Jukka Raunu

The Mediated Immediacy

João Batista Libanio and the Question of Latin American Liberation Theology

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Theologian, liberation theology doesn't exist.
It comes from getting theological,
And that's all there is to it.
Theology is made when we get theological.
And if we look back
We can see the path we have taken
But will never tread again.

Teólogo, não há teologia da libertação.
A TdL se faz ao teologar-se e nada mais.
E ao teologar-se, faz-se teologia
e ao voltar a vista para trás,
vê-se o caminho já trilhado
que nunca mais se repetirá.

Teologia da libertação, 282
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Abstract

This study is a systematic analysis of “mediated immediacy” in the production of the Brazilian professor of theology João Batista Libanio. He stresses both ethical mediation and the immediate character of the faith.

Libanio has sought an answer to the problem of science and faith. He makes use of the neo-scholastic distinction between matter and form. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, God cannot be known as a scientific object, but it is possible to predicate a formal theological content of other subject matter with the help of revelation. This viewpoint was emphasized in neo-Thomism and supported by the liberation theologians. For them, the material starting point was social science. It becomes a “theologizable” or “revealable” (revelabile) reality.

This social science has its roots in Latin American Marxism which was influenced by the school of Louis Althusser and considered Marxism “a science of history”. The synthesis of Thomism and Marxism is a challenge Libanio faced, especially in his Teologia da libertação from 1987. He emphasized the need for a genuinely spiritual and ethical discernment, and was particularly critical of the ethical implications of class struggle.

Libanio’s thinking has a strong hermeneutic flavor. It is more important to understand than to explain. He does not deny the need for social scientific data, but that they cannot be the exclusive starting point of theology. There are different readings of the world, both scientific and theological.

A holistic understanding of the nature of religious experience is needed. Libanio follows the interpretation given by H. C. de Lima Vaz, according to whom the Hegelian dialectic is a “rational circulation” between the totality and its parts. He also recalls Oscar Cullmann’s idea of God’s Kingdom that is “already” and “not yet”. In other words, there is a continuous mediation of grace into the natural world.

This dialectic is reflected in ethics. Faith must be verified in good works. Libanio uses the Thomist fides caritate formata principle and the modern orthopraxis thinking represented by Edward Schillebeeckx. One needs both the
“ortho” of good faith and the “praxis” of the right action. The mediation of praxis is the mediation of human and divine love. Libanio’s theology has strong roots in the Jesuit spirituality that places the emphasis on contemplation in action.
Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation on a Latin American theme is, without doubt, a time-consuming operation. There is no gain without at least a slight amount of pain, and the same holds for an academic work.

The challenge to write something, or anything, on the issue of liberation theology carries a double difficulty. One must be aware of the ambiguities of politics and philosophy, and also be well informed about popular and social Catholicism, new ecclesial groups and the history of theology. One stands on the top of the mountain from where many views are possible. This is one of them.

My interest in Brazil was kindled during a trip in 1990–1991 and has continued ever since. I had the opportunity to study at the Post-Graduate Institute of the Escola Superior de Teologia of the Lutheran Church of the Evangelical Confession in Brazil during the academic year 1996. Most of my time was spent, however, gathering the material for a future study, which now lies before you.

First of all I wish to thank Professor J. B. Libanio himself for giving me access to the material I needed for the study. With the help of Mr. Alex Fabiano de Toledo, a student, I was able to process a complete bibliography of Libanio’s production in the past century, which is my topic. I was also able to meet Libanio in São Leopoldo, and to visit his institution in Belo Horizonte. Professors Peter Hünemann and Bernd-Jochen Hilberath in Tübingen helped me to put Libanio’s theology in its Catholic perspective.

Academic colleagues in Finland have been of invaluable help. Professor Miikka Ruokanen was responsible for starting the project “Gospel and Cultures”, which helped to finance my first year of doctoral studies at the University of Helsinki. During his time abroad, assistant professor Pauli Annala contributed to the study with his knowledge of both classical and modern theology. Professor Vesa Oittinen has provided a good understanding of postwar Marxism. Assistant professor Timo Vasko examined the text during the final process of having it approved as a doctoral dissertation.
Mrs. Joan Nordlund adeptly revised the translation. She is not, however, responsible for any stylistic inadequacy, or for the voluntary choices I have made in the editing process.

I wish to express my gratitude to the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, the Academy of Finland, the Research Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Parish of Myllykoski, the university fraternity Hämäläis-Osakunta, the Foundation for the Support of Christian Science and Art, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for making this study financially possible. The time has come to give something back to the community, whether it be this greater community, or the ones in which I live and work.

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1. Introduction

1.1. João Batista Libanio and liberation theology in Brazil

J. B. Libanio (1932–) has been working as Professor of Fundamental Theology at the Jesuit school in Belo Horizonte. Most of his production belongs to liberation theology, or at least is part of the liberation theology debate.¹ He is not as well-known as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, who have been the most famous Brazilian liberation theologians, or as Gustavo Gutiérrez, who coined the term “liberation theology” with his publication of Teología de la liberación in 1971. Libanio’s writings from 1977 to the early 1980’s are the most strongly representative of the movement. His books from the later 1980’s, such as Teologia da libertação (TdL, 1987), are interesting contributions because they are both critical and informative. Since the 1990’s, liberation theology has gradually ceased to be an issue in his writings, and in 2003 he spoke of it in the past tense.²

The discussion on liberation theology was very lively in the 1970’s and 1980’s. The Boff brothers, Leonardo and his younger brother Clodovis, were among its leading proponents. Their contributions have helped to further understanding of the epistemological process that is based on the methodology of Catholic Action: “see–judge–act”: one “sees” the praxis with the help of Marxist social analysis and goes on to “judge” it in theological terms. The process leads back to “acting” in new praxis.

Two principal types of criticism have been raised against the liberation theological method. Firstly, it has been considered predominantly or even

¹ See Ferm 1988, 159–163. He mentions Spiritual Discernment and Politics (=SDP, 1992) and Fé e política (FP, 1985). Politics, or political (liberation) theology is, indeed, a central theme in these books. Not many of Libanio’s books have been translated, and if so, mostly into Spanish or Italian. This is perhaps due to the fact that he has not wanted to advocate political change as strongly as, for example, Hugo Assmann and Gustavo Gutiérrez. The latter kept the political line well into the 1980’s. Neither have more radical books, such as Leonardo Boff’s radical O caminhar da Igreja com os oprimidos (L. Boff 1988a, 1st ed. 1980), fitted the translators’ agenda. I wonder if this might be attributable to his ideas of “more easiness to obey the 10 commandments and the evangelical spirit in the Soviet Union” (p. 303), and the like.

² The past tense verb (era, “was”) in Olhando para o futuro is part of an apologetic of liberation theology, but it reveals a post hoc stance. “A teologia da libertação [...] em vez de ser marxista, era a mais cabal refutação do marxismo, ao valorizar a dimensão prática da fé cristã.” OF, 65. Cf. the same idea in the present tense in 2000: “A TdL é a melhor refutação do marxismo, ao querer mostrar a força mobilizadora da fé cristã [...]” IC, 137.
“exclusively” (J. C. Scannone\textsuperscript{3}) political, and secondly, it has been said that the theological hermeneutics is arbitrary, since it is too hermeneutic (V. Westhelle\textsuperscript{4}). We therefore have two interpretations: it is too scientific, or it is too hermeneutic, i.e. too philosophical.

Could we find another view? One could ask if liberation theology is too theological in addition to being very political. It is a curious mixture of both political hermeneutics and neo-scholastic, metaphysical epistemological thought. The term “mediated immediacy” means that the mediation of politics is balanced by the immediate theological aspect. The hermeneutic circle is guided by theological principles.

Libanio follows the general line of metaphysical realism. He believes that there is a unity of all that exists. It is possible to “take” this one and the same really existing being and to predicate something of it through various different forms of knowledge.\textsuperscript{5} The idea of fundamental unity is a metaphysical statement. It helps us see how Libanio relates to metaphysical realism and its concept of truth.\textsuperscript{6} The realist methodology makes it possible to detect God’s working in history and human reality even today. In other words, Libanio’s methodology is based on the notion of continuity of God and creation. It is common in liberation theology to refer to knowledge of reality, or praxis, as the “first step”, and of its interpretation as the “second step”. Libanio’s view is considered not only in the context of the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and his rather un-systematic methodology, but also in comparison with Clodovis Boff’s doctoral dissertation \textit{Teologia e prática}, the methodological magnum opus of the late 1970’s.

\textsuperscript{3} Scannone 1986, 145. See n. 851. For Libanio’s assessment of this (\textit{TdL}, 180), cf n. 861.
\textsuperscript{4} See n. 972.
\textsuperscript{5} The maxim is most definitely Libanio’s idea that sociological data is of the “same real” as theological knowledge: “É o ‘mesmo real’ visto sob ângulos de saberes diversos.” \textit{TdL}, 176.
\textsuperscript{6} Cf. Simon Blackburn’s characterization. According to Blackburn, metaphysical realism demands that there be one reality, but conscious minds may interpret it in various ways: “I suppose anything worth calling metaphysical realism might demand that there is one reality. Its constituents are debatable: a space-time continuum, physical inhabitants, perhaps more: possibilities or possible worlds, minds, classes, numbers, universals, and other disputed candidates. But why should realism demand that there is one true description? At first blush it might be like this: there is the one reality, and among its denizens are minds capable of representing the reality to themselves. There are, however, different ways of representing it: different minds may select different features, and some may select features which are either invisible or outrageously gerrymandered to others. So one reality can admit a plurality of descriptions. But this is no departure from metaphysical realism – just the addition of a sensible view about representation, according to which the way it is done will be partly a function of properties of the representing medium.” Blackburn 1994, 16.
Because liberation theology of the Boff type was posited as a theological interpretation of social science, the methodology is very far from both Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and the Putnamian type of “internal realism” and rather based on strong metaphysical realism. How, then, do we reconcile this with the idea that liberation theology begins with the “praxis”? One way of understanding the contradiction is to see the liberation theologians’ idea of “praxis” as objective reception, whereas pragmatist philosophies begin with the subject. In this sense, liberation theologians are very close to the Marxist notion of objective social science. Praxis (or practice) is an objective notion for Marxists, while pragmatists consider it subjective. This accounts for the Marxists’ critique of “pragmatism”.

The second chapter of this work is a background chapter, introducing the reader to neo-scholastic epistemology of the Cajetanian type as represented by Jacques Maritain and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, among others. It also deals with the most influential brand of Marxism in early-1970’s Latin America. We are talking about the interpretation of “historical materialism” disseminated by Louis Althusser and by the Chilean–Cuban author Marta Harnecker. The “Marxist analysis” in liberation theology equals Althusser’s concept of scientific Marxism, particularly in Clodovis Boff’s synthesis. This synthesis was based on both the Marxist “science of history” and neo-scholastic formal logic.

The first chapter on Libanio, Chapter 3, is based on his fundamental theological thinking. I am interested in showing how Libanio deals with the questions of revelation and faith, and of nature as a counterpart to revelation. His fundamental theology has a Thomist structure: analogical knowledge helps to show the reality “in the light of the faith”. However, a strong Augustinian emphasis on existential faith is in continuous tension with the onto-theology.

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7 C. Boff (1998, 399) in his new phase continues along these lines, seeking to “avoid (evitar) pragmatism in the field of theology”. This apparent contradiction makes sense given that Marxism never valued pragmatism in spite of the talk about “praxis”. Soviet philosophers, according to Niiniluoto (1989, 65) thought that pragmatists “inflated an active and voluntarist anthropology” and “interpreted the practice [i.e. praxis] in a subjective way”. Likewise, the critical Polish philosopher Kolakowski (1971, 59) remarked that Engels’ philosophy invoked “the effectiveness of human actions as a criterion” in contrast to the pragmatism of W. James, which “introduces the concept of practical usefulness as a factor in the definition of truth”. It is obvious that orthodox Marxists could not be pragmatists because a “criterion” necessarily was an objective yardstick. For Kolakowski’s interpretation of the Marxist concept of truth, see the whole article (ibid., pp. 59–87).

8 According to E. Dussel (1991, 130), Clodovis Boff’s influential dissertation TP is “perhaps the most systematic theological work which attempts to assume Althusser’s theory”. The ideas of the 1970’s French Marxism are used in a “strictly Christian theology of the political”. Liberation theology uses Marx’s categories in the same way as St. Thomas used Aristotle. See ibid., 140.
The fourth chapter explains how after his return from Europe in the late 1960’s, Libanio gradually changed from a critic of liberation theology to one of its moderate exponents. There was a visible change in 1977, evidenced in Libanio’s only English-language book *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*: it is part of the liberation theological movement, even if it remains rather ambiguous.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the way Libanio interpreted liberation theology. Was he against or in favor of Clodovis Boff’s theological and philosophical methodology which sprung from the results of social science? How did he react to the crisis of liberation theology in the early 1990’s? These questions are studied at length, and the reader also receives a lot of information about C. Boff’s liberation theology in general. The concepts of praxis and Marxist analysis are considered in detail. The main emphasis is on the book *Teologia da libertação* (1987), which is in fact a meta-discourse on liberation theology. The seventh chapter sheds light on the crisis in liberation theology.

This work on J. B. Libanio is a study of how he understands the “mediated immediacy”. That which is mediated is the spiritual experience of God. Libanio follows the transcendental thinking of Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, among others. He has personally contributed to an understanding of the mediated character of faith in today’s context. The “question of liberation theology” in the subtitle refers to this. Liberation theology has been criticized for being too mediated and political, but faith in its mystical immediacy always calls for mediation in ethical and political terms. The idea of “mediated immediacy” helps us to understand both the need for mediation and that which is mediated, the spiritual reality.

The meaning of “liberation theology” is not always very clear, however. Firstly, it is often referred to as being both a historical idea and a historical movement, both a theological model and true action by base communities, “conscientized” bishops and other clergy. There is no consensus concerning its true nature, either. Is there only one liberation theology, or had we better speak about many “LT’s”? The Argentinian Juan Carlos Scannone divided the phenomenon into four in the article he wrote in 1981. At one extreme was the completely Marxist–Leninist approach, and at the other was the liberation theology approved...
of by the Church. The Finnish scholar Elina Vuola stated in her dissertation in 1997 that only theology sufficiently deviant from ecclesial theology was truly liberation theology. In many respects, Vuola’s idea is accurate. There has certainly been opposition by the Magisterium against liberation theology ever since it started, the most vehement dating from 1984. In Central America, it has even been even possible to detect a “parallel magisterium” and “popular church”, as opposed to the hegemonic church. This is particularly true of Nicaragua.

