LIBERATION THEOLOGY
AND THE ANGLICAN
TRADITION

1. Liberation and the Christian Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ is primarily a free gift, the unexpected, unmerited assurance that the world's creator accepts and loves unreservedly a creation which we can only see as lost, deprived and rebellious. But as preached by Jesus, it is a gift from one person to another, and, as such, both sustains and constitutes certain sorts of relationship; in other words, it cannot be regarded as a 'neutral' piece of information. Gospel occurs in the interaction of historical persons; it is embodied in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and this means that it is embodied in the relationships of which Jesus was a part. We grasp good news as good news when we see the effect, the difference it makes. The gospel is only really understood when we understand it as a transforming event; when we see human life and self-understanding established on a new basis as a result of what happens in and around Jesus, we can see why his story is good news.

So the gift-character of the gospel appears primitively as a result of the enacted reality of transformed lives and relations; it is seen because people are speaking and acting in a new way. So as the earliest believers explore and assimilate the newness of their experience, they ask what has happened to them—and in due course produce the New Testament as a partial answer. They sort through their memories, their records, their worship practices and their correspondence to discover how they came to be the kind of people they now are. Part of this process will inevitably be also the discovery and investigation of what formerly prevented them from being the people they now are, what stopped them making the responses they now discover they are able to make; and it is entirely natural that they should see past and present related to each other as bondage and
freedom. They have been slaves, they are no longer; liberation has occurred.

Of course this is not the only New Testament metaphor for human transformation. If Paul is preoccupied with bondage and freedom, John is more interested in darkness and light; but these are in no sense rival theories, mutually exclusive. The variety of biblical imagery used to characterise the central transformation simply reflects the complex and manifold nature of the previously existing restraints upon human development. We are slaves to the "elemental powers": spiritual forces between God and the human world block our access to the ultimate source of meaning and energy, and so keep us in fear and uncertainty about our destiny in relation to that ultimate source. We are slaves to sin, caught in the downward spiral of revolt against the remote God we cannot trust. We are moral infants, restrained by the guardianship of an external legal system. We are blind to our own weakness and need, and condemn ourselves by rejecting what offers us insight and hope. And so on. These are classical—and pretty generalised—ways of speaking about the pre-gospel state; as we shall see shortly, they are not necessarily the only ways.

So the person who has heard and assimilated the gospel confronts the person who has not heard it (or heard it only as abstract information) with the possibility of analysing and identifying what prevents the latter from hearing it. That analysis and identification are not the same thing as the communication of the gospel and the event of transformation. This occurs as persons are concretely brought into the new patterns of action and relation centring upon the memory and presence of Jesus, and it remains as difficult as ever to make generalised statements about how they are brought in. But we can at least say that change is unlikely to occur without some element of consideration of what may be preventing it.

Putting it a little more concretely: the presence in a society of a community making claims about the possible transformation of human possibilities can—and should—set up a challenge and a conflict. Within the believing group it sets up the challenge of thinking through why the proclaimed gift is not being accepted or understood. In the wider society, it should generate a puzzle as to why its professed social and individual goals are being bypassed or
overthrown, why it is being treated as incapable of offering fullness of life. More especially, among those who feel their present situation as incomplete, frustrated, unfree, it can be the catalyst for an unprecedentedly critical vision of this situation. Although none of this adds up to the event of transformation itself, it should be clear enough that it is part of that quite complicated process which we describe in shorthand as 'preaching the gospel'.

But this kind of analysis and challenge and conflict is, in the nature of the case, not a single, fixed account. The more aware we become of human conditioning and motivation, the more sensitive we are made to the varieties of unfreedom. Christ and the first Christians did not perceive the constraints on human life as we do; oppression for them, bondage and limitation, were seen in terms of the administration and interpretation of religious law, and the powerful influence of a hostile spirit world. It is useless simply to say that they were wrong, but it is undeniable that to see human bondage now primarily in such terms would be to block out almost all that we have learned about human interrelation since the first century, and to ignore the highly specific shifts in the concrete organisation of society that have occurred. It would, in short, be a flight from history such as Christian doctrine has fairly consistently discouraged.

