workshop 5

Towards a European Theology of Liberation?

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1. What is meant by theology of liberation

The discussion in workshop 5 started with an exposition by Sr. Dr. Mary John Mananzan who explained the structure of Philippino 'theology of struggle' against the background of her own life-story. This Philippino way of doing theology, as it is the case with any liberation theology, is characterized by the following aspects: 1) It is a contextual theology. 2) It has a clear point of departure, the choice for the oppressed. 3) It uses social and cultural analysis, in a critical way. 4) It has new ways of Bible interpretation. 5) It is geared to action for the oppressed. The theologian relates to the poor as a technician to the real subjects of the action. 6) This way of doing theology is more collective than individual. Spiritually it is a source of inner freedom. The implied concept of salvation is 'integral'. The traditional distinction between 'pre-evangelization' and 'evangelization' has no place any more. Both the concept of church and that of religious life are bound to change in this hermeneutical circle of theology and action.

What follows are brief indications of some important elements of the exchange of views that subsequently took place within the group, in a certain order of synthesis.

2. Obstacles to the liberation of theology in Europe

For the purpose of our discussion for 'Europe' could also be written 'North America'. Why is it that similar renewal of theology as is experienced in the Philippines, Latin America and elsewhere in the South is hardly perceptible in the North Atlantic scene? It is not that we do not have the poor among us!

Many want to orientate themselves by Third World theologies of liberation. While this is an essential thing to do in the context of North-South solidarity relations, it may be said that taking such an interest in liberation theology is another thing than applying such an 'imported' theology out of context. Often when Latin American contextual and committed theology comes to Europe it is dealt with in the traditional academic way so much criticised by the theologians of liberation themselves. The observation can be made that the distinction between the question of a possible European liberation theology on the one hand and the theme of the 're-evangelization of the North' on the other hand to be treated in two separate workshops, points already to one of the risks involved; separating what in liberation theology is one -- liberation and evangelization -- amounts to a reduction of both.

A second obstacle is of a sociological nature. The poor in Europe are often spread throughout our societies; they sometimes form geographical communities, but these are often very plural (multi-faith) in character. They do not easily tend themselves to be
transformed into base communities. (The black-led churches in Britain are a sort of exception.) The factors of secularisation and privatisation are also important aspects of difference. As far as analysis is concerned, many committed Church members are puzzled by the autonomy and seemingly irreversible processes of our societal development that are beyond control of small 'initiative groups'. It may indeed be observed, as it is done by Hans Jonas, that traditional ethics will not do any more.

About this I like to include a small digression, that relates to the concept of faithfulness which played an important role in our workshop. In the discussion about John Pobee's address in the plenary meeting it was said that modern technology should not be considered as an all-devouring juggernaut, but as a field of action in which man should collaborate with God the Creator. Reference was made to the second chapter of Hebrews. It seems, however, that modernity does pose the church -- and modern man in general -- before fundamental questions that are really new in history.

The concept of collaboration presupposes the possibility of a projection, a plan. The outcome of modern technology is less and less the result of a deliberate program, for instance with a view to establish concrete forms of a just, participatory and sustainable society. More and more is technology drawing the consequences from earlier technological steps, largely with unforeseeable effects. Hans Jonas, in his Das Prinzip Verantwortung, observes that the developments of modern world society give more reason for fear than for hope. What he offers is a critique of the implied utopian promises of Technique (of which Marxism presented a radicalized 'eschatological' version).

But fear is not fatalism. Fear can be the legitimate and even necessary base for preoccupation and concern and active involvement. The ethical question is not whether economic-technological processes are unavoidable, but precisely whether we fear them, or applaud them, or do not care about them because of indifference and a privatised consciousness. Though we are not in control of our ethical situation, we do have -- and this is unavoidable! -- the real choice of accepting or rejecting, promoting or curbing, more of the same or steps in alternative directions. So Jonas calls for a heuristics of fear, which, from a Christian point of view we may add, goes hand in hand with hope. Jonas observes, for that matter, that it is hope that enables to the 'courage of responsibility.' The extreme limits beyond which western technology has brought us, compel us to an equally radical analysis and action.

The ethical dimensions of human conduct in modern 'technological society' by-pass the foreseeable in time and space. But that calls for the development of knowledge that, in contrast with traditional ethics, goes beyond the now and here and even beyond the scene of interhuman relations because it includes, for the first time in