In Brazil, however, the strong desire to keep liberation theology inside the walls of the Church prevailed well into the 1980’s. The progressive bishops Ivo Lorscheiter, president of the CNBB, and the cardinals Paulo Evaristo Arns and Aloísio Lorscheider followed Leonardo Boff to his trial in Rome, and kept supporting him when his venia docendi was lifted for a year. Many of the dioceses – but by no means all – supported base ecclesial communities (CEBs) and

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9 This four-fold division of liberation theology proposed by Juan Carlos Scannone (1983, 271–280) was largely accepted. The most radical liberation theologians were characterized as histmat-ists but not atheists. Libanio adopted Scannone’s four-fold division (TdL, 258–260):

1. liberation theologians accepted by the Church
2. [as the opposite] the radical liberation theologians (Hugo Assmann, et al.) who are committed to historical materialism and “revolutionary praxis”
3. the liberation theologians who are committed to the “historical praxis” (Gustavo Gutiérrez, et al.); according to Libanio (TdL, 259), this is very close to group 2, “próxima, mas distinta da anterior”
4. the liberation theologians who put an emphasis on cultural values and popular religion.

Walter Kasper argued in 1985 that the various liberation theologies were on a continuum, the extreme ends of which were an “instrumentalizing” politicalness and a theology approved by the church, respectively. Kasper stresses: “Es gibt nämlich nicht die Theologie der Befreiung, sondern nur höchst unterschiedliche Theologien der Befreiung.” Kasper 1986, 77–98, 77.

10 “It is even possible to speak of a liberation theological method. Especially in Latin American LT [liberation theology], it is assumed that the chosen praxis-based point of departure makes LT ‘a new way of doing theology’.” Vuola 1997, 221. Vuola (p. 44) had presented this as a central thesis of her study: “One of the arguments of this work is that in spite of the diversity in how liberation theologians understand the praxis and the relation between theory and praxis, it is possible to speak of a liberation theological method that is different enough from the tradition.” (Emphasis in the original.) This would mean that only theologians and theologies “different enough from the tradition” could be regarded as part of liberation theology. Another way to look at the question, and certainly a more genuine one, would be to say that it is precisely this relationship with the [Catholic] tradition that determines the nature of any and every breed of liberation theology. A superficial analysis of the language used is simply not enough. The same words can mean different things to different thinkers, and “moderate liberation theologians” like Libanio have had a stabilizing effect, particularly in Brazil.

11 The collection “Teologia e libertação” / “Teología y liberación” was supported by a “Comité de patrocinio” of 12 archbishops and 108 bishops, most of whom were Brazilians. It is interesting to see that not one of them was Argentinian, although there was D. Carlos Parteli, the retired Archbishop of Montevideo (Uruguay), and several bishops from Ecuador, Chile and the USA. See the list of committee members in EC, 7–10 (no page numbers, introduction). In 1986, The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, led by J. Ratzinger, banned the expansion of the series. The books have been reprinted at least in Brazil.

12 As Beozzo (1994, 241–242) remarks, J. Ratzinger only admitted the cardinals to the colloquium.
liberation theology.\textsuperscript{13} Leonardo Boff had his fierce opponents, too.\textsuperscript{14} The situation in the other countries was different from that in Brazil for many reasons. The anticlerical and anti-American spirit was stronger in Central America, the second home of liberation theology.

The Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to liberation theology as of 1972. Alfonso López Trujillo, a conservative and a productive theologian, became a central figure in the Church hierarchy, first as general secretary and later as president of the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM). There was a colloquium in Rome on March 2–6, 1975 that was directed against liberation theology and its corollary, the “Christians for Socialism” movement. Apart from Trujillo, the other strong opponents there were the Belgian-born Father Roger Vekemans and Bishop Hengsbach, head of the influential Adveniat Foundation.\textsuperscript{15} John Paul II, the new pope, had had first-hand experience of socialism in his native Poland, and gave his full support to the curbing of the liberationists’ influence. Brazilian society had started opening up to democracy by 1979, but incidents in the Roman Church pointed in the opposite direction. The “return to the great discipline” (\textit{a volta à grande disciplina}) was initiated. This term had been used by J. B. Libanio, and it was an expression used by the two new popes in the 1970’s, John Paul I and II.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} The negative Roman stance on liberation theology came to light when many liberation theologians were deprived of their teaching status. The other means of keeping the movement in check included closing down the local seminaries all over Latin America and nominating only conservatives as bishops. On this, see Beozzo 1993, 237–292. The archdiocese of Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns in São Paulo was divided into smaller parts in 1989 because the archbishop could not be dismissed. Beozzo (pp. 253–254) is critical of the fact that the anti-liberationist campaign continued after the Pope had called the open conflict to a halt.

\textsuperscript{14} Urbano Zilles, the principal of the PUCRS, filed a complaint about Boff’s theology in 1982 and said that the first problem was the Protestant liberal theology of the von Harnack – Ritschl type. Jesus becomes “a philanthropist, craftsman, revolutionary, existentialist and ethical teacher, and nothing else”. Cf. Brasilianische Bewegung für die Menschenrechte 1986, 15. John Burdick (2004, x) gives a personal account of how he felt at the time in the mid-1980’s. He had realized that “the attack on Boff, far from being the defensive manoeuvre of a cornered Church, was the Church’s first major offensive in a war that would eventually reveal its extraordinary staying power and the liberationists’ vulnerability”.

\textsuperscript{15} On this early campaign against liberation theology, see esp. Beozzo 1993, 137–139. The Christians for Socialism movement was forced to cease its activities in Chile after the Pinochet coup. After the coup, the Chilean bishops condemned it, but the movement was still active for some years, particularly in Italy and Spain. See e.g. the critical booklet Albani & Astrua 1977.

\textsuperscript{16} On how the opening up of society met with an ever more rigid official Roman Catholicism, see Beozzo 1993, 212. Beozzo (p. 293 n. 8) mentions Libanio’s \textit{A volta à grande disciplina} of 1983 by name. It was a “livro premonitório”, or a prophecy of the future problems non-conformist theologians would have to face.
Joseph Ratzinger, the present Pope Benedict XVI, started to lead the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1982. Liberation theology was officially condemned. A process was started against both Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff. The first instruction of 1984, *Libertatis nuntius* (LN), made it clear that the Church would not tolerate liberationist, Marxist jargon in its theology. The new instruction of March 1986, *Libertatis conscientia*, and particularly the Pope’s letter to the Brazilian bishops in April 1986 helped to ease the tension, since the Pope acknowledged liberation theology as “not only opportune but useful and necessary”.\(^{17}\) The original anathemas were not lifted, however. The “fall of the Wall” in Berlin on November 9, 1989 made John Paul II pronounce liberation theology dead on his trip to El Salvador in December of the same year.\(^{18}\) The new head of the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference CNBB, Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo, repeated this pronouncement to John Paul II as he visited Rome in 2003. The Pope could see that the Brazilian bishops were now following the Roman line.\(^{19}\)

Liberation theology has caused both “shock and awe”. The more critical voices have pointed out that people in Latin America have never really been interested in any Latin American brand of Christianity. José Comblin argues that the intention spelled the very death sentence of liberation theology, as it sought to separate from the European tradition. Not only were Latin Americans not fond of it, the central administration of the Church also started its campaign from above.\(^{20}\)

\(^{17}\) Beozzo 1994, 251–252; *TdL*, 31. In *TdL*, Libanio reflected on the delicate situation in the late 1980’s, which was characterized not only by the Pope’s positive signs, but by the continual mistrust (p. 32) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

\(^{18}\) The ex-activist of the Chilean Christians for Socialism movement Pablo Richard (2000, 253–254) gives a bitter account of this. He also criticizes Pope John Paul II for not remembering the Jesuits who were killed a week after the Berlin incident in November 1989. The famous liberation theologian, Spanish-born Ignacio Ellacuría, was one of them: “El 9 de noviembre 1989 cae el muro de Berlín, hecho simbólico de la crisis de los socialismos históricos. Es muy significativo que sólo 7 días después, el 16 de noviembre, son asesinados 6 jesuitas en El Salvador, que constituían un equipo cuya referencia fundamental era la TL. (El Papa poco después, en su visita a El Salvador, proclamó que la TL había muerto, sin mencionar siquiera el asesinato de 6 de sus mejores teólogos.)” In Finland, Elina Vuola (art. Vuola 2003) has been critical of the “death sentence” of liberation theology.

\(^{19}\) “O cardeal arcebispo de Salvador e presidente da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB), dom Geraldo Majella Agnelo, disse ao Papa que a ‘Teologia da Libertação teve seu tempo, deixou sua contribuição e se esgotou ali onde tinha que se esgotar’. A declaração foi oferecida ao Papa durante uma audiência no Vaticano e consta de um relatório aprovado no mês de maio pela assembléia da CNBB, afirmou o próprio cardeal em entrevista publicada hoje pela agência vaticana Fides.” Agência Efe 2003.

\(^{20}\) Comblin 1998a, 54: “However, it was dangerous to create the impression of wanting to move away from the entire Western tradition, because most Latin American Christians do not want to
The year 1990 marked the end of any general discourse on the liberation theology movement: support simply vanished when the Iron Curtain ceased to exist.\(^{21}\)

Yet, the movement had strong support in the Catholic Church of Brazil well into the 1980’s. The key person Leonardo Boff had been a leading theologian since the beginning of the 1970’s, and editor-in-chief of the main theological review, *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, since 1972. He was able to publish his books through the Franciscan publishing house Editora Vozes, as was his brother. He was a Franciscan until 1992. The Boff brothers had major roles in the 1970’s–80’s movement of the base ecclesial communities, which Libanio also joined.

What are the really controversial issues involved in liberation theology? According to Libanio, some liberation theologians have supported “methodological atheism”.\(^{22}\) What kind of role has Cuba with its atheistic agenda played here? It had been a distinctly Soviet-bloc country since the late 1960’s, with a scientific and atheistic constitution approved in 1975. Religion as a private matter was not banned, but “scientific” propaganda was disseminated against it.\(^{23}\) On the other hand, it gave the green light to liberation theology when it came into being in 1971 in Peru and Chile.\(^{24}\) This meant that some kind of theology –

\(^{21}\) “After 1990 a growing number of progressive Catholics seemed to give up on politics altogether. For many, the collapse of socialism in 1989–1991 felt like a violent body blow, and although liberationist theologians insisted that their vision was wedded not to Marx but to the poor, not to any single model of socialism but to the Kingdom of God, still the ‘triumph of capitalism’ in the autumn of 1989 and the defeat of the Sandinistas in February of 1990 left many liberationists reeling. Leonardo Boff himself wrote of ‘the general crisis of left-wing thought’ brought on by the collapse of socialism; the liberationist theologian Jon Sobrino wrote of ‘the closing of a period’.” Burdick 2004, 8. Cf. Comblin’s (2000, 186) statement to the effect that “Latin American theology still had the capacity to think of a synthesis until 1990”. He (p. 187) positively referred to *Mysterium Liberationis*, which was first published in 1990 in Spain, and negatively to Gutiérrez’s “revised” *TL* (1990) and the general process of revision and clarification among the liberation theologians.

\(^{22}\) TdL, 196.

\(^{23}\) The official line of Cuba was based on the Soviet model of scientific atheism. A commentary on Article 54 (the article on religion) of the Cuban constitution of 1975 states that scientific truths need to be propagated to “liberate” the people: “Más que el ateísmo descarnado hay que difundir la verdad científica y revolucionaria que, con las nuevas condiciones sociales creadas por la Revolución, libre material y espiritualmente al hombre.” Alvarez Tabio 1985, 211.

\(^{24}\) The Presbyterian pastor Sergio Arce Martínez explained in 1971, after liberation theology had come into the limelight, that a Christian needed to be fully committed to the Marxist revolution, or the “liberation à la Cuba”. This would help achieve development and assist the hungry of the world: “[...] la teología de la Revolución en su especificación, – más que justificante, demandada – de de teología de la Liberación. [...] Dicho en términos de la Jornada Camilo Torres – Habana, 1971 – ; ... se impone una identificación total del cristiano con la Revolución, no sólo por razones
liberation theology – could be associated with real socialism. The main contours of this historical background need to be understood. This study cannot go into the broad historical background, but it will help to shed light on the influence of Marxism in theoretical terms.

How have liberation theologians criticized each other? It is a well-known fact that Clodovis Boff’s highly scientific and dualistic methodology met with increasing criticism in Latin America in the 1980’s, culminating in Ignacio Ellacuría’s posthumous article in 1990. According to Ellacuría, the distinction between traditional and liberation theology, or the theology of the political, was not fruitful.25 As he and after him José Comblin argued, all theology ought to be contextual and liberating.

Many liberation theologians have been addressing the epistemological question in their self-criticism since the 1990’s. Perhaps the most characteristic – and profound – of these retractions is the one issued by Hugo Assmann, the ex-“Leninist” of liberation theology, in an article published in 2000. He makes a scathing assessment of earlier epistemological positivism, and confesses that he has given up the “frenzy of total answers”.26 In his view, discussion about liberation theology should be “in the past tense”, and he wonders if it really was (foi) a healthy phenomenon in human terms.27 The core of the matter is the liberation theological method of “seeing–judging–acting”, as if there were a direct road from perceiving reality to truly knowing it. The belief in the rising of the historical subject and revolution was part of the “virtual reality” of so-called real socialism.28 As early as 1970, as he watched horror films on Uruguayan TV with
Juan Luis Segundo, he had had to face the issue of positivism. There is no direct way from “seeing” to “judging”, no complete theory of correspondence in social matters. 29

A leading Lutheran ecumenist, Walter Altmann, brought to light some criticism against salvation historical hermeneutics. For some Lutherans at least, the notion of the salvific character of history is unfounded. In letting people believe so, liberation theology is “issuing a check that will bounce”. 30 This is the theological criticism concerning the classical analogia entis in historical terms.

Different brands of liberation theology share a common belief in the positive outcome of the “process of knowing”. It may be a question of “historical praxis” as a starting point or, as with Clodovis Boff, of “the praxis of knowing” as the Althusserian pratique théorique. Either way, there is a belief that the “thing as such”, the Ding an sich, is attained. Liberation theology is thus close to scholastic, pre-critical epistemology and also to Marxist orthodoxy and its objective epistemology. New literature, such as Marx ja Venäjä 31 (‘Marx and Russia’, 2006), has pinpointed major themes in the Marxist–Leninist philosophy of science. In this light, liberation theology is closer to the scientific than the humanistic Marxist tradition, which accounts for the fact that its “founding father”, Gustavo Gutiérrez, speaking humanistically of “praxis” and “critique” nevertheless quotes Louis Althusser’s works. Althusser’s scientism of the Far Left was indeed the line chosen by the revolutionaries in Allende’s Chile, as well as the approved line of the Castro administration.