From what are we liberated? If the answer to that question is limited to the affirmation of a radical liberation (death, suffering, guilt, etc.), without dealing with their historical contemporary and provisional implications, the impatience with our condition will be exacerbated through religious and emotional excitement and may assume any impulse of a revolutionary aura... Christianity does not have a definite list of the areas of dependency nor of the means of liberation. By challenging the idealistic character of radical liberation it leads back to the patience of history.

Jesus, after all, did not in so many words challenge the lordship of sin and death: he cast out demons from particular individuals and attacked the legal and spiritual hegemonies of a particular group. Even Paul’s generalisations about freedom from law, sin and death are interwoven with polemic about specific practices, particular problems, the hostility of particular factions. This is the particularity which the ‘preaching of the gospel’ must continue to show.

Theologically speaking, liberation is one of the central biblical
metaphors for the overall renewal and reconstitution of humanity before God. But if it is theologised abstractly or one-sidedly (in a timeless, 'spiritual' sense), we shall fail to do justice to the fact that the new humanity comes into being in history, in specific conditions—sub Pontio Pilato, in a tangible community of persons with complex and interweaving biographies. The sharing of the gospel, the communication of life-in-Christ, demands from those who would share it an intense attention to the society they find themselves in. And there is no avoidance of this sharing: if the gift of God is to created humanity as such, there can never be any justification for restricting its diffusion or refusing to interpret it to new and strange situations. To receive and assimilate the gospel is to be committed to sharing it; to be liberated is to become a liberator.

But can theology itself provide exhaustive analysis of human unfreedom? Once we have ceased to see this unfreedom in dominantly 'religious' terms, once we have independent secular sciences to describe for us the nature of personal growth or social relation or political power, should theology ignore the deliverances of these disciplines in favour of its own diagnosis? If it does so, it will in fact have abandoned the task of interpreting and sharing it; it will have refused to take seriously the inability of society to 'hear' what the Church is saying, because it assumes in advance that it can understand and define the problem as a problem to which it can give a blandly satisfactory answer. Theology and the Church have often done precisely this, and the disastrous consequences are evident wherever society at large rejects the Church out of hand, refusing what it sees as the Church’s blanket prescriptive definitions of its needs and questions. If this is not to happen, we are bound to take account of how social, economic and psychological analyses characterise power, freedom and fulfilment—or their absence. The sharing of the gospel should go hand-in-hand with the constant effort to understand more fully the world to which it is addressed. Why should it be 'good news' here? for these people? Naturally, this exposes the communicator of the gospel to manifold risks, to the relativity and vulnerability of various unfamiliar and often unstable disciplines. But the only alternative is retreat to a theological absolutism which effectively imprisons the gospel and blocks its communication.
To sum up so far:

(i) Hearing the gospel is the event in which a transformation of life occurs;
(ii) Scripture and subsequent theology ask where and how it occurs, and begin to characterise the structure of pre- and post-gospel life;
(iii) 'Bondage and freedom' is one such central characterisation; a fundamental aspect of transformation is liberation;
(iv) The presence of the gospel community in any society prompts serious questioning (inside and outside the community) about the precise nature of the unfreedom or frustration prevalent in that society;
(v) Such questioning means, for the Church, an openness to non-theological analyses of its context, if it is to avoid compromising its own calling to catholicity.

The challenge posed by contemporary 'theologies of liberation' emerges as a result of taking all these considerations with entire seriousness in one peculiarly unfree and constrained social setting.

