Workshop 4:
Five hundred Years of Mission

Moderator: Enrique Dussel, Celaya 21, Depto. 402, Colonia Hipódromo, 06 100 Mexico City, Mexico

In this workshop we will work on the whole theme of particular cases of evolution in history of the Missions of the five centuries (since 1492 up to the present). It may also help to discover the new meaning Missions may have, from the moment that the local churches in each country have been organized.

It is possible to participate in the workshop with papers that attempt to reflect the sense of the Mission as a whole, as expansion of European Christendom in the Third World.

It is a workshop preparatory to the commemorations that are being organized for the fifth centenary of the European arrival in America, and the end of the Second Millenium. What sense are Missions going to have in the Third Millenium?

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Workshop 5:
Economy, Gospel and Culture:
Towards a European Theology of Liberation

Moderator: Dr. Roelf L. Haan, P. van Hoeklaan 1, NL-3571 WE Utrecht, Netherlands

Greed is efficient because it has no compunctions about using others for one's own glory.

Kosuke Koyama

In the programme outline of the VIIth IAMS Conference, the workshop for which this study paper is meant to serve as an introduction is listed under the heading Economy, gospel and culture: towards a European theology of liberation. For any 'theology of liberation' to be meaningful in the Northern part of the world, much analysis has still to be done. Rich industrial societies are commonly described as predominantly 'economic'. I would suggest to take over Jacques Ellul's phrase of the 'technological society'. It will become clear that we face a historical development that presents a fundamental theological problem for both North and South and for the relationship between them. The technological society imposes itself on both sides of our world economic system, i.e. in its centre and - more violently - in its periphery. Modern society is mechanistic and managerial. It is becoming more and more one single field of interrelated relationships, whose cohesion is not societal but technological. Coupled with the atomization of society is a process of militarization which is continuously encroaching upon the civilian sector. This is most avert in the Southern part of the
world. "... Under such circumstances, evangelization must mean speaking out as the voice of a people confronting an antipeople system" (1). Sociologically and theologically it should be taken into account that the relations between the so-called first world and the third world are due to modernity as the context which they have in common.

Technological society

How can the modern 'technological phenomenon' be understood? It is not the machine. Technique, for that matter, is more than that. There is economic, social and political technique, legal technique, religious technique etc. Magic is technique: certain means are systematically used to reach a certain goal in an efficient way. Numerous technological revolutions have intensified each other. The result has been a complex whole of technical systems that are ever developing and mutually integrating. In his later writings Ellul stresses the fact that even society itself is entering the technical system, which means that society changes its active role into a passive one. Being originally a means, technique has become a power.

The more important remains the distinction between '(technological) society' and 'technical system'. The system is not the society; the former exists within the latter. It depends on her, it has been grafted on her. The machine does not transform nature. Society is nature; she is formed by the intermingling of nature and culture, in a way that becomes nature for the human being. Within this environment the technical system is situated as an alien body, penetrating everywhere, and irreplaceable (2). Society and technique appear to be in conflict. The technical system, in which order reigns, causes tension and chaos in society. Not only the ecological, but also the sociological environment is violated.

By definition, technique is efficient. Efficiency in the modern sense is the search for the one and single best means in absolute terms. "It is no longer the best relative means which counts, as compared to other means also in use. The choice is less and less a subjective one. It is, then, the specialist who chooses the means; he is able to carry out the calculations that demonstrate the superiority of the means chosen over all others" (3).

This is why technical development obeys to automatism. Resistance to progress is an inferior and rejectable point of view. Technical development generates technical development in a continuing process of self-augmentation. This is happening in a uniform, monist way. The means are not 'neutral'; they prescribe their own use; technique is not something that can be used, technique is use. The universalism of modern technique submits everything what is found in its way, geographically and culturally. The expansionist and universalist movement is sustained by commerce and by war. Traditional societies enter within short periods into a national setting of modern dictatorship. Also religion, Christian theologies included, adapt to the demands of homogeneity. - The universalist claim of European theology amounts to a rather passive type of contextuality!

From a theological point of view, the fundamental problem of modern technological society lies in the autonomy of Technique. The only criteria that are allowed to judge and to influence technique are themselves derived from Technique. The circle of immanence is a hermetically closed one. The only way for maintaining order in a society that has been made dependent on technique, is to strengthen the technical means of control. The realms of the state, of government, of 'public interest' etc. loose their independency vis-à-vis the technical system, as they become part of it, and the main actors of its promotion. Human rights considerations enter into the calculation of costs and benefits, of efficiency, and of 'the lesser evil' that is to be taken for the sake of making the system function.