How should one classify Libanio: as a liberation theologian, as a critical liberation theologian, or as a neutral mainline theologian? There are people such as

Juan Luis Segundo gave Assmann the idea that Alfred Hitchcock was in fact a great theologian with an understanding of the mythical. Segundo criticized the book Assmann was writing because he thought it was excessively positivistic and rather naïve. Later, when John Paul II’s encyclical Centesimus Annus criticized the anthropological fallacy of socialism, Assmann recalled the teachings of “master Juan Luis”. He had warned that no “see–judge–act” model could be systematically applied to human experiences. Assmann 2000, 116–118 (chapter “Saudade (nostalgia) das ironias de Juan Luis Segundo”). Assmann makes the psychologizing remark that the greatest change had been epistemological: the facts and truths of a human being are basically only “discursive constructions, by which a human being seeks to find a meaning in life”. Ibid., 127. After so many years on the revolutionary line, it is a lot to say.


the Brazilian professor Urbano Zilles who do not consider Libanio a liberation theologian at all, even though they do not fail to emphasize the moderate nature of his criticism. According to the U.S. professor Robert Schreiter, Libanio has always been “a friendly critic” of liberation theology. Walter Altmann once remembered some meetings of liberation theologians in previous years: Libanio tried to discourage the most triumphalistic liberationist views of the other participants.
1.2. Previous studies and the scope of this study

The basic contours of Libanio’s theology have not so far not been expounded in any doctorate-level study. Not much has been written about it in general, although he is often mentioned, particularly in Brazilian books on liberation theology.

Libanio is referred to in a major study on liberation theology conducted by Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade. His dissertation *Fé e eficácia: O uso da sociologia na teologia da libertação*, which he produced for the Gregorian University in Rome in 1989, was published in 1991. Andrade sees Libanio as a mainline liberation theologian of the late 1970’s, and considers his article “Teologia no Brasil: reflexões crítico-metodológicas” of 1977 a sign of the fact that he accepted the basic arguments of Clodovis Boff’s liberation theology. He thought it echoed Clodovis Boff’s study in some way. Libanio, however, emphasized the role of the Christian community as the birthplace of theological production, as distinct from the place in which theology was taught.

Like C. Boff, Libanio considers it to be the basic tenet of liberation theology to use data and categories “taken from the social sciences, to read them in the light of the revelation, in contact with the Christian Scriptures”. The main point in the article and in Andrade’s work is that theology is a “self-regulated” discipline in the sense that it is a discourse in its own right. This is evident in the way Libanio

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33 Teologia no Brasil: reflexões crítico-metodológicas. *PerTeol* 9 n. 17 (1977), 27-79. Quoted in Andrade 1991, 79. Andrade thought that Libanio was following the C. Boff line, yet emphasizing the community as the place where theology was born: “No ano seguinte, no Brasil, João Batista Libanio, teólogo jesuíta, publicava um longo artigo acerca da Teologia no Brasil que de certo modo faz eco ao estudo de Cl. Boff. Em seu artigo, em primeiro lugar, J. B. Libanio chama a atenção para a diferença entre o lugar de produção teológica e o lugar de ensino da teologia. Embora muitas vezes se identiquem, os dois lugares são distintos e deve-se superar esta identificação. A teologia é um discurso auto-regulado que tem como lugar de produção fundamental a praxis pastoral da Igreja local. A teologia é produzida antes de tudo na e para a comunidade.”

stresses the “scientificalness” and “syntactic freedom” of the discourse. Clodovis Boff also stressed theology as a “self-regulated” (auto-regrado) discourse.

Yet only a year earlier Libanio had published an article in which he expressly stressed the communitarian nature of theological discourse. He also stated that the starting point of theology was not other sciences but human experience in general. Theology operates “in its own peculiar way”. This article from 1976, unlike the one from 1977, could be interpreted as a strong criticism of Clodovis Boff and his “positivism”, even if C. Boff is not mentioned by name. For some reason, Andrade fails to mention this, although it is of crucial significance in terms of understanding Libanio either as a liberation theologian or as one of its critics.

According to Andrade, Libanio’s article of 1977 nevertheless corresponds very well to the “certain consensus” of Brazilian church history at that particular point, a consensus exemplified by Clodovis Boff’s liberation theological method. Andrade sought to prove this by suggesting that the three models for making theology demonstrated by Libanio were analogous to those put forth by C. Boff.

These models are the following:

1. the epistemic commitment (compromisso epistêmico) in accordance with which the way of making theology is determined by the liberating interest
2. the alternation of practical and theoretical moments, and finally

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35 Proper theological discourse is "self-regulated" and has its own rules, Libanio states, but he also stresses that it has its own scientific status: “O discurso propriamente teológico, por sua vez, é científico, auto-regulado. Tem suas regras internas. Possui um estatuto teórico definido. Não se permite a liberdade semántica e sintática de outros discursos religiosos. Cuida de sua cientificidade. É um discurso construído segundo uma gramática estabelecida. Discurso educado, disciplinado. Diz respeito diretamente ao conhecimento, elaborando os seus próprios meios de auto-controle.” Teologia no Brasil (1977), 34. In order to find out what was really at stake, however, one would have to know in practical terms how this “self-regulating” works: is it only the same kind of “theoreticalness” for which Althusser has been criticized? According to Majumdar (1995, 100), for Althusser, the “scientific activity takes place entirely within thought”. Given the difficult theoretical context, it is difficult to say whether Libanio defended this or whether he was making an apologetic of the autonomy of theology.

36 Clodovis Boff, one year later, translated “self-regulated” as ‘auto-regrado’, not ‘auto-regulado’. See e.g. C. Boff, TP, 205.

37 “Ela [Teologia] é um discurso crítico, auto-regulado, sobre a experiência, a práxis da fé, numa comunidade eclesial. É uma prática teórica que apropria dados da experiência ou de outras ciências, segundo seu modo peculiar.” Teologia e hermenêutica. Atualização 7 n. 84 (1976), 917-937, 921.

38 Andrade (1991, 295) seems to have known of Libanio’s “Teologia e hermenêutica” but de does not refer to it in the published edition.
3. the model according to which the theologian lives permanently in the midst of the people and makes theology immediately relevant to them.\textsuperscript{39}

Thus, according to Andrade, Libanio had completed a “reception” of Clodovis Boff’s methodology and showed the consensus of the Brazilian Catholic Church concerning liberation theology in the late 1970’s.\textsuperscript{40} He also mentions Libanio’s emphasis on the fundamental local and parochial starting point of theology.

What Andrade fails to ask is whether this really was the same as Clodovis Boff’s basic intuition of a theology based on the social sciences. On closer inspection, Libanio’s theology seems to indicate a somewhat less political stance than, say, that of the Boff brothers – including the highly political years of the turn of the 1970’s and 1980’s.\textsuperscript{41} In 1985, or after the first Instruction \textit{Liberatis nuntius} (\textit{LN}), Libanio’s writings became more critical of liberation theology.

The dissertation of the Lutheran theologian Ênio Mueller does not give as good an idea of Libanio’s role in the theological discussion, and the passage about Libanio is rather short. He begins the part dealing with Libanio in his \textit{Teologia da libertação e marxismo: uma relação em busca da explicação} by referring to what is perhaps his most political article, “A articulação da fé e o compromisso social” of 1982.\textsuperscript{42} Mueller fails to mention that Libanio had distanced himself from the

\textsuperscript{39} Andrade 1991, 79–80. Particularly the first phase (“o compromisso epistêmico, no qual o interesse pela libertação determina o modo de fazer teologia”) attracts attention. Andrade later points to the fact that it is not possible to justify a scientific procedure in terms of [ethical] interest (p. 265), yet this is the part where he speaks of the beginning of liberation theology as a sociological project. The first phase nevertheless reveals the contradiction between critical theory with its acknowledged social interest and “neutral” scientificness.

\textsuperscript{40} “Como se pode notar, o artigo de J.B. Libanio faz uma recepção do pensamento de Cl. Boff no tocante à questão de método. Trata-se de um certo consenso que se forma neste momento no Brasil em torno ao método apresentado por Cl. Boff para a Teologia da Libertação.” Andrade 1991, 80. Ref. to Libanio’s article \textit{Teologia no Brasil} (1977), 72.

\textsuperscript{41} Libanio did use distinctly Althusserian expressions in his 1976 article “Teologia e hermenêutica”, stating that “theology is a product of the theoretical practice (prática teórica)” and that the performative aspect is always central in the theological discourse: theology aims to be “a moment of the praxis”. It always asks the self-critical question concerning its own interest of knowledge and what praxis it is linked with. This is because all use of discourse is in relation to the social place (\textit{lugar social}) of the one who makes the theory. However, discourse itself is a different thing than the use of discourse. If it were the same, this would ultimately end up with a sociological scepticism of knowledge? Libanio makes the reminder: “Importa distinguir o discurso e o uso do discurso.” Teologia e hermenêutica, 932.

\textsuperscript{42} Mueller 1996, 108–121, 108–111. Such a long quotation would have made it necessary to comment on Libanio’s self-criticism of 1985. One must ask if he had in fact ceased to support liberation theological ideas after the first instruction \textit{LN}, which was published in 1984 – \textit{FP} was published in 1985.
article in *Fé e política* (1985) after the Vatican Instruction LN, but he does expound Libanio’s criticism of Marxism in his *Teologia da libertação* of 1987. One thing he repeatedly ponders on but does not problematize is the empirical approach also seen in *TdL*. Is it really possible to distinguish an “empirical level” (*nível empírico*), a “philosophical level” (*nível filosófico*) and a “theoretical level” (*nível teológico*)? Is this kind of distinction in itself an indication of a scholastic, or Marxist, objectivist epistemology?

A study that takes a step further is the Korean-born Jung Mo Sung’s work *Teologia e economia: repensando a teologia da libertação e utopias* from 1994. It is particularly critical of Leonardo Boff’s way of defending the historical materialism of liberation theology as a “science”, as distinct from the atheistic ideology of dialectical materialism. Such a distinction was typical of the radical wing of liberation theology. According to Leonardo Boff, the discourses of religion and science are “on different levels”, and a “discourse on things” or science cannot thus jeopardize religion, which is “the discourse on the final meaning of life”.

Particularly relevant to a study on Libanio is the passage in Sung’s work that deals with his *Utopia e esperança cristã* of 1989. This utopian question, however, is of less epistemological interest and not directly linked to the methodological discourse. For Libanio, it meant taking up a theme that was not as important in Brazil as the ones he had discussed in *TdL*.

Two dissertations on Libanio were published in the United States in 1989. The one by Margaret J. Benefiel centers on the theology of the Quakers, and the

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43 Libanio’s self-criticism is in *FP*, 71–72 (footnote indicated by an asterisk *).
44 Mueller 1996, 121.
45 Mueller (1996, 97) also gives a rather uncritical account of C. Boff’s idea concerning the possibility of theology to distinguish between the “philosophical aspect” (=diamat) and the “scientific aspect” (=histmat) in Marxism. It is (p. 93) “a science” and rather, “a scientific method”. It is precisely this “Althusserianism” of which Clodovis Boff had repented in the critical preface of his third edition of *TP* in 1993. Yet Mueller does not take this into account. On the original difference between Marxist “science” and “philosophy”, cf. C. Boff, *TP*, 118–121; 381.
46 Sung 1995, 128. Sung quotes L. Boff’s *O caminhar da Igreja com os oprimidos: do Vale de Lagrimas rumo à Terra Prometida*. See L. Boff 1988a, 273–274: “A ligação entre um escalão e outro, digamos, entre o materialismo dialético (ateísmo) e materialismo histórico (ciência) não é necessitante e intrínseca, mas histórica e conjuntural. (...) É que o discurso sobre as coisas (ciência) se situa em outro nível que o discurso sobre o sentido último da vida (religião). Esta distinção se aplica também ao marxismo.” [Sung cites 1st ed. of 1980, 199.] Emphasis added. Boff’s sentence contains a metaphysical conception of religion as inferior to science, however, which is in line with the Marxist criticism of religion. But it is also possible to detect Boff’s strong liberal theological approach behind it.
part on Libanio is limited to *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*. It is very limited in scope for the purpose of this study. The other one is Ronaldo S. Rosa’s *An Integrative Model for Pastoral Action in Brazil*, focusing strongly on Libanio’s 1982 book *Pastoral numa sociedade de conflitos*. Rosa’s study displays a deep knowledge of church life and culture in Brazil. He criticizes Libanio for failing to see the social psychological contribution of church work, suggesting that there are, though, various types of communitarian work that offer empowering experiences to people so they feel that they are not alone. He argues that Libanio had forgotten the importance of this kind of service: giving clothes, food and medicine, calling at people’s homes, reading the Bible and praying, as part of psychological assistance to the oppressed. The “dialectical–structural” approach is not enough to substitute this psychologically empowering activity. Interpersonal activity, on the other hand, by no means denies the existence of social conflict.

Rosa’s critique is particularly directed against a certain type of social work adopted by the Catholic church, the aim of which was social change. The Commission for work with the landless (CPT), for instance, hands out leaflets, encourages the landless to get organized in trade unions, and supports their meetings. In Rosa’s view this cannot be the last word, as Libanio indicated. He quotes S. Minuchin’s experiences of slum work, suggesting that poor families first of all need “an initial sense of change and competence”. He criticizes Libanio not as a certain theologian with certain theological views, but as a representant of a certain line in the church. Rosa’s dissertation concerns practical theology, and it does not touch on the tricky issues of theological epistemology or anthropology in liberation theology.

There is another interesting study, even if it only deals with Libanio on ten pages. It is Antonio Nello Figa’s dissertation for the Gregorian University in Rome, *Teorema de la opción fundamental* of 1995. It was written under the supervision of the famous moral theologian Klaus Demmer. Nello Figa makes a correct assessment of Libanio’s early concept of sin in rather Augustinian terms:

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49 Rosa 1989.
50 Rosa 1989, 28–83 (the chapter “An Analysis of the Major Pastoral Approaches to Social Conflict in Brazil”).
51 Rosa 1989, 77: “Minuchin (1967), while working from the perspective of the family system, has found clinical evidence to hold that individual members of a family need an ‘initial sense of change and competence’.” Cit. from J. Minuchin, *Families in the Slums: an Exploration of Their Structure and Treatment*. New York: Basic, 1967.
“Beyond the trespassing of a law, sin consists in the fundamental decision of a person by egoism, in a decision which becomes in the subject a moral one and which is materialized in the actions which express and reaffirm it.”\(^{52}\) He does not seem pleased with Libanio’s “ethical mechanicism” which would tie human liberty and \textit{arbitrium} to a previous personal decision on a deeper level.\(^{53}\) He does state that Libanio further qualified his concept of the fundamental option with the help of “fundamental intention”. Yet this 1995 work makes no reference to Libanio’s article of 1992\(^{54}\), and it obviously carried no hint of his 1999 book \textit{Crer e crescer}, which in fact seems to have changed his thinking.\(^{55}\)

It is more relevant to this study to note that Nello Figa regards Libanio’s distinction between mortal sin or faith (“the fundamental option”) and moral acts as a distinction between the ontological and the epistemological. Moral acts manifest the fundamental level of the person. The problem in Libanio’s thinking of the 1970’s was, according to Nello Figa, that he “oscillated” between an emphasis on the fundamental (ontological) level and an emphasis on the concrete decisions on which personal freedom was made dependent.\(^{56}\) This means that there is a dialectic between the Absolute (with a capital A) and the concrete at play, as Nello

\(^{52}\) Nello Figa 1995, 33. He cites (p. 33 n. 49) \textit{POF}, 78–79 to support his view of mortal sin, which is portrayed by Libanio as “[t]al decisão, tal ato fundamental”.