2. Theologies of Liberation

Gustavo Gutiérrez, in his now classical exposition, *A Theology of Liberation*, 10 insists that this theology 'offers not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology'. In effect it proposes that theologians follow the social scientists in recognising that the intellectual structures they develop are determined in varying ways and degrees by the social structures they inhabit. Not to recognise this is to continue in unacknowledged bondage to the existing social order. It is in this sense that, to borrow the title of Juan Luis Segundo's major work, the theology of liberation may be the liberation of theology;11 it sets theology free to perceive more truly where it stands in relation to the facts of social life. Theology is not an 'innocent' thing with no political constraints or effects. Like all systems of ideas, it is in fact operating in somebody's interest, and so long as it is blind to this truth it will operate in the interests of the status quo (because it is in the interest of the status quo not to be questioned, analysed and relativised). But once theologians grasp their dependence upon social and economic realities, once they accept the relativising of social order by social and economic analysis, they can now decide whether or not to be consciously allied with
existing power structures: there is no possible neutral stance. This kind of ‘liberation’ is likely to occur in societies where acute conflict is already present, provoking increasingly sharp criticism of prevailing power structures. Thus, in Latin America, the failure of ‘development’ programmes in the fifties and sixties led to a more radical challenge to the status quo, more demands for revolutionary social reconstruction. As revolutionary awareness grows, the deep refusal to accept ‘our situation as dominated peoples’ presents the Church with the question, ‘In whose interest do you work and speak?’ ‘Liberation theology’ replies by proclaiming its commitment to the poor, its belief in what has been called the ‘hermeneutical privilege’ of the poor and powerless. This means that the interpretative work of theology moves in two directions. Firstly, it arises out of present concrete engagement with the poor; it struggles to understand their situation and its claims, and the action necessary to transform and humanise it. As Hugo Assmann puts it, ‘the original ‘text’ has become our reality and our practice.’ Secondly, this ‘text’ is to be understood with reference to the classical texts of Christian tradition, but it is therefore the needs of the present situation which determine the questions to be asked of the tradition. The ‘truth’ of the deposit of Christian tradition is not some absolute and supra-historical given, but the viability and verifiability of Christian resources in creating an authentic and liberated humanity.

This is how ‘theologies of liberation’ see the hermeneutical circle, the presuppositions governing the reading of text and tradition. And if it is objected that there is danger of making this a vicious circle, the reply can only be in terms of some such argument as has been set out in section I above: a dramatically and perceptibly new humanity has been brought into being in the event of Christ, and Christianity exists because of the conviction that this is what decisively liberated humanity looks like. This can never be a neutrally demonstrable conviction, because its verification can only be in historical action. Theological interpretation derives from ‘the spiritual power of metaphorical language creating intermediate structures for overcoming injustice, pain, and meaningless’ and to experience and work with this power depends upon present commitment to the overcoming of injustice, pain and meaningless.

It is when we consider the framing of the questions we need to put
to the tradition that the problem arises most clearly of the use of non-theological tools in the analysis of the present situation. Among such tools, the most immediately controversial is Marxism. Segundo\(^9\) claims that anyone now engaged in serious analysis of society is in some degree 'Marxist', since Marx is responsible for a decisive change of direction in social understanding: we cannot now ignore the crucial lesson of his reversal of accepted notions of the relation between history and social reality. We are—at the very least—bound to work with some of his suspicion about the interests being served by ideological constructs. And in a setting where—as already observed—conflict of interest is massive and violent, these suspicions are bound to be more deeply felt; so that in such a situation the person seeking an understanding of society will be more noticeably 'Marxist' (in Segundo's sense) than might be the case elsewhere.

This is threatening to the theologian (especially the theologian living in a less visibly conflict-ridden context) because it is—rightly—seen as relativising theological utterances and thus undermining religious certainties. But the liberationist might reply that such relativisation is not a problem: theologies ought to be relative to their context. What should worry the theologian is not this, but how his or her reflection relates to the context, whose side it is on. Theological certainty is inseparable from commitment to a particular human project; theological truth is inseparable from the durability of that project. There is no other kind of absoluteness in our history.

How far orthodox Marxism enters into the detailed analysis of the situation and the definition of the liberating project is evidently a matter for considerable disagreement. J. P. Miranda's efforts\(^9\) to construct a fairly comprehensive synthesis of Marx and biblical theology have met with some scepticism. Sometimes Latin American writers seem far removed from the bitter debates of contemporary European Marxism, assuming very readily that Marx is capable of a generally 'humanistic' reading.\(^1\) In any case, a satisfactory Marxist account of the Latin American situation will lean heavily on Leninist theories of imperialism as well as on Marx himself; and the spread of liberation theology to areas other than Latin America has already run up against problems connected with the application of classical Marxism to Asian or African societies.\(^2\) But these questions are secondary, and cannot be treated here in detail. Two points should
be borne in mind:

(i) that the theologians cannot honestly evade the challenge posed by what might best be called ‘post-Marxist’ accounts of their relation to social reality and social conflict, and

(ii) where the practical drive towards a ‘renewed humanity’ or a freer society is concretely bound to Marxist-inspired political action, opting for a particular view of the human project will involve choices for or against Marxism. Despite repeated accusations from European and North American critics, this need not mean an identification of the Kingdom of God with a ‘Marxist utopia’, or a total politicisation of the Christian gospel.