\(^{53}\) “¿Cómo puede un solo acto de decisión incidir determinantemente en las decisiones siguientes? Suponiendo que ello fuera posible, nos encontrariamos frente a un mecanicismo ético: puesto un acto, la sucesión de actos siguientes queda predeterminada en su moralidad. El ejercicio de la libertad ya no es realización de la responsabilidad ética, sino simple albedrío amparado en la autoidentificación profunda de la persona expresada precedentemente.” Nello Figa 1995, 38.


\(^{55}\) I have dealt with Libanio’s moral theology and psychology in two articles (Raunu 2001, Raunu 2002). A closer look at \textit{Crer e crescer} reveals that Libanio still aims to combine the existential and the metaphysical, speaking of a “decision-orientation” which is “a continuous conquest of one’s own being” and an “ontological process”. \textit{CC}, 22.

\(^{56}\) “De hecho, hablando de la explicitación de la opción fundamental, J. B. Libanio afirma que si bien en la línea ontológica la opción fundamental precede a los actos que la manifiestan, en la línea del conocimiento es a través de estos actos que podemos conocer la opción fundamental. Es pues el análisis valorativo de los hechos concretos, entendidos como signos inequívocos, quien pone en evidencia la moralidad de la opción fundamental. Y no ésta la que constituyendo la personalidad moral, se despliega y se actúa en la incesante búsqueda de aquellas decisiones concretas que la convienen y que, en la medida en que efectivamente le son coherentes, por ello mismo se revisten de su moralidad. La falta de precisión al explicar la relación que existe entre la opción fundamental y las decisiones concretas propicia la oscilación de J. B. Libanio entre una moral que exclusiviza el valor de la opción fundamental, en detrimento de los actos, y una moral que reemprende la primacía del valor moral de estas decisiones concretas, haciendo depender de ellas la profunda autodeterminación de la persona frente al Absoluto que denominamos opción fundamental y que se propone como reestructuradora de la comprensión del dinamismo ético de la persona.” Nello Figa 1995, 40.
Figa correctly argues. In fact, he seems to have made one of the very few fundamental theological remarks about Libanio’s production. This study could be regarded as a continuation of the same question: was Libanio trying to combine two opposite approaches to theology and philosophy, the ontological and metaphysical on the one hand, and the epistemological and hermeneutic on the other? Could this be one key to understanding the “mediated immediacy”?

The fundamental mind–body dualism and its critique is linked to the basic problem of liberation theology itself. In spite of the many opinions of what it really is, there is a basic consensus on the following: liberation theology starts with praxis, and it moves on to interpret the Christian faith with the help of modern experience and modern, social scientific results. This is the same mind–body dualism transferred to the methodological plane. Both keys, the philosophical and the methodological, are used to distinguish Libanio’s role in the discussion concerning liberation theology.

This study is a systematic analysis of Libanio’s theology until the end of the last millennium. His large treatise on faith Eu creio, nós cremos, published in 2000, is included because it sums up Libanio’s 20th-century thinking. Particular attention is given to the theological and philosophical context in which he developed his own interpretation of liberation theology. He took an active part in the discussion that forms the natural perspective of the study.

The history of the church of Brazil makes Libanio very interesting reading to those who are keen to know more about the difficult years of the military regime and the Abertura since 1985. This political ‘opening’ coincides with the “closing” of the Church to political theology at the same time. I have agreed with Libanio himself to put a certain “limit” on the period of study for practical reasons: both studying and finding the material takes time. The extensive bibliography runs until the end of 1999.

The very core of Libanio’s thinking is mediated immediacy. In systematical terms, the study shows how the “mediated” aspect of faith lends support to liberation theology and its ethico-political interest. However, the theological reserve of the spiritual “immediacy” comes in to criticize the absolute

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57 According to Torres Queiruga (1987, 220), the term has its origin in the transcendental Thomism of Rahner and Schillebeeckx in particular. It purports to balance the scepticism of the theology of secularization on the one hand, and the repristinated supernaturalism, on the other. Cf. n. 337, 338 and 583.
demands of the political reality. Many times the only way of establishing the real relevance of Libanio’s text is through comparison. Because he has both supported and criticized liberation theology, he has been a *via media* theologian of his time.

“Mediated immediacy” and its German equivalent “vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit” have often been used to show the paradoxical nature of human knowledge and the religious experience. What we know is always a subject’s own experience and intuition, but it is also conceptual and linked with historical, objective traditions and mediations. It is both “immediate” and “mediated” in this respect. More accurately, the language of “mediation” can be traced to the Catholic traditions that have shaped Libanio’s thinking the most.

Both the German Karl Rahner’s philosophy of religion and the Hegel interpretation given by the Brazilian philosopher and Libanio’s teacher H. C. de Lima Vaz, influenced Libanio’s concept of mediated immediacy. Vaz understood Hegel’s dialectic in an essentialist manner: the contingent aspect is annulled in dialectical suppression (*Aufhebung*), whereas the essential aspect is preserved. This interpretation of the dialectical process made it possible to understand its three stages (position, negation and reposition) as “mediated immediation” (*imedição mediatizada*). This means that the “immediate” stage is not simply overcome. Because it is understood as the spiritual essence, it remains. Vaz builds his argument particularly on the Hegel interpretation given by the French scholar A. Kojève.

Libanio quotes an influential idea put forward by Vaz: “The Hegelian dialectic introduces movement and history in the realm of the absolute: it
mediates the infinite by the finite.”63 The concept of “mediation” was important. It was used to interpret the Hegelian dialectic as such.64

On the subject of this Hegelian emphasis, the Brazilian philosopher Carlos Cirne-Lima remarked that it does not solve the proper theological problems. The question of contingency and God’s will remains. In other words: “Is there contingency? Does something happen by chance? Does God throw dice?”65 Libanio did not support determinism and many times spoke of the need to discern God’s will. In this sense, the study takes us to the dividing line between philosophy and theology.

64 “Par la suite, l’idée d’Aufhebung se reliera très étroitement à celle de médiation.” Niel 1945, 49 n. 102. This note was referred to in Vaz 1968, 159 n. 25 for a clarification of Aufhebung (dialectical suppression).
65 Cirne-Lima 1996, 89.
2. The background of liberation theology

2.1. The influence of modern Catholicism and neo-scholasticism

In his *Praeambula fidei*, Ralph McInerny reminds us of the different brands of Thomism that came to light at the second meeting of the French Société Thomiste in 1933. The topic of the meeting was Christian philosophy, which meant that the deepest fundamental theological and philosophical themes were treated there.66

The meeting in many ways supported the idea that a “Christian philosophy” was both possible and desirable. This was particularly the standpoint of Étienne Gilson, whose book *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas* was to become a standard reader of the Angelic Doctor. Yet in the meeting Father Mandonnet said that any argument that started from the faith was necessarily a theological one.67 Mandonnet and Gilson confronted each other strongly. Mandonnet defended the possibility of *praebambula fidei* on which both believers and non-believers could somehow agree, while in Gilson’s view, “faith proposes solutions for which philosophy sometimes later finds a demonstration”.68

An intermediate Thomist position was represented by Father A.-R. Motte, who emphasized the unity of being:

“For Saint Thomas there are not two compartments of being, two creations, the second of which by improvisation comes to the help of the first; there are not two final ends, one for natural man, the other for man raised to the supernatural level, no more than there are two gods, a natural God and a triune supernatural God [...].”69

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67 McInerny 2006, 94.
68 McInerny 2006, 95.
69 McInerny 2006, 97. The passage is McInerny’s translation of Gilson 1949, 78.
This “holistic” position was strongly defended in Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* of 1946.\(^70\) As one of the leading figures of the French nouvelle théologie, de Lubac wanted to balance neo-Thomist thinking with spiritual and patristic elements. McInerny, however, makes the following critical remark:

> In de Lubac’s account, man no longer has a natural end. His actual call to the vision of God is the basis for a natural potency to achieve that end. It is almost as if for him the supernatural replaces the natural.\(^71\)

In fact, de Lubac’s idea of “only one vocation” is often seen as the core message of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology. One need not look far to find this passage in Gutiérrez:

> His [Christ’s] redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and leads it to the complete fulfillment. The history of salvation is the very core of human history. [...] God’s salvific action carries all human existence. [...] the fundamental affirmation is clear, concretely: there is only one history. A Christo-finalized history.\(^72\)

Gutiérrez mentions the great modern theologians Maurice Blondel, Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac as he emphasizes that “historically and concretely we only know the human being as truly called to an encounter with God”\(^73\), and that

\(^70\) According to Susan K. Wood (1998, 118 and 118 n. 146–147), one can see de Lubac both asserting that “[t]here are not two different orders”, yet following Pascal in saying that the supernatural “belongs to a different order”. The first quote is from Henri de Lubac, *Athéisme et sens de l’homme: une double requête de “Gaudium et spes”*, Paris: Cerf (1968) and *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (1977), in which he cites Jean Mouroux’s art. Sur la dignité de la personne humaine, in *L’Eglise dans le monde de ce temps, “Vatican II”,* n. 65b, Paris: Cerf, 1967, 232. The second quote is curiously also (cf. n. 147) to be found in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, p. 29.

\(^71\) McInerny 2006, 86. John Milbank criticized Karl Rahner’s theology precisely for “naturalizing the supernatural”. Milbank (1993, 206–255) was also critical of liberation theology. See esp. Milbank 1993, 207; cited in Stålsett 1997, 18 n. 19. The terms are the other way round, but the point is the same: there is a danger of the supernatural becoming too natural and taken-for-granted.


\(^73\) “[...] histórica y concretamente sólo conocemos al hombre efectivamente llamado al encuentro con Dios.” Gutiérrez, *TL*, 105. Wood (1998, 118 n. 146) cites de Lubac’s words (*Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, 101, after Mouroux, see my previous note 70) in the original: “S’il y a, dans l’univers, des niveaux d’analyse différents (création, péché, rédemption), il n’y a pas deux ordres différents, mais un seul, celui de l’Alliance dont la création est le premier temps, dont le Christ est l’Alpha et l’Oméga, le centre et le fin; et cet ordre est surnaturel.” Her translation reads: “There are not two different orders, but only one, that of the Covenant for which Creation is the first moment and for which Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the center [sic, SW] and the end; and this order is supernatural.” This idea was, according to Gutiérrez (*TL*, 105, 29), “discretely” (discretamente) to
“the first and fundamental issue is the unity of the divine call and therefore of the human being; of all human beings”.74

In fact, the underlying message in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s breakthrough book is that there are “levels of signification which imply each other”. Thus social liberation, psychological–existential liberation and spiritual liberation from sin have mutual implications.75 Gutiérrez also represents the Pauline and Lutheran idea of Christian freedom: it is for freedom to love that Christ set us free.76

Does this mean that Latin American liberation theology was first and foremost an heir of modern Catholicism of the de Lubac and Rahner type, which stresses the “unity” of creation and redemption, of nature and grace? Is its basic character holism: the mutual implication, interdependence and perichoresis of everything? It is, and it is not.

In fact, the extensive publicity that Clodovis Boff’s dissertation received in the late 1970’s meant that this holistic interpretation had to give way to another interpretation, which surprisingly also took its cue from Gutiérrez’s programmatic book. It is the idea of liberation theology as a process of knowledge that starts at the secular reality.

Gutiérrez had already spoken of liberation theology in the following words:

Theology is the critical reflection of the historical praxis in the light of the Word. It does not replace the other functions of theology, such as wisdom and rational knowledge. Instead, it presupposes and needs them.77

For him, this methodological statement signified that one first had to take the “commitment of love” and that theology came “afterward”, which is the meaning of his idea of theology as “the second act” (acto segundo).78 This naturally seems
to be a U-turn from any form of Christian philosophy of the Gilson type. In fact, it is perfectly in line with neo-scholasticism, which he as an alumnus of the Louvain University knew pretty well.

It is precisely this neo-scholasticism that was the “third” type of Thomism, in addition to Gilson’s Christian philosophy and de Lubac’s holistic approach. In scholastic thinking, and particularly in the works of Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio Gaetano, 1469–1534), there has been a strong division between that which truly exists (quod) and that whereby something (quo) exists.\(^79\) This is the equivalent of the idea of the material and the formal. To complicate things further, scholastics have introduced the division of the “formal object” of knowledge into two: *objeictum formale quod* and *objeictum formale quo*, which means that in the formal object itself one can distinguish between its “material” and “formal” sides. This was clearly accepted by the French neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain as he developed his theory of “moral theology adequately considered.”\(^80\)

What does it mean, then, that Clodovis Boff turned the liberation theological discussion upside down? He was severely critical of the previous interpretation of liberation theology as “Chalcedonian dialectics”, which was used to rid it of its “semantic mix” and “bilingualism”. Yet the liberation theological method was inherently problematic. “What liberation is dealt with there?” C. Boff asks. “Is it a political, economic, cultural, or spiritual liberation? Or all of them?"\(^81\)

For Clodovis Boff, the Chalcedonian method shows “all its weakness” because it only “realizes that there is a reciprocal relationship that links salvation and liberation”.\(^82\) He expressly mentions Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *Teología de la liberación* as something “determined from the beginning”. The Chalcedonian

\(^{79}\) McInerny (2006, 58) explains this in the anthropological context: “Because it is subsistent, the human soul is and comes to be properly as such. Other forms are not subsistent, are not what (quod) exists, but that whereby something (quo) is such and such.”

\(^{80}\) On Maritain’s moral theory, see Nelson 1963. On its critique in the Thomist conference in 1933, see McInerny 2006, 106: “Indeed, whenever Maritain’s notion of moral philosophy adequately considered is mentioned it is regarded as pure theology.” This means that Maritain – despite his scholastic reputation – in fact represented “Christian philosophy” in the area of moral theology. According to Sertillange, Maritain’s thinking was not coherent. See McInerny 2006, 104.


\(^{82}\) “Ora, sobre este ponto concreto, o método calcedônio mostra toda a sua fraqueza, pois não permite ir mais longe do que a simples constatação da existência de uma relação reciproca, ligando Salvação e libertação.” C. Boff, *TP*, 169.
dialectic is nothing but an “alchemy” of union without confusion, distinction without separation. Instead, he suggests that one should begin with liberation in its “autonomy” and its “historical materiality”, which the social sciences help us to understand. It is about “real oppression, of the economic, political and ideological order and about the real historical efforts toward emancipating this very order”. In other words, we are faced with a political theology that is distinctly political.

One could also point to the influence of Protestant dialectical theology and the corresponding roots of modern Catholicism in liberation theology. Whether it be the “apologetics of immanence” of Maurice Blondel, the “implicit intuition” of Dominicus Maria de Petter, or “the supernatural existential” of Karl Rahner, it is always a question of “how the revelation comes to respond to the deep anxieties of the human being”. Taking human existence seriously does not undermine God’s possible revelation. Instead, it is existence as an open question that implies the answer. This is the logic of 20th-century transcendental Thomism, which endeavored to face the challenge of Kant’s philosophy and scientific and historical thinking.

In its most dialectical and paradoxical phase, modern theology developed the theology of secularization that reached its peak in the 1960’s. From a Thomist point of view, one could argue that “secular realities can also become the object of

83 C. Boff continues in a rather polemical tone: “No fogo da polêmica teológica em torno dessa relação, a resposta foi exigida e decidida desde o começo do debate de um modo determinativo. Pergunta-se então para que teologizar, se tudo fica já resolvido de antemão pela alquimia da dialética calcedônica, contida inteira ‘numa frase única’ (Hegel): união sem confusão, distinção sem separação.” C. Boff, TP, 169–170.

84 “A nosso ver, ao contrário, a Teologia da Libertação deve começar por tomar seu objeto particular: ‘libertação’ na qualidade de uma GI, dotada de uma constituição autônoma. ‘Libertação’ é então compreendida de acordo com sua materialidade histórica, isto é, segundo a tessitura real que as CDS [=ciências do social] nos fazem dela apreender. A partir daí, entende-se que ‘libertação’ diz respeito à opressão real, de ordem econômica, política e ideológica, e aos empuxos históricos reais na direção da emancipação da mesma ordem.” C. Boff, TP, 170. C. Boff claims that his starting point was the same as of Hugo Assmann, who was openly socialist and worked to help the Allende revolution (p. 170 n. 81). He also mentions the book by Nikita Khrushchev, *O movimento de libertação nacional* of 1963 as an example of this materialist weight of the term “liberation”.

85 Libanio (*TdL*, 91; *IT*, 141; *TdR*, 54–58; *ECNC*, 31–32) speaks of Blondel’s thought as “the apologetics of immanence” (*a apologética da imanência*). For an existentialistic and phenomenological idea of Blondel’s philosophy of action and option, see Duméry 1963, especially pp. 237–238, 479–481.

86 de Petter 1939.

87 Libanio formulates the core of Blondelianism in these terms: “Parte-se da subjetividade moderna. A mais famosa proposta veio da apologética da imanência, que trabalhou a dimensão humana em sua abertura para a Transcendência. E tentou mostrar como a Revelação vem responder, em profundidade, aos anseios do ser humano. Ela o plenifica e não o avilta.” *ECNC*, 31.
theological reflection”. From a “paradoxical” point of view, this could be otherwise. One could maintain the positivist thesis of the scientific age, yet point to faith as *etwas ganz anderes* in dialectical terms. In this sense, revelation would belong to the sphere of faith, even if it leads to knowledge. “Natural” knowledge would remain natural, revelation would be an issue of faith, and mystical intuition would be the ineffable, unspeakable reality. This scientific thinking is the background of Protestant dialectical theology which sought to deny the possibility of natural theology. In more classical terms, dialectical theology and immanent or transcendental methodology comprise a modern version of *via negativa*: it is not about what we can know of God, but precisely about what we cannot.

Clodovis Boff’s methodology, therefore, seems to have two different roots. In maintaining the “non-theological” character of scientific knowledge he seemed to accept the position of dialectical theology: faith is distinct from knowledge. He implied that the object of theology was not real, although the object of faith was. Yet in the second phase, that of the hermeneutic process or of the “second

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88 “As realidades seculares também podem ser objeto de reflexão teológica, sem perderem sua consistência, ao ser inseridas no projeto salvífico de Deus que a tudo abarca. E com isso a teologia também não perde seu caráter de teologia.” *IT*, 150.

89 This is what Rudolf Carnap (1928, 256–258) meant. Far from calling faith non-sensical, he saw it as a distinct source of knowledge for the believers: “Es gibt zweifellos die Phänomene des **Glaubens**, sowohl religiöser als anderer Art, und der **Intuition**, und sie spielen nicht nur für das praktische Leben, sondern auch für die Erkenntnis eine wichtige Rolle. […] Erkenntnis aber kann erst dann vorliegen, wenn bezeichnet, formuliert wird, wenn in Worten oder anderen Zeichen eine Aussage gegeben wird. […] Aber erst diese aussprechbare und damit begriffliche Feststellung ist Erkenntnis, sie muss von jenem Zustand selbst deutlich unterschieden werden. Diese Auffassung hängt zusammen mit unserer Auffassung vom Begriff: ein Begriff ist die Bedeutung eines Zeichens, das in Sätzen vorkommen kann. So kann z. B. der Glaube an eine bestimmte Offenbarung oder an die Angaben eines Menschen bei näherer Nachprüfung zu einer Erkenntnis führen; denn hier ist mit **Glauben** Fürwarhalten gemeint.” (Ibid., 256; emphasis in the original.)

For Carnap, it was clear that faith and intuition were true spheres of life (Lebensgebiete) as well as the poetic and the erotic. He nevertheless made the distinction that they can only become the object of science (because there is nothing that could not be the object of science), but that they are completely separated from science as to their content (inhaltlich aber sind sie von der Wissenschaft völlig getrennt). Ibid., 257.

90 “La tarea fundamental, desde el punto de vista teológico, no sería decir lo que el entendimiento humano puede captar de la realidad divina, sino exactamente lo contrario: indicar aquello que no puede. La teología debe determinar los límites de nuestro conocimiento: de ahí que la experiencia teológica debería contentarse también con su aspecto negativo.” *Hortal* 1975, 23.

91 In *TP*, C. Boff engages in positivist criticism, stating that “theological knowledge does not have the qualities of its object” and that it is “always a human activity”. It is not “an absolute discourse, but a discourse of the Absolute”. Thus, this anti-realism is founded on the scholastic distinction of the real and knowledge of the real: “Aplicada à Teologia, a distinção real/conhecido, teoria/mundo, equivale à afirmação de que o conhecimento teológico não está dotado das qualidades de seu objeto. […] Como conhecimento, a Teología é e será sempre uma atividade humana, histórica e concreta e não é absolutamente porqué ela versa sobre o divino, o eterno e o transcendent que ela teria estes mesmos predicados. […] Assim também, a Teologia não pode se colocar no ponto de vista da totalidade senão sob um modo setorial. Para dizer tudo, a Teologia não é o discurso absoluto, mas o discurso do Absoluto.” C. Boff, *TP*, 104.
generality” (G II), everything was once more considered Thomistically *sub una formali ratione [...] divinae revelationis*. He maintained that the key to a theological understanding of history was to “read” it *sub specie aeternitatis*.

We might find this kind of liberationist hermeneutic procedure rather problematic. We could indeed say that the basic theological problem is, in Blondel’s words, the relationship between history and dogma. Obviously, we should be able to accept the two seemingly contradictory statements, namely the fact that

1. any and every reality, particularly “the non-theological one” (*o não-teológico*), is the starting point, and that
2. we can only read history theologically *sub specie aeternitatis*.

In fact, the answer is somehow included in the question. The direct relationship between history and transcendence on the ontological, or theologal, level, makes every reality “theologizable”. Is this nothing but an optical trick, however? Can one really accept both the modern thesis of secularization and the medieval, unproblematic access to divinity? In fact, Clodovis Boff seemed to promote an unhealthy mixture of modern neo-positivism and traditional Thomist scholasticism. Both share some similar epistemological traits, such as the distinction of the formal and the material and the anti-Kantian belief in objective knowledge, and it was possible to give to Caesar, or to social science, that which was Caesar’s. According to the Aristotelian pattern, science would give the “material” matter, and theology would then supply the “formal” hermeneutic interpretation.

Clodovis Boff’s dissertation opened up a very odd dialogue between opposing world-views in Latin America. For some time and some people in the

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92 C. Boff, *TP*, 152.
93 C. Boff wanted to make a theological “reading” of history, and he also thought that the “eschatological reserve” of J. B. Metz meant this. In fact, this passage shows the problems that liberation theologians had in understanding the critical theory that had inspired Metz: “Com efeito, a História não é teologicamente legível senão sub specie aeternitatis. A imanência tem um sentido teológico na estrita medida em que ela se situa dentro do horizonte de Transcendência. Necessariamente. Na verdade, não existe Teologia senão fundada sobre a afirmação da soberania absoluta de Deus, tal como se exprime no primeiro mandamento [...] Não é esse o sentido da ‘reserva escatológica’ (J. B. Metz)?” C. Boff, *TP*, 94. For Jung Mo Sung’s remarks about this traditional *sub specie aeternitatis* type of theological realism, see Sung 1995, 151.
94 See the text of C. Boff (*TP*, 85) in n. 131.
95 “Com efeito, a História não é teologicamente legível senão sub specie aeternitatis. A imanência tem um sentido teológico na estrita medida em que ela se situa dentro do horizonte de Transcendência.” C. Boff, *TP*, 94.
late 1970’s and early 1980’s, it seemed possible to accept both Louis Althusser’s scientific Marxism and traditional neo-scholasticism at the same time. Scholasticism helped in acknowledging the autonomy of the secular sphere, and Althusserianism gave the conceptual, “scientific” tools with which it was approached and analyzed.

Yet, neither the methodological similarities nor the division of work between science and religion would be sufficient to maintain a dialogue. With the best of intentions, liberation theologians following in Clodovis Boff’s footsteps could not do away with the fundamental ontological difference between Marxism and Christianity. After all, it was the ontological gap between the two that was the core of Libanio’s criticism in *Teologia da libertação*.96 The following sections on neo-scholasticism and Althusserian Marxism begin the elaboration of this problem.

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96 Libanio claimed that the ontological distance between liberation theology and Marxism could not be overcome because the latter was materialist. This is an example of his ideal interpretation of liberation theology: “A distância entre a TdL e a *ontologia* marxista é nítida e insuperável, já que no centro da ontologia marxista está a matéria. O ser é, em última análise, matéria, e tudo o que existe se explica pelo seu movimento. Esse monismo materialista é absolutamente indigerível pela TdL, uma vez que ela parte do Ser último, Espírito, Deus.” *TdL*, 194.
2.2. Neo-scholastic terminology in liberation theology: from “revealable” to “theologizable”

Libanio’s book *Teologia da libertação*, published in 1987, is an important piece of work on liberation theology. He both criticizes its Marxist traits and works out his own version – the reader will ask many times over which of the ideas contained in the book can really be attributed to Libanio.

Yet one of the ideas he most strongly shares with the influential liberation theologian Clodovis Boff is the notion of “theologizing” everything:

Every human reality is theologizable. The non-theological quality of a discourse must be measured, not with respect to what is being talked about, but in the light of what is being reflected and talked about.  

Libanio also claims that “it is possible to theologize historical events”. This means that he sought to resolve the Blondelian tension between history and dogma by promoting the methodology coined by Clodovis Boff: one starts with history, and it is unproblematic to arrive at dogma from this starting point, whatever it may be.

In his Master’s degree thesis at the Pontifical Catholic University in Porto Alegre, Lúcio J. Hammes identifies three moments in Libanio’s idea of a liberation theological process: a pre-theological, a theological and a practical (*práxico*) moment. This is perfectly in line with what Libanio says of liberation theological methodology in *TdL*:

The theoretical practice in theology consists in the transformation of a pre-theological piece of knowledge into a theological one with the theoretical force of the encounter with the revelation.

This makes us ask the critical question whether theology is back on the scholastic track where it is nothing but a *scientia conclusionum*? In other words, is

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97 “Toda realidade humana é teologizável. A qualidade não-teológica de um discurso deve ser medida, não a respeito do que se fala, sobre que se reflete, mas à luz do que se reflete e se fala.” *TdL*, 217. For a longer quote, see n. 684.

98 “É possível teologizar sobre os eventos históricos.” *TdL*, 223.

99 Hammes 2000, 71–74. He cites the book written jointly by Libanio and Murad (*IT*) and reminds the reader particularly of their warning against “dogmatism and scientism” (*IT*, 171).

100 “A prática teórica teológica constrói-se pela transformação de um conhecimento pré-teológico em teológico pela força teórica do confronto com a Revelação.” *TdL*, 215.
its task only a matter of logically arranging that which has been received from a
“pre-theological” activity, an Aristotelian composition of the “matter” in a
theological “form”? In his book on revelation, Edward Schillebeeckx criticized
this kind of understanding of “virtual revelation” according to which theology is
supposed to discover new things in its “light”, so that theological discourse is, in
fact, creative. It is precisely this kind of virtual theology to which Schillebeeckx
was opposed.101

In a seminal article on Latin American theological methods written in 1987,
Libanio’s fellow Jesuit Francisco Taborda pointed to the same liberation
theological logic: “The condition of possibility for taking the political [realm] as a
theme for theological reflection is the universality of the material object of
theology.”102 This is based on the insight of St. Thomas Aquinas in Summa
theologiae, according to which

in sacred science, all things are treated of under the aspect of God: either because they are
God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end.103

This is not the only point at the beginning of Summa, however. We cannot
take “making theology” to be as simple as that. Should one not also recall that St.
Thomas started by reminding theologians of the limits of its formal object?

Sacred doctrine does not treat of God and creatures equally (ex aequo), but of God
primarily, and of creatures only so far as they are referable to God as their beginning or
end.104

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101 “Das organische Zusammenwirken von Glaube und Verstand wurde von der späteren Scholastik
nach dem Modell der aristotelischen Wissenschaft einseitig allein auf die diskursive Funktion der
Theologie bezogen. Sie nannte dieses Zusammenwirken und ihr Objekt die ‘virtuelle Offenbarung’.
Damit wurde die Theologie von vornherein als eine ‘scientia conclusionum’ definiert, und die
anderen Aspekte der Theologie wurden faktisch zu prätheologischen Tätigkeiten entwertet. Wir
werden sehen, dass das Diskursive in einem sehr bestimmten Sinn zwar durchaus authentisch zur
Theologie gehört, aber dass dies nicht das einzige ist. Zwar kann man von einem aristotelischen
Standpunkt aus, was diese diskursive Funktion der Theologie betrifft, das besondere licht, unter
dem Theologie alles betrachtet, ‘virtuelle Offenbarung’ nennen, aber damit hat man die Theologie
doch nur nach einer einzigen Funktion und somit durchaus nicht schlechthin bestimmt.”

102 “Condição de possibilidade para que se tome o político como tema de reflexão teológica é a
universalidade do objeto material da teologia.” Taborda 1987, 298.