One of the factors which should warn us against any such simplistic view of the relation between Marxism and liberation theology is the importance given by Latin American writers to the ‘base community’ or ‘grass-roots community’. Originally conceived as groups spearheading pastoral and educational effort among the masses, they have come to be seen more and more as a ‘revolutionary vanguard’, an agency for the raising of political consciousness. At this level, they are obviously open to analysis by unsympathetic observers as a manipulative elite of a vaguely Leninist kind. However, this seems a rather reductive account of what is intended. Segundo appeals to the biblical model in which the quality of life of the minority (‘sect’ or ‘elite’, to use the pejorative terms) is itself part of the agency which opens up new possibilities for the masses. The minority does not simply aim at an immediate mobilisation of the majority for purposes defined by the elite; the task of the committed ‘base community’ is simply the consistent living out of a radical, inevitably political, but also reflective, prayerful and sacramentally oriented, Christian discipleship. And it lives with the constant likelihood of ‘defeat on the quantitative level’.

What all this seems to indicate is a commitment to something which no purely ‘orthodox’ Marxism takes account of—the role of symbolic or sacramental reality, not in a simple cultic sense, but as a sign of possible futures in an unfree present. Here we can perhaps talk of an anticipation of the Kingdom in the Church, and refer back to our earlier discussion: a qualitative shift in human possibilities has occurred, and is being witnessed to; the judgment passed by the coming of God’s Kingdom is already active in the existence of a
community committed to what Herzog has called ‘God’s praxis’.  

Both theologically and socially, then, the self-aware minority has a highly significant role. It will live in a relentlessly dialectical situation if it is to avoid becoming enclosed, self-obsessed and exclusive—‘elitist’ in the common colloquial sense—and anti-socialist; its life must always be a response to the perceived and analysed condition of the mass society around, though its resources will not be only those of that society. And this latter fact points to a further dimension of the significance of that ‘base community’: its reality is not constructed from above, by delegation of power from state or sovereign, but expresses the social creativity of free persons. It is a beginning of that process which Paolo Freire, and many Latin American theologians in his wake, have called ‘becoming the subject of one’s own history’.

What is more, it breaks through the sterile alternatives often presented of ‘individual liberty’ or ‘mass collectivism’, the unfettered freedom of the isolated individual or the unrestricted sovereignty of the state. ‘The church functions as an intermediate structure between individuals or smaller units of society (like the nuclear family) and the state.’  

Such an ‘intermediate structure’ is a way of restoring power to those stripped of it by oppressive state authority, while underlining the truth that power does not properly belong to individuals in isolation, but is a function of the self-ordering of groups. Thus the grass-roots community, which is, for the Latin American theologian, the most authentic manifestation of the Church’s reality, is the manifestation of a destiny open to all, a pattern of just relationship in which, because power is genuinely shared, the need for individual assertion and domination (the root impulse of capitalism) has vanished.

Since the tension between small-group patterns of relation and mass-society patterns is endemic in human society, the goal is not a simple transformation of mass society into a wholly self-aware power-sharing group (which would be impossible): in this sense, liberation theology does not (as is often claimed by its critics) look for a full realisation of the Kingdom of God in history. What it does look for is a force which will consistently battle against the ‘inertia’ of mass society, repeatedly challenge its patterns of power and dominance, in the effort to push the mechanisms of mass society towards operating in favour of the disadvantaged. The minority group, it could be said,
is always insisting that prevailing power structures are to be challenged to justify themselves in terms of their capacity to preserve the dignity, welfare and self-determination of people at large. When such justification is not forthcoming (as it is not in the 'development'-oriented thinking of Latin American politics in the last few decades), the minority becomes a revolutionary force, part of the movement to reconstruct power patterns. Thus it keeps open the possibility for all of deepening what Segundo sees as 'minority-type' experience and action—self-involving, self-determining action—without making the simplistic demand that all societies should be 'small groups'.