103 “Ommia autem pertractantur in sacra doctrina sub ratione Dei: vel quia sunt ipse Deus; vel quia
habent ordinem ad Deum, ut ad principium et finem.” S. Th. I a.1.q.7.

104 “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod sacra doctrina non determinat de Deo et de creaturis ex aequo:
sed de Deo principaliter, et de creaturis secundum quod referuntur ad Deum, ut ad principium vel
finem.” S. Th. I a.1.q.3.
Theology posits the “primacy” of God, which means that God is its **formal object**. This expression made it possible to think of the **material object** in such a manner that it does not affect the qualities of the formal object, which is in the last instance God. Of course, liberation theologians have been right in pointing out that the material object may not be limited, but according to St. Thomas there is in fact a limitation: that of theology itself. Should we not be critical of Libanio’s idea that the reality to be interpreted “may be theological to begin with, or may not be” (*já teológica ou não*)? If it is not theological to begin with (in formal terms), will it be at a later stage so that the formal quality [of being theological] is added *a posteriori*? In other words, how could this primacy of God later be reconciled with the “primacy of praxis”. We will see that the discussion also called for the two concepts of *obiectum formale quod* and *obiectum formale quo*.

Francisco Taborda points to another problem with liberation theological logic, that of mixing the two arguments of relevance and of truth: “The social locus does not determine the truth-value (*pertinência*) of the theological discourse, but it does determine its relevance.” Early critics of liberation theology said the same: the replacing of the traditional pre-understanding by modern historical pre-understanding does not do away with the hermeneutic problem.

Taborda is very helpful in pointing to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, as the key to the liberation theological problem. We are faced from the beginning with the question of how to relate history and dogma, or science and religion/theology. Is it possible to maintain that theology “takes” something from somewhere else in a passive sense, instead of actively participating in what it “decides to take” from history, the world and the social sciences in an active sense? Here Libanio would argue strongly that “any time that this confrontation with the word of God does not happen, theology is not being made”.

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**Notes:**
105 *TdL*, 217.
106 “O lugar social não determina a pertinência do discurso teológico, mas sim a sua relevância.” Taborda 1987, 299.
107 J. Andrew Kirk (1979, 193) argues that by switching to the historical and critical mind, Gutiérrez’ liberation theology would lead to the formula “in the light of God’s word” to finally “becoming emptied of content”. This would be putting the emphasis on one end of the problem (history) without answering the question of the other (dogma).
108 “Portanto, toda vez que não se chega a esse confronto com a Palavra de Deus não se faz teologia.” *TdL*, 216. It is in *TdL* (p. 214) that Libanio once uses the term “revelável” (revealable) when he writes of Thomism in terms of a *scientia conclusionum*: “A teologia é organização e desenvolvimento do revelável.”
One could say that it is not only the question of “first” and “second” that is the core of the hermeneutic problem – it is more a matter how the material and formal principles were worked out. Let us take the examples of Jacques Maritain’s neo-Thomism and the discussion on “revelable”, or revealable, in Francophone Europe and Canada. Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) made an important contribution because he shows us the logic of *prima causa*, the centrality of objective knowledge and the way everything is referred to God in moral theology.

In terms of first-cause reasoning, the “three wisdoms” (*trois sagesses*) demonstrate how Maritain was pledged to traditional metaphysics. The first wisdom is natural theology, or metaphysics, the second is theology proper, or ”the science of the revealed mysteries”, and the third is supernatural or mystical knowledge of God. The aim of metaphysics, according to Maritain, is to ”rise from the visible things, of which it knows the ultimate reason (*la raison dernière*); it knows the existence of God, the first cause (*Dieu cause première*) and the creator of the creation, in the natural manner”. The terms “ultimate” (last) and “first” are both used; what matters is a commitment to the notion of *prima causa* in Thomist terms. Something of God can indeed be inferred from his creation. This, naturally, is a bone of contention in the modern philosophy of religion. The nominalist tradition stresses God’s freedom and the contingent, non-causal nature of creation. Would it not be even more problematic to take the Thomist *prima causa* thinking to a different domain, making it the first link in a modern scientific chain of causality?

Maritain was an enemy of nominalism and of Ockham’s razor, and he pledged allegiance to the late medieval scholasticism of Cajetan and John of St.

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111 See the English translation of *Les degrés du savoir, The Degrees of Knowledge*, and especially the chapter on Maritain’s “critical realism” (Maritain 2002, 75–144), which is realism but not “critical” in the modern Kantian sense. On the critique of Ockham’s razor, or “the principle of economy”, see pp. 99, 138. Interestingly enough, one can find “critical realism” in Remer’s scholastic manual where it is identified with Cartesianism: “*Idealistae critici* (duce Kant) iuxta quos existunt quidem corpora, at prorsus alia ac sentiuntur, naturae nobis penitus ignotae, ita ut ne extensioni quidem ad ipsos pertineat; ita etiam *Realistae critici* (duce Cartesio), iuxta quos corporibus insunt extensioni et cetera quae extensionem consequuntur (qua quibus sensibilia communia, a modernis qualitates primariae vocantur), non autem ceterae qualitates, ut color, calor, sonus... (qua olim sensibilia propria, recentius qualitates secundariae dictae sunt).” Remer 1934, 129. On Gilson’s criticism of Maritain’s critical realism, see his book Gilson 1939.
Thomas (Johannes a Sancto Thoma). No subjective criticism of knowledge was allowed. What was at stake was Immanuel Kant’s question of whether the 100 thalers in reality were any more than the 100 thalers in the mind. According to Kant, they were not, but on this Maritain disagreed: 100 “subsisting” thalers were more than 100 thalers “simply conceived and defined”. Here is a shining but difficult example of the Thomist “quiddity” – 100 thalers in reality are more than the merely thought-of 100 thalers.

For Kant it was the very opposite. As he states in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason), “Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind”: concepts outside an understanding of their empirical use do not mean anything. This means that the empirical reality does not render them “greater” or “more” – it only makes them understandable. Maritain with his scholastic notion of quiddity (quidditas) thought otherwise. It is from this scholastic point of view that many of the liberation theologians’ ideas can be understood. Human beings should, according to Ignacio Ellacuría for example, direct themselves to the “more” of historical reality that transcends the everyday level. A human being can – because of the objective and receptive nature of knowledge – be directed to this reality. Moreover, reality may be even more

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112 Nickl 1992, 125–127. On the fundamentally neo-scholastic (neo-Thomist) nature of Maritain’s Thomism, see e.g., Valadier 1995, 175: “Maritain a incontestablement souffert d’une réputation d’antimodere” […] Et il et sûr que sa fidélité au thomisme […] qui devait autant à Jean de Saint-Thomas qu’à Thomas d’Aquin lui-même […] n’ont pas peu contribué à cette réputation.”

113 Maritain 1959, 853. Nickl (1992, 140, 145) deals at length with Kant’s 100 Thaler (‘dollar’) metaphor. It is in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Kant 1995, 504, chapter “Von der Unmöglichkeit eines ontologischen Beweises vom Dasein Gottes”). The central thought is expressed in the sentence: “Hundert wirkliche Thaler enthalten nicht das Mindeste mehr, als hundert mögliche.” It is a question of the meaning of the synthetic clause: even if the human *Anschauung* attaches the concept to the reality, the concept does not grow any greater as a result. In other words: the hundred dollars in reality are not a penny “more” than in the concept.

114 “These remarks show that subsistence adds nothing (any more than existence does) to the quidditative order in its own line. From the point of view of quidditative construction, or in that which constitutes them intrinsically as intelligible objects, there is no more in a hundred subsistent thalers than in a hundred possible thalers. Otherwise (if to be subject as subject changed anything in the subject as thinkable, or as object), all knowledge of subjects would be false, since they cannot be known except as thinkable, or as objects. (In this sense St. Thomas says that actual existence is extra genus notitiae.) But subsistence adds something utterly real, most real of all, to the quidditative order – outside the proper line of this order. It makes what is such, to be I: it makes a certain depth of and intelligibility to be also a depth for itself. And subsistence, like existence, has an intelligible content, a thinkable quiddity. There is more in reality and in my thought in one hundred subsisting thalers than in a hundred thalers simply conceived and defined in their nature; but this more is extrinsic to their quidditative construction.” Maritain 2002, 457.

“real” because it subsists and not only exists. In other words, the “quiddititative” order and the “more”-than-meets-the-eye can be known.\textsuperscript{116} For theology, the subsisting core of human history is the praxis of love. Human praxis can be a mediation of divine charity.\textsuperscript{117}

The scholastic traits of Maritain’s epistemology come directly from Cajetan’s thinking. In his work An Essay on Christian philosophy he makes Cajetanian epistemology clear. The treatise on “moral philosophy adequately considered (adéquatement prise)” at the end of the essay shows the relation between moral theology and moral philosophy. \textit{Mutatis mutandis} it is about the way in which theology is related to everything. This is because the role of moral philosophy as subordinate to theology is explained in a universal manner: all science is subordinated to the “light” given by theology.\textsuperscript{118}

Ralph Nelson states in his article on Maritain that human knowledge could be considered from two viewpoints, as a ”thing” in itself and as (only) an object of knowledge. The distinction between \textit{ratio formalis obiecti ut res – ratio formalis obiecti ut res

\textsuperscript{116} Stålsett (1997, 34–43) deals with the question of the first act of theological knowledge. According to Ellacuría (p. 36), the neo-scholastic notion of \textit{inteligencia sentiente} advocated by Xavier Zubiri seems to guarantee the fact that our knowledge is objective, and the historical reality “embraces the totality and yet remains open”. This, according to Stålsett, is no dualism as “traditionally” implied in the concept of transcendence (pp. 36–37). Wondering whether Ellacuría succeeds in overcoming the unnecessary and ideological duality, he ends up asking (p. 39) what the “beyond”, and the “more” in history indeed is. He stops short of asking what Zubiri’s epistemology is based on. If we take a closer look we can see how closely related Zubirian scholastic thinking is to Maritain. López Quintás uses exactly the same terms: “[...] aborda Zubiri la grave y sutilísima tarea de manifiesto que el destino nato del intelectual auténtico es distinguir para unir [...].” López Quintás 1970, 231. It is revealing that (p. 201) Suárez is seen as the savior from the perils of nominalism. At the beginning of his chapter on Zubiri, he states: “Desde el siglo XIV hasta Suárez se ha ido complicando cada vez más la idea de fenómeno con la de subjetividad.” In Zubiri’s terms, it is the empirical sensory datum of the \textit{inteligencia sentiente} that is the foundation of experience and not life in general in Diltheyan terms. Zubir is explained in extremely realistic and empirical terms: “Dado que la experiencia se basa en algo previo – el estar en la realidad –, no es la vida – contra lo que afirma Dilthey – quien suministra la experiencia [...] La experiencia se funda en la inteligencia sentiente por la que estamos en realidad. Esto hace posible la experiencia, no viceversa. La experiencia se inscribe por entero en la realidad.” López Quintás 1970, 251.

\textsuperscript{117} Libanio makes this link between praxis and charity very clear in his recent (2000) treatise of faith. All that is good and true in human and political praxis is a “concrete historical mediation of Christian charity”: “A práxis humana, sociopolítica, no que ela tem de bem, de verdade, de valor, de justica, é uma mediação concreta histórica da caridade cristã.” ECNC, 460. Cf. IT, 174: “A TdL é a face teórico-critica da prática da caridade libertadora.”

\textsuperscript{118} Nelson 1963, esp. p. 144: “What this proves, he [Maritain] says, is that no true science of human behavior can be established independently of theology.” This goes much further than the Kantian critique of pure reason could allow: it would permit thinking of the concept of God (i.e. the supreme being) as “a useful idea in many respects”. Yet because God is an a priori concept of pure reason and not empirically verifiable, thinking of God in no way adds to our knowledge of the empirical world. See Kant 1995, 505: “Der Begriff eines höchsten Wesens ist eine in mancher Hinsicht sehr nützliche Idee; sie ist aber eben darum, weil sie bloß Idee ist, ganz unfähig, um vermittelst ihrer allein unsere Erkenntnis in Ansehung dessen, was existiert, zu erhweitern.”
obiecti ut objectum corresponds to this. 119 Maritain believed that modern science was first of all purely (purement) objective. He sought to justify this by means of medieval philosophy and theology.120 Does this, then, not bring theology to a hopelessly pre-critical and pre-Kantian stage?

Let us now return to the issue of Maritain’s Christian philosophy. Contradictory though it seems, Maritain combines both a strong “natural” viewpoint (the “quiddity” of natural objects) and an equally strong Christian a priori. It is Christian because no human being is in a state of pure nature, but is always in a fallen and redeemed (dèchu et racheté) state. That is why the light of Christian philosophy comes from philosophy and theology at the same time.121 Maritain deals expressly with moral philosophy. It is not methodologically heteronomous but it has its own methods with the help of which it can attain many truths.

According to Maritain, moral philosophy and moral theology are materially the same. They “cover the same domain” (couvrent le même domaine) and their

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119 “To show the distinction between moral theology and moral philosophy adequately considered, Maritain has recourse to a distinction developed by Cajetan. In general this distinction implies that there can be sciences which are generically the same, having what is called the same ratio formalis objecti ut res, while differing because each has a distinctive objective light or formal perspective, in Cajetan’s terminology the ratio formalis objecti ut objectum. What does it mean to say that two sciences have the same generic object, but differ because of formal perspective? The generic appeal of intelligibility or ratio formalis objecti ut res of moral philosophy adequately considered, answering fully to the definition of science, is the ordination to freedom to the ends of human life. It is considered with human acts as ordered to their actual end. Of course both moral theology and moral philosophy are concerned with human behaviour as ordered to the ultimate end, and since this end is supernatural, there is a temptation to assert that that theology constitutes the only possible science of human behavior. Maritain rejects this opinion which entails the absorption of moral philosophy into theology. What this proves, he says, is that no true science of human behavior can be established independently of theology. There is a diversity of sciences in this case because moral philosophy has an objective light which differs from that proper to moral theology. ‘It is in so far as they are revealable that theology weighs all truths of its own, – the laws of human action as well as the rest ...’, while a moral philosophy adequately considered regards ‘human acts in so far as they are capable of being regulated by human reason (suitably completed)...’ While the objective light of theology is derived from the light of divine revelation, moral philosophy is a created or profane way of knowing within the practical domain. There is a manner of knowing things related to human life from a human point of view and theology can never be substituted for this kind of knowing. In this human way of knowing, reason is not instrumental, as it is in theology, but operates as a second principal cause.” Nelson 1963, 144–145. Emphasis added. Citations from Cajetan, In I Summa Theologiae, q. 1, a.3, n. III, V; Jacques Maritain, An Essay on Christian Philosophy. New York: Philosophical Library, 1955, 76. For the former, see Caietanus 1888.

120 “En tout cas ce n’est pas seulement à Platon, c’est bien plus encore, et dans un rapport historique beaucoup plus direct, aux théologiens et aux philosophes du moyen âge que l’Occident moderne doit la notion elle-même d’une science purement objective, avec tout ce que cette notion entraîne d’ascèse pour l’intelligence. Cette purification du spéculatif est une des acquisitions de la philosophie chrétienne.” Maritain & Maritain 1982, 262. Emphasis added.

121 Maritain & Maritain 1982, 263.
object, human acts, are the same. In more traditional terms, their *ratio formalis quae*, the “material” formal object, is the same. Yet they are two different ways of knowing because the formal object that directs them (*ratio formalis sub quo*) is different. (To visualize this rather involved distinction, we might think of two colored pairs of spectacles. Depending on the color, the object looks different although it remains the same in itself.) Maritain argues that the sameness of knowledge is due to the fact that even natural theology is derived from a beatific vision and the original knowledge God has of himself. This is founded on the principles of Cajetan’s commentary on St. Thomas at the beginning of the 16th century.\textsuperscript{122} The second commentary Maritain uses was written by John of St. Thomas, another scholastic commentator on Thomas in the late Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{123}

The “material and formal formal objects”[my distinction] are, according to Cajetan, two different things. Referring to the formal and not the material object, he makes the following distinction:

\[\text{Nota duplicem esse rationem objecti in scientia, altera objecti ut res, altera objecti ut objectum, vel altera ut quae, altera ut sub qua.}\textsuperscript{124}\]

In the light of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique*, this kind of reasoning has become ever more difficult to accept. How could there be “two ways” of knowing the same thing so that there is no contradiction? More importantly, how could the idea of the “thing in itself” (*ut res, “Ding an sich”*) be detached from the knowledge thereof? Cajetan gave an interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas that had a strong influence on 20th-century neo-scholasticism due to the fact that it was recommended by Pope Leo XIII. Cajetan’s long commentaries were included in the official *Leonina* edition of Thomas’s *Opera omnia*, and his analogical thinking was perfectly in line with the supernaturalist model of the First Vatican Council.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{122} Maritain & Maritain (1982, 284) refers to Cajetan’s commentary in Iam, q. 1. a.2, 3, 7.
\textsuperscript{123} Maritain & Maritain 1982, 284 n. 4, with ref. to Jean de Saint-Thomas, *Curs. theol.*, in Iam, q. 1. disp. 2, a. 11 [Solesmes, I, p. 402].
\textsuperscript{124} Caietanus 1888, 12. [Comm. in Iam, q. 1. a. 3]. Quoted in Maritain & Maritain 1982, 285. On their use as the first two stages of the liberation-theological method, see especially C. Boff, *TP*, 27.
\textsuperscript{125} A good example of the distinction between nature and the *superadditum* is to be found in Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 1879: “For, not in vain did God set the light of reason in the human mind; and so far is the super-added light of faith from extinguishing or lessening the power of the intelligence that it complements it rather, and by adding to its strength renders it capable of greater things.” *AeP*, 2.
Neo-scholastic theologians in the 20th century used Cajetan’s interpretation of thinking “objectively about the object” in the epistemological sense, but it was not clear what the theological object was. Was it purely theological or also natural? In other words, was it based on revelation, or could one reach knowledge of it apart from divine revelation as well? In his article on Cajetan’s concept of *revelabile* published in 1953, Étienne Gilson argued that the “revelabilia” also included things that were “demonstrabilia”. Because theology can make use of other things than theology proper, many things that are accessible to natural reason will also be part of theological knowledge. This makes the very notion of revelabile the nub of the problem: the “revelabile” is such a general concept that many – in his view too many – natural truths end up being included in it.126

St. Thomas Aquinas tried to avoid this in *Summa Theologiae* and to keep scientific knowledge and theological knowledge apart, stating that an “astrologist” and a natural scientist considered the globe from their own theoretical points of departure *lumine naturalis rationis*, ‘with the help of natural light’. There is nothing that would prohibit theology from considering the results of natural science in the light of divine revelation, but St. Thomas shows the priority: theology deals first of all with the things revealed by God that are to be received through faith (*a Deo revelata, suscipianda per fidem*).127 He repeated the message in referring to the scientificalness of theology properly speaking.128 It is to be noted in particular that the “revealable” nature of other sciences is secondary in the *Summa*. The primary formal object of theology as a *sacra doctrina* is the question

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126 “Bien entendu, saint Thomas maintiendra intacte la distinction entre ce que Cajétan devait nommer les démonstrables (même s’il se trouve que Dieu les ait révélés) et les révélables qui ne peuvent être connus que par révélation: pourtant, sauf erreur de notre part, même ce que Cajétan nommera les *demonstrabilia* est inclus par saint Thomas dans les *revelabilia*. Démonstrable ou non, tout ce que Dieu a révélé est du révélable. Ce qui fait de la notion thomist de révélable la clef du problème, c’est précisément que la *raison formelle en est assez générale pour englober dans sa comprehension celles des vérités révélées qui sont de soi accessibles à la raison naturelle et celles qui, en cette vie du moins, l’excèdent irrémédiablement.*” Gilson 1953, 204.

127 *S. Th.* I, q. 1. a. 1. This is truly an article on the philosophy of science: “Utrum sit necessarium, praeter philosophicas disciplinas, aliam doctrinam haberi.”

128 “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod sacra doctrina non determinat de Deo et de creaturis ex aequo: sed de Deo principaliter, et de creaturis secundum quod referuntur ad Deum, ut ad principium vel finem. Unde unitas scientiae non impeditur.” *S. Th.* I, q. 1. a. 3. Engl.: “Sacred doctrine does not treat of God and creatures equally, but of God primarily, and of creatures only so far as they are referable to God as their beginning or end. Hence the unity of this science is not impaired.”
of God. It deals primarily with God, and with creatures only inasmuch as they are related to God, its primary subject matter.

What happens if the Christian *a priori* is taken away from the Thomist system? Are we not then faced with a curious process, starting with a scientific and natural datum, a *demonstrabile* rather than *revelabile*, which is secondarily (*i.e. a posteriori*) led to the Christian domain? Another article, a literature review by Yves Congar in 1938, manages to show how much interest *revelabile* aroused in Thomist circles before the Second World War. The word “*revelabile*” points to the realities of which a Christian theologian may make a theological interpretation because they refer to God as their beginning and end – as Thomism argues. The roots of the liberation theological “everything is theologizable” paradigm are here. Only the word is different: “*revealable*” later became “*theologizable*”.

The “*revealable*” nature of a certain science means the possibility for the light of revelation to fall on it and to make this kind of “non-theological” knowledge theologically meaningful. This possibility of scholastic re-interpretation lies at the heart of liberation theology. Also known as the “theology of the political” (*teologia do político*) it is, according to Clodovis Boff’s dissertation, exactly “theology of the non-theological”, because God is the hidden

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129 The clearest exposition of the problems concerning the demarcation line of mystical theology (theologia mystica) and revealed theology (sacra doctrina) is Robert A. Delfino’s recent article, defending the dividing line between mysticism and theology. Even if the formal object is “*revealable*” in both, sacra doctrina needs to be propositional due to the fact that it is based on abstraction as in every science. Non-propositional (mystical) experience is “experience of things *qua* experience”, and hence it cannot be the same as revealed theology proper, or sacra doctrina. Delfino 2002, 263 n. 37. See esp. pp. 260–263. On pp. 260–261, Delfino distinguishes between three kinds of theology (mystical, revealed, and natural), and makes the point that each has its own formal object [or the “primal question” – my simple explanation of what a formal object is]: “God as experienced by someone in mystical experience/union”, “God as known through propositions known to have been divinely revealed”, and “God insofar as he is the cause of the being of creatures”. Disagreeing with Thomas Gilby, Delfino stresses (p. 262): “Since it is the formal object that specifies a science, different formal objects will bring about different sciences.”

130 Taborda (1987, 298 n. 13) mentions not only Schillebeeckx 1965b but also e.g., Y. Congar, who (Congar 1938, 494) gives a critical analysis of L. Charlier’s book *Essai sur le problème théologique*, which was published 1938, and the question of “*révéé virtuel*”, or the ‘*virtually revealed*’. In Charlier’s opinion (p. 495), the theocentric thesis held: “‘Toutes choses ont Dieu pour principe et pour fin, toutes choses s’explicuent par rapport à Dieu.’” Congar also explains (p. 496) what “*revealable*” means: “Le mot *revelable*, auquel le P. A. Gardiel, à la suite de Jean de Saint-Thomas, a donné une valeur technique vraiment curieuse, n’offre pourtant aucune obscurité. C’est un mot formé, comme *scibile*, *credibile*, *sensibile*, *amabile*, pour désigner un certain ordre d’objets; dans le cas, ainsi que l’a bien vu le P. Charlier (pp. 145–146): ‘*Tout ce qui est susceptible d’être connu à la lumière de la Révélation.*’. L’équivalence est donnée par S. Thomas lui-même: ‘*Prout sund divino lumine cognoscibilia.*’
meaning of world history. The point is to unite this “not-yet-theological” or “pre-theological” scientific knowledge with theology. Again, there is a difference to be noted between scholastic theology and what St. Thomas Aquinas himself advocated: given his view of revealed theology as only one science, una scientia, theology is governed by its own principles. The issue of true theological principles cannot be overlooked. The nature of “non-theological” or “not-yet-theological” data is not clear: why, when, and how can it become part of theology? Moreover, if it is still “theologizable” or “revealable”, it must belong to the category of “revealable and demonstrable” which Gilson criticized. The problem is thus a scientific philosophical one: is this kind of natural knowledge scientific or theological?

Maritain is an example of this kind of thinking as he “adequately considered” moral philosophy. This is precisely the neo-scholastic view: the same matter can be observed in different lights, just as the lights of different colors can be shed on the same concrete object. This makes the objects “revealable”, i.e. theologically relevant. Cajetan issues his maxim: “It is said that all things (omnia)
can be considered in theology, insofar as they are theologically revealable.”

In his commentary on St. Thomas, he – or at least his commentator in the second degree, Maritain – makes theology into a “meta-science” that reigns supreme in the domain of every particular science. The price to be paid for this is that the nature of theology as one science in itself (ut sacra doctrina sit una scientia), that St. Thomas sought to defend, is forsaken. Theology becomes a philosophy and a meta-science. This is because the divine light becomes a “medium” in Cajetan’s terms, and no longer a “superior light” in itself: a subjective state of mind instead of the objective and ontological higher ground.

It should be no surprise that this divino lumine type of methodology was transferred to Latin American liberation theology. It is easily explained geographically because Maritain was held in high esteem at the Catholic University of Louvain. Many other Third World theologians also came to know the same distinguere pour unir epistemology. The expression of “light” in itself

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134 This is the part of Cajetan’s commentary that makes the most of theology as a medium. “Et hoc est quod in littera dicitur, dum ratio quare theologia sit una scientia, assignatur ex unitate rationis formalis sub qua, seu objecti ut objectum, idest luminis divinae revelationis: omnia enim dicuntur considerari in theologia inquantum sunt divinitus revelabilia. Et sic patet vis et sensus rationis allatae in littera.” Caietanus 1888, 13 [comm. in Iもの, q.1, a.3], emphasis added. Cajetan thus paraphrased St. Thomas’s “omnia quaecumque sunt divinitus revelabilia” in a slogan-like phrase. The following note illustrates how Maritain used the longer quote.

135 “En se plaçant à ce point de vue de la ratio formalis sub qua, on voit que les objets de savoir se divisent ‘in scibile per lumen metaphysicale, idest medium illustratum per abstractionem’ ab omni materia; et per lumen mathematicum, idest medium illustratum immaterialitate sensibili, obumbbratum tamen materia intelligibili; et per lumen physicum, idest, medium obumbbratum materia sensibili, illustratum autem ex separatione individualium conditionum; et per lumen divinum, idest medium divino lumine fulgentis: quod scibile theologicum constituit. [...] Omnia enim dicuntur considerari in theologia, inquantum sunt divinitus revelabilia. [...]” Deitati respondet una tantum ratio formalis adequaquata objecti, ut objectum est, et haec est lumen divinum. Sed illa ratio formalis non est una in specie, sed in genere, et dividitum in lumen divinum evidens, et lumen divinum revelans, abstrahendo ab evidentia et inevidentia, et lumen divinum inevidens, et primum est ratio sub qua theologiae beatorum, secundum nostrae, tertium fidei.” Maritain & Maritain 1982, 285–286. Cit. from Caietanus 1888, 12–13 [comm. in Iもの, q.1, a.3]. Emphasis added.

136 For Cajetan, the divine light was a medium, an epistemological category, as is evident from the context of his commentary: “Et ex hac fluit alia divisio scibilis [...] et per lumen divinum, idest medium divino lumine fulgentis: quod scibile theologicum constituit.” Caietanus 1888, 12.

137 For St. Bonaventure, it was not a question of “lumine” as a medium but one of “lumen”, light in itself, in which different creatures participate in different degrees. The superior light is the light of the Scriptures: it teaches truths that are supra rationem. See Bonaventure 1996, 42–45. In his Teoria do método teológico Clodovis Boff (1998, 207) abandoned the neo-scholastic idea of considering things. Rather, God’s word is “the source and not the means of theology (fonte e não meio da teologia)”.

138 For instance, the Tanzanian Louvain graduate Charles Nyamiti used the notion of theology as a “unifying discipline” and a “communicating link in the world” as he intended to unite several theological streams of thought (European and African). This could be seen as an application of Professor Dondeyne’s Maritainian neo-Thomism that was popular at Louvain in the 1950’s. See Vähäkangas 1999, 93–94.
is based on the Augustinian doctrine of illumination. The methodology is certainly very far from the critical social theory advocated by Metz and Habermas which is based solidly on Immanuel Kant and his notion of practical reason. The idea of making theology, and particularly “non-theology”, in the Thomist sense sub ratione Dei would have been difficult for critical theorists to accept. One question therefore needs to be asked. Is the method of liberation theology advocated by Gustavo Gutiérrez, or theology as the “critical reflection of the historical praxis in the light of the Word”, contradictory in the first place? Was the aim to be “critical”, or un-critical and scholastic?