This is a complex and debated area in theologies of liberation. There is some justification in the charge that a consistent theory of the relation between church and society has yet to be worked out, and that there is a lack of detailed proposals for a revised political philosophy. The liberationist would reply that theory of this sort can only emerge as political praxis generates from within the pressure towards clarification. What matters more is to be clear about the present role of the minority or 'vanguard' group, and the spiritual and political demands placed upon it; because this is where the new humanity, humanity taking the fullest possible responsibility for itself, is most plainly visible.

However, this emphasis does at least establish an important negative presupposition for any subsequent political theory. The life of society at large cannot be regarded in terms of a 'pre-established harmony': politics belongs to history not nature. Thus there are no social (or national?) structures and forms of association that are absolutely given, and it is a mistake to think of society in organic terms, as a kind of living 'biological' unit. In practice, that is the path towards Hobbes' Leviathan. Any serious political theory must give central place to the recognition that political structures are made by human beings—even if it will also be bound to grant that, in important respects, human beings are made by the political structures which in fact determine their possibilities. But one of the contributions which a specifically Christian stance can make at this point is to insist that the power of human beings to construct their own historical future is inalienable, because it is rooted in the divine image in men and women; no de facto limitation of possibilities can actually destroy this potential. Ultimately, a belief in the possibility
of liberation rests upon the belief that it is God and not any existing social form which fundamentally defines human existence.

To sum up this second section:

(i) Theologies of liberation invite theologians to understand the socio-political factors affecting their work;
(ii) Thus they also summon theology to choose for or against the disadvantaged, and to reconstruct their principles of interpretation accordingly;
(iii) In framing the questions they now wish to address to the tradition in which they stand, they will be bound to take into account non-theological analyses of the social situation, especially those offered by Marxism;
(iv) But this does not mean a reductive politicisation of the gospel: the ‘sacramental’ role of the dedicated minority community remains central;
(v) The character and vocation of such a group defines a direction both for ecclesiology and for political theory overall.

3. Liberation Theologies and the Anglican Tradition

The title of this section might suggest to many that the discussion was going to be very brief indeed. At first sight, the kind of theology described in section 2 is dramatically different from what has commonly passed for theology in Anglican circles. It is true that individual members of the Anglican Communion have produced work which can be identified as within a ‘liberationist’ style; but this has the clear character of response to stimulus from the writings of those quite outside Anglicanism, rather than any kind of development of native Anglican themes.

Several reasons might be given for this. The first and most blindingly obvious is that, in the period when Anglicanism was emerging as a distinctive phenomenon, the English Church for the most part allied itself with a theory of absolute sovereign right vested in the monarch and the state apparatus—and thus with an assumption of absolute givenness in the political structure. Gradually, the conception of the Church of England ‘by law established’ came to mean that the church was understood to exist by licence of the sovereign (though the original sense of the expression is different), and therefore had no rights over against the state. What the church can do,
what it can require of its members, is not for it to decide independently of the sovereign power—and, as has been pointed out, this is a principle not restricted in application to the Church of England only. However, since the Church of England was for a good while after the Reformation the only fully legally recognised ecclesiastical body in the state, it was (and is) assumed that the control of the law over its internal working should be tighter than it is where other bodies are concerned. The overall result of this has been increasingly evident in the vicissitudes of the Church of England during this present century in its efforts to secure a reform of its liturgy: and some of the popular assumptions loosely connected with this attitude to legal control emerged crudely and vocally in controversies over the Church's political stance in 1982.

Thus Anglicanism within the United Kingdom has historically been associated with a political theory and practice entirely inimical to that commended and fought for by the theologies of liberation. The challenge represented by this recognition cannot be evaded simply by appeal to the Anglican provenance of 19th century 'Christian Socialism'. The name is, in fact, very deeply misleading: although the movement reacted strongly against the worst excesses of laissez-faire capitalism and supported the idea of co-operative labour and free workers' associations of a trade union kind, its leaders were basically conservative monarchists, with a markedly hierarchical view of society. F.D. Maurice asserted that 'The State is as much God's creation as the Church', and summed up his political commitment as being 'to monarchy, aristocracy and socialism.'

The sovereign is directly answerable to God: the English Reformation, by stressing this fact, represents not so much the 'establishment' of the Church as 'the establishment of the State on a firm basis'. Maurice, despite these views, was not a believer in the divine right of monarchs, and clearly had some idea of proper limitation upon sovereign rights; but it is almost impossible to extract from his writings a rationale for such a qualification.

The whole tenor of Maurice's work is anti-pluralist and even theocratic. Although the Church does not stand at the executive summit of society, this is not because it is seen as a voluntary body within society: on the contrary, the Church cannot govern precisely because the Church is not a body separable from the State. What the
Church does is to reveal the nature of the deepest spiritual bonds between persons as children of God, which provide the overarching context for other forms of human association. The family, the nation, the state are all—so to speak—dim reflections of that unity which the Church reveals. None of them makes sense without reference to the Church and thus to God: there can be no autonomous secular human associations.

Maurice thus denies priority to human liberty in the creation of political forms (though he certainly grants that the goal of social order is personal 'liberty' of some kind); he denies the contingency—and thus the liability to criticism—of existing power patterns; and he denies the reality of class-conflict, of clashes of interest that cannot be resolved in society as it is presently ordered. He has little grasp of economic matters, and (like many of his fellow Christian Socialists) shows no sign of being aware of Marx. He is very much a believer in 'pre-established harmony'. Indeed, J.M. Ludlow, his friend and associate, a man far more attuned to the concerns of secular socialism, could criticise Maurice's 'Platonism'—his belief in the priority of ideal unities, only distantly related to existing social fact. There can be no denying Maurice's stature as a theologian and teacher, but it is important not to be blind to the manifold weaknesses of his political thinking. Unfortunately, it was highly congenial to the Victorian liberal Anglican temperament, and benevolent paternalism of a Mauricean kind had become, by the turn of the century, something of an orthodoxy among the leaders of the English Church. Its popularity was much assisted by the prevalence of a theology, which (like Maurice's own) saw the incarnation as the crown of God's purpose in creation rather than a divine response to sin and fallenness. A certain merging of grace with nature is perceptible—encouraged by evolutionary philosophy and certain kinds of idealist metaphysics.

This is the 'mental set' of a great many influential figures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—Westcott and Gore are outstanding here—though few if any shared Maurice's frankly hierarchical views to the full, or saw the state as as embryonic Church. Their general position was a compound of real indignation at the effects of industrial capitalism and a belief in the possibilities of amelioration in accord with the vision of harmony implied in a
theology of Christus Consummator, the Christ in whom all things cohere. The organisation which, from the 1880s, represented this consensus was the Christian Social Union. Once again, its links with and understanding of secular socialism were not extensive, and its political theory was rudimentary; but it played a serious part in the slow shift of educated opinion in Britain towards a belief in legal intervention on behalf of the poor.

Others took the underlying political and economic problems rather more seriously. Explicit commitment to the revolutionary reordering of society and the dissolution of capitalism characterised somewhat smaller and less ‘establishment’ groups such as the Guild of St. Matthew. The Church Socialist League (founded in 1906), having begun as something of a protest against the CSU, ran into many of the same difficulties, but, after the First War, the League for the Kingdom of God (1923) attracted many former CSL supporters with a more radical platform. An earlier split from the CSL, the Catholic Crusade (1912), led by that remarkable figure, Conrad Noel, was perhaps the most outspokenly left-wing among these groups, before and after the war; but after 1929 it was deeply divided (and eventually collapsed) over the question of attitudes to Stalinism. Noel remained generally loyal to the Soviet Union, though he was not completely uncritical of Stalin; Trotskyists, however, were steadily squeezed out during the 1930s.19

It is probably in the writings of this last group that we find the closest parallel to the work of liberation theologians—not least in statements about the eucharistic community as a sign of the coming just order and even as ‘a centre of training for the group’.49 When allowance has been made for the often breathtaking political and economic naivety of the Crusade, it is still clear that they saw more plainly than any comparable group the need to tackle the domination-liberation motif in social and theological reflection. It is worth noting too that this made them abidingly hostile to what they saw as the oppressive power structures of Roman Catholicism: they tended to look to a loosely-defined mediaeval ideal in their thinking about church order and church-state relations—the ‘free church in the free state’—critical alike of Erastians and papalists in the Church of England.

This is not very fully developed, but mention of it leads to con-
sideration of one Anglican writer who did explore this subject with some depth and sophistication. J.N. Figgis (1866-1919), both as a teacher of history at Cambridge and later as a member of the Mirfield community, developed a comprehensive reading of the evolution of political theory, especially in the late mediaeval and renaissance periods, in terms of a struggle between two models of authority in society. One, heavily dependent upon Roman law, and associated with the theory and practice of the mediaeval papacy, assumed an absolutist view of sovereignty: the sovereign authority is supreme 'in all causes' within a unified political body, and all forms of association within this unit exist only by grant or concession from the sovereign. In the church, this was held to apply to universities, cathedral chapters and religious orders: although for certain purposes treated as 'legal persons', their corporate reality is a fiction dependent upon the sovereign's will, and their rights as corporations are capable of being dissolved by the sovereign's will. The other theory, less tightly articulated, looks back to Germanic common law: its assumption is that the primary political unit is the voluntary 'corporation', the local or specialised society. State authority simply means that, in an association of such associations (an association essentially fluid and dependent upon a variety of factors such as language or geography), power is delegated to the unifying structure in order to balance the claims and order the relations of the smaller units. In this perspective rights can, in certain circumstances, be claimed against the state, because the sovereign state power is not their source.

The emergence of identifiable nation states in the later middle ages led to a struggle against the 'Romanist' picture of authority emanating from the Pope; and within the Church itself, conciliarism made a bid for federalism and decentralisation in ecclesiastical matters. However, thanks largely to the vigour of the papalist reaction to all this, nation states found themselves increasingly unable to defend their rights without transferring to their own rulers the absolute sovereignty formerly given to the Pope. This absolutism is further confirmed by Machiavelli's dismissal of the concept of natural law as a check on sovereign power. And because there is as yet no sense of the legitimacy of a religiously pluralistic society, the state's power of religious coercion is thus established.

Figgis' tentative conclusions touching the 20th century situation
seem to be as follows. The religiously monolithic state has long since broken down, and its breakdown (certainly in English legal history) has immediate implications for the theory of absolute sovereignty: the existence of toleration for the free Churches reintroduces into political life the principle of voluntary association and only by a transparent fiction ('what the law permits it commands') can this be reconciled with the old theory of sovereignty. Given this, the only ground upon which the Church of England can now justify its existence (when it can no longer take for granted a position as the sole legitimate religious body in the state, cannot appeal to any status as part of an international organisation with its own 'sovereign' in the Pope, and must in consequence take seriously its character as a voluntary association) is a federalist theory of ecclesiastical unity and authority—a new 'conciliarism'. We might add that the development of the Anglican Communion itself in the last 150 years shows just this implicit move towards pluralism and detachment from the monolithic state; the constitutional question of the rights of the General Synod of the Church of England, however, is by no means settled in the minds of many. And the implication of what Figgis is saying is that thinking through the relation of Church and state in this way carries with it an embryonic political theory: we cannot consistently be federalists in our ecclesiology and absolutists in our politics. It might even be said that the Anglican Christian has a peculiarly direct reason for adopting a strongly syndicalist view of political power and of the rights of associations over against an encroaching state.

Figgis recognised that this was a double-edged weapon: it can be kidnapped by reactionary forces unless complemented by a carefully worked-out theory of justice as a balance of rights, and the state's authority to rectify imbalances—especially in the economic area. Figgis largely ignores economics (and once again, seems innocent of any knowledge of Marx), and this dimension of political order and the exercise of authority is something which he barely touches on. But there is no inherent contradiction between what he says and Marx's insistence that the state must in some circumstances be administered on behalf of the proletariat, to rectify the imbalance of interest in bourgeois society. For Marx, of course, this is the stage prior to the 'withering-away' of the state; when there are no more
collisions of interest, it no longer has a function.\textsuperscript{48} But for anyone unconvinced that such a situation is conceivable, the concept of the state as arbiter has a more lasting value; and for those unwilling to see every social conflict as a class conflict, the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat will need some qualification.

These are lines for further discussion. Figgis' concern with the history of constitutional theory and practice, with the thought of mediaeval canonists and with the church controversies of the turn of the century seems very far from the world of liberation theology. Yet it may be worth paying some attention to a quintessentially Anglican thinker whose overriding theoretical interest is to establish what we have earlier characterised as a principle of inalienable —and potentially ‘revolutionary’, though it is hard to imagine Figgis writing in such terms—\textit{creativity} in socio-political relations. He goes a good way towards turning Maurice on his head, showing that Anglicanism is not intrinsically committed to a belief in ‘pre-established’ harmonies and hierarchical or paternalist models of authority, and retrieving an alternative history and ‘prehistory’ of the Anglican ethos.\textsuperscript{49}

We cannot claim that one or the other of these is the ‘essence’ of Anglicanism. But we do need to ‘liberate’ Anglican theology decisively from captivity to one style of historic English polity if Anglicanism is to engage with the emergent theologies of the third world without completely forgetting its roots or submerging its identity. This paper has sought to show that liberation theologies are genuinely anchored in the assumptions behind any serious preaching of the gospel, and that they do not necessarily reflect a wholesale political reduction of that gospel; in this final section some attempt has been made to see why it is at first so hard to connect the world of ‘historic Anglicanism’ with theologies of the poor—but also to propose some tentative foundations for bridge building. It may be unlikely that the Church of England, or the Episcopal Church in the United States, or any of the non-third world Anglican bodies will produce a ‘liberation theology’ as such: the social situation, for all its parallels, is different, and it is not self-evident that in any of these contexts a revolutionary situation prevails. However, this is not an alibi for ‘northern’ theology; if what has been said above in section I is true, the obligation remains to analyse patterns of domination and
deprivation as obstacles to the transformation offered by the gospel, and to refuse collusion with repressive or regressive theories of state authority and economic organisation. In this sense, the theologies of liberation summon all of us to a theological critique of our social context, and to a more historically concrete understanding of the pressures of the coming Kingdom.

NOTES

1. For example, Galatians 4:3, 8-9.
2. Romans 6 and 7, passim.
4. John 1:9-11, 9:39-41, etc.
5. The fallacy of regarding the communication of the gospel as based on the communication of information is as much a preoccupation of liberationist writers as it was for Bultmann. The crucial difference in what this preoccupation mean will, I hope, emerge as we proceed.
8. A point made by various liberation theologians against writers like Bultmann; and a similar criticism could be levelled against more recent liberal and radical writers. See, eg. N. Lash's discussion of Hans Kung in Theology on Dover Beach, London 1979, pp.122-33.
10. London 1974, pp.6-15
11. See n. 6, supra; Segundo's introduction makes it plain that the book is intended to address basic questions of method and epistemology.
12. See Segundo, op. cit., p. 34, n. 9, etc.
15. Ibid., p. 104.
18. Frederick Herzog, Justice Church. Maryknoll, N.Y. 1980, p. 31
21. Many Latin American writers seem, for instance, reluctant to engage with the kind of Marxism represented by Althusser though Miranda has some discussion of this.
22. Assmann, op. cit., p. 140, has some reflections; for a rather more detailed discussion of one case in point, see R. W. Sandburg, Marxist Views on India in Historical Perspective, 1976. Apart from the Latin American debate, there is also a fair amount of literature on the Caribbean situation.
24. This conclusion is accepted, in broad outline, by Dennis P. McCann, op cit., pp. 225-7, and 232-3 (n. 8); for Segundo’s defence against such an account, see Segundo, op. cit., pp. 192, 199, 217.
25. Ibid., pp. 228ff.
26. Ibid., p. 231.
29. Ibid., p. 113.
33. This attitude of an influential section of British society to this question, and the governing assumptions about the state’s power over the Church are vividly illustrated by the abstracts from the 1881 Parliamentary debate on the Prayer Book Protection Bill reproduced in No Alternative. The Prayer Book Controversy, ed. David Martin and Peter Mullen, Oxford 1981, pp. 206-226.
36. From a piece in the Daily News, Aug. 22, 1868; Davies, op. cit., p. 121.
38. Ibid., p. 139.
41. His two major technical studies are The Divine Right of Kings, Cambridge 1914, and From Gerson to Grotius, Cambridge 1916.
42. See Churches in the Modern State, ch. 2.
43. From Gerson to Grotius, pp. 70, 71ff.
44. Ibid., pp. 97-103.
45. Churches in the Modern State, ch. 4.
46. See the extraordinary remarks of C.H. Sisson in the Spectator, 2nd May 1981 reprinted in Martin and Mullen, op. cit., p. 230: 'Parliament can do as it likes, and will do, if sufficiently moved... (Britain) will not stand more than a certain amount of nonsense in the name of religion'. (my emphasis).