The interpretation of Latina American liberation theology has been – at least at times – very scholastic indeed. There is a fair amount of scholasticism in the writings of Juan Carlos Scannone, an Argentinian philosopher of religion. He accepts the “Cajetan type” of division into two different formal objects, which he in turn denominates as obiectum formale quo (“in the light of faith”) and obiectum formale quod, “a formal object that is objectively thematized”. This is the same as applying the terms ratio formalis obiecti ut res / ut obiectum and ratio formalis quae / sub qua. By material object Scannone means “the social reality, the revelation”. This line of thinking is very difficult to grasp, however. What is the role of the revelation as the “light of the faith” is thematized? Why are the revelation and the social reality together considered to be material objects? Scannone’s explanation of the relation between “praxis and theory and theory and praxis” (section 5.2.1. of the article) seems to be very scholastic and un-pragmatic, compared to any philosophical standard of the 20th century. His sophism even deviates from Gutiérrez, who spoke of the critical reflection of the historical praxis

139 “La teología como reflexión crítica de la praxis histórica a la luz de la Palabra [...].” Gutiérrez, TL, 38.
140 “Pero por otro lado tal discontinuidad no excluye una cierta continuidad (aunque ésta no sea ni lineal ni dialéctica), en cuanto el sujeto de la praxis histórica (de fe y caridad e informada por ellas) y de la praxis teórica o epistémica es el mismo, así como también en cuanto el objeto material del que se trata (la realidad social, la Revelación) es el mismo. Aún más, también el objeto formal quo u horizonte último de comprensión es en ambos casos el mismo, es decir, la luz de la fe que ilumina tanto la praxis de la caridad (opción preferencial evangélica por los pobres) cuanto la teoría teológica que la reflexiona críticamente. La diferencia o ruptura epistemológica entre praxis y teoría de la fe consiste, por tanto, más bien en la ruptura metodológica entre sabiduría y ciencia, pues en ésta el objeto formal (la luz de la fe) se tematiza objetivamente (objeto formal quod), y se hace jugar explícitamente a la Revelación como principio hermenéutico y criterio de juicio, en forma consciente, crítica, metódica, argumentativa y sistemática, según corresponde a una ciencia. No sólo se comprende, interpreta, juzga y valora de ese modo, se da razón de por qué se interpreta, juzga y valora de ese modo, y se sistematizan dicha teorización y argumentación a partir de los principios propios del orden de la fe y según la analogía de la fe.” Scannone 1990, 328–329.
in the light of the Word. According to Scannone, it is the revelation (= the word) that is the material object, and it is considered “in the light of the faith”.

The method is not made absolutely clear in Libanio’s *Teologia da libertação*, either. He suggests interpreting the data given by “empirical” social science in the light of the revelation (*à luz da Revelação*), yet two pages further on he states that “faith has the absolute priority” and that “faith reveals the transcendent sense of the historical action”. This means that we cannot clearly see in which light he considers the surrounding reality: in the general “light of the faith” or in the theologically more specific “light of the revelation”. Neither faith nor revelation are adequately described in terms of content: in what way does liberation theology consider science? The radical priest of the Allende years Pablo Richard provides another example of the terminological difficulty, suggesting that praxis be considered “in the light of the praxis”. It should be clear whether the formal object is the light of the faith, or of revelation, or of praxis. This is the question of “criteria” and “priority” in liberation theology, but it should also be clear whether the material object is, in fact, the praxis, or social science, or the Bible.

It is the precisely the “ultimate criteria” that have been expressly referred to in the *retractationes* of the liberation theologians. This is particularly true of the

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141 “Poderíamos definir este nível empírico como o do conhecimento dos mecanismos de funcionamento das estruturas da realidade. É o nível em que as ciências exatas, verificáveis trabalham. Para isso, elas usam o método da observação, da verificação, da falsificação. Suas interpretações devem ser testadas, verificadas, comprovadas pelos fatos, pelas experiências. Apesar de relacionar-se com ele no duplo movimento da captação da realidade e da devolução do dado pensado à luz da Revelação a esta mesma realidade, a teologia não se situa especificamente nele.” *TdL*, 217–218. What, then, is the formal criterion of theology itself? Is it enough to just say that it “comes afterward”, as a “second act”? Where is the *inquantum* (insofar as) criterion that Cajetan suggested? Is all emphasis put on the *omnia*, “everything”? Namely, the *inquantum* criterion is there precisely because not everything is revealable in practice but only in principle.

142 “No círculo hermenêutico da TdL, a fé tem absoluta prioridade, relevância. [...] No círculo hermenêutico, a fé desvela o sentido transcendent da ação histórica concreta, a dimensão salvífica dos acontecimentos políticos, o valor simbólico das libertações humanas.” *TdL*, 220.

143 In his article “El significado histórico de la fe cristiana en la praxis revolucionaria: análisis crítico a la luz de la praxis” (*Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional* (Santiago) 17 (1973), 170–185 = Richard & Torres 1975, 42–66), Pablo Richard argues that the praxis of the Christians needs to be considered critically, not in the light of the faith or theology, but “in the light of the praxis” (a la luz de la praxis, s. 55). He explains this: “Tratándose aquí de analizar la mediación de una praxis, concebida como militancia marxista-leninista, la ‘luz de la praxis’ que usaremos será la racionalidad de la praxis tal como la conciben Marx y Lenin.” *Ibid.*, 55–56. The rationality of the praxis has “a meaning in itself” (un sentido en si misma) since “The revolution justifies itself by itself (La revolución se justifica por sí misma), Mao said.” *Ibid.*, 59. Richard was able to publish his anarchistic articles under the pseudonym Esteban Torres. Later, in 1975, he made good use of this as he published an article collection “with” Torres in Spain. He openly mentions this in a later article: “Lo publiqué junto con Esteban Torres, que era yo mismo [...]” Richard 2000, 245
14th Spanish edition of Gutiérrez’s main work, published in 1990. The emphasis on “starting from the praxis” is consciously played down. Gutiérrez’s public mea culpa had commenced earlier, however, since he had published “Teología y ciencias sociales” in 1984 and “La verdad os hará libres” in 1986, for instance. The same thinking, albeit perhaps more balanced, is evident in the latter text: “The ultimate criteria come from the revealed truth that we receive in faith, and not from the praxis itself.”

It has thus been shown that the neo-scholastic philosophy of religion provided the theological background for Latin American liberation theology. Its legacy was not very clear, however. From the Cajetanian point of view, one would be inclined to emphasize the material object and the “real world” because it subsists and not only exists. The 100 dollars in your pocket are greater than the merely fictional 100 dollars. St. Thomas’s Summa Theologiae originally stressed the formal object of theology, which provided the criterion for establishing what was theological and what was not. As shown, the same ambiguity is visible in Libanio’s thinking of mediated immediacy: he emphasizes the theological criteria against the Marxist, and also affirms the need for truly contextual, mediated and “real” liberation theology.

144 Likewise, there is no talk about judging it “in the light of the praxis”, which Gutiérrez expressly prohibits. Because the praxis cannot justify itself, something superior is needed – this is an apologetic of the traditional kind: "Hoy cabría criticar igualmente la tendencia a una ‘casi exclusividad’ de la ortopraxis. Ese no era el caso hace veinte años. Lo cierto es que entre ortodoxia y ortopraxis se dan una relación circular y una alimentación recíproca. Limitarse a una de ellas es rechazar las dos. Está claro, además, que hacemos teología cuando reflexionamos ‘a la luz de la fe’, según la fórmula tradicional que recordamos con frecuencia en teología de la liberación. Carecería de sentido, por otro lado, decir que se analiza la práctica ‘a la luz de la práctica’. Los criterios últimos vienen de la verdad revelada, que acogemos en la fe y recibimos en la Iglesia, y no de la praxis misma. Cf. Libertatis Nuntius VIII 4–5, X 3–5, XI 13 [...]” Gutiérrez, TL (1990), 66 n. (a), emphasis added. Footnote (a) is an alphabetized footnote, as distinct from the numbered footnotes, the numbering of which has remained the same since 1971. Footnote (a) is Gutiérrez’s first (!) addition to the original work so it should be considered extremely important.

145 Both are included in Gutiérrez 1990c.

146 “Los criterios últimos vienen de la verdad revelada que acogemos en la fe y no de la praxis misma.” Gutiérrez 1990c, 127. Concerning the ultimate criteria, “los criterios últimos”, see also ibid., 144.
The neo-scholasticism of Jacques Maritain was important in the political sense, too. Luis Alberto Gómez de Souza, a Catholic lay activist, mentions his book *Humanisme intégral*, which was crucial as they were laying the foundation for subsequent liberation theology in the early 1960’s. The inspiration he gave to the Christian Democratic Party in Brazil was diminished because the bishops did not encourage people to join it. Maritain was particularly helpful because he distinguished between Christian action as “Christian action” and as “a Christian’s action (without the church)”, paving the way for freer political participation by Catholics. This meant that the first truly liberating effect came from Maritain’s social Catholicism because it freed Christians to take their own political option. The cross-breeding of neo-scholasticism and Marxism was not only theoretical but also practical. The politization that followed was a Pandora’s box for Catholic Action in the 1960’s.

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148 Gómez de Souza (2004, 40) refers to Maritain 1973, 294: “[...] on the first plane of activity, on the plane of the spiritual, I appear before them as a Christian as such, and to this extent I engage Christ’s Church; and that on the second plane of activity, on the plane of the temporal, I do not act as a Christian as such, but I should act as Christian, engaging only myself, not the Church, but engaging my whole self, not amputated or inanimate [...]” =Maritain 1936, 314: “en tant que chrétien” – “en chrétien, n’engageant que moi, non l’Eglise”. This distinction was very familiar to Gutiérrez, who had worked as a priest for Catholic Action. See Gutiérrez, *TL*, 87: “en tanto que cristiano” – “en cristiano”.

149 Bruneau 1974, 94–100.
2.3. The concepts of scientific Marxism, historical materialism and Marxist analysis

From the very beginning, liberation theology has interpreted historical praxis through social science. This Marxist analytic instrument has been used in a free and creative way, as Alfonso G. Rubio stated in his study of early liberation theology. Liberation theologians have often repeated the claim that their use of Marxist analysis does not imply Marxism as a total system.\textsuperscript{150} However, the term was first used by the Christians for Socialism who were committed to a “conquest” of power for the working class.\textsuperscript{151}

According to Rubio, the relationship between Christianity and Marxism in liberation theology was built on a dualistic and \textit{scientistic} interpretation of what Marxism was. The writings of the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser were the source of this interpretation.\textsuperscript{152} Marxism was supposed to be more scientific than \textit{humanist}, as opposed to the excitement that the “humanist” Marx of the early \textit{Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts} had caused in the New Left of the 1960’s. Now, Althusser wanted to go back to the real and scientific Marx who was the late Marx of the \textit{Capital}. Marxism in its core was not humanism but a science – Althusser even spoke of “anti-humanism”.\textsuperscript{153} French communists also thought that Marxism as science could be clearly separated from Marxism as \textit{ideology}.

The main works of Althusser, \textit{Pour Marx} and \textit{Lire le Capital I–II}\textsuperscript{154}, were translated into a number of languages, including Spanish. The person who most helped the spread of Althussarianism in Latin America was the Chilean Marta

\textsuperscript{150} “A teologia da libertação depende, pois, do instrumental analítico marxista, embora manejado de maneira livre e criativa. Insistir-se-á, repetidamente na distinção existente entre o uso desse instrumental científico e a aceitação do ‘sistema totalizador’ marxista.” Rubio 1983, 241 [orig. 1977]. Clodovis Boff (\textit{TP}, 120, 381) based his “theology of the political” (TdP) on histmat and not diamat i.e. not on an “all-explaining Weltanschauung”. Cf. Gutiérrez’s apologetic text of 1984 about “aspectos ideológicos y análisis marxista” in Gutiérrez 1990c, 80–82.
\textsuperscript{151} The 1972 document of the Jornada Nacional of the Christians for Socialism is an early example of the term “Marxist analysis”. The collective aim is obviously not purely scientific: “CpS es un lugar de encuentro de cristianos que militan no en diferentes partidos de izquierda, pero que tienen el mismo compromiso con la clase trabajadora y su lucha por el socialismo. Asumen el análisis marxista y tienen como objetivo inmediato colaborar en la conquista del poder por parte de la clase trabajadora.” Richard 1976, 256.
\textsuperscript{152} Rubio 1983, 243.
\textsuperscript{153} Althusser & Balibar 1971a, 150.
\textsuperscript{154} Althusser & Balibar 1971a, Althusser & Balibar 1971b.
Harnecker. She had been a Catholic Action leader at the Catholic University of Santiago at the turn of the 1950’s and 60’s, and said that Jacques Maritain was their “gran guía” at the time.\(^{155}\) However, she gradually moved from social Catholicism to open Marxism.\(^{156}\) After visiting Castro’s Cuba and studying at the elite École normale in Paris where Althusser taught, she was ready to return to Chile where the revolutionary action was on full throttle. A few years later, the administration of Salvador Allende in 1970–1973 was committed to democratic socialism, but it had very close links with Cuba and the Soviet Union and more or less openly harbored a revolutionary program.\(^{157}\) Most specifically, revolutionary groups such as MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria) were bent on revolution.\(^{158}\)

Marta Harnecker’s famous political manual *Los conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico* (1969) deals, as the title suggests, with historical materialism.\(^{159}\) It could be considered a paraphrase of Louis Althusser’s thinking

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\(^{155}\) Smith (1976, 42) implies that Maritain’s social Catholicism could in fact have prepared people for Marxism. Because of its historical determinism, Maritain’s thinking has sometimes been regarded as nothing but camouflaged Marxism. One can see the historical optimism, if not determinism, in *Humanisme intégral*: “But what will come after time is prepared by time; the kingdom of God constitutes the final term which the movement of history prepares and to which it leads, and toward which converge, on the other hand, the history of the Church and the spiritual world and, on the other, the history of the secular world and the political city: with this difference, that the history of the Church is already the history of the kingdom of God begun in time, of the ‘crucified kingdom’, which at the end will be revealed; whereas the history of the secular world will come to its final term only by means of a substantial ‘mutation’, which is designated as the conflagration of the world, and which will engender it to the kingdom.” Maritain 1973, 102.

\(^{156}\) “Mi encuentro teórico con el marxismo se produjo en Francia en 1964. Yo en ese momento era católica militante. [...] A mediados de 1960 pude conocer de cerca la revolución cubana. Eran los primeros meses de euforia, improvisación y creatividad de una revolución triunfante [...]” Harnecker 1987, 15.

\(^{157}\) Allende’s links with the KGB were forged in the early 1950’s (Andrew & Mitrokhin 2006, 71). He was backed by hundreds of thousands of dollars of Soviet money, just as his electoral opponents were supported by the CIA, though less effectively (ibid., 71–72). Interestingly from a Christian perspective, the KGB gave him two icons as a gift (p. 75). Mitrokhin’s files reveal that the Soviet Union had, in fact, given up on Chile as early as 1972 after the truckers’ strike (p. 79). The involvement of the CIA in Project FUBELT helped to create the conditions for the military coup, cf. Wikipedia 2008b; on the original 1970 “Track I” and “Track II” schemes, cf. Andrew & Mitrokhin 2006, 73. For general information on the Chilean coup d’état, see Wikipedia 2008a.

\(^{158}\) On accusations of the involvement of priests with MIR, see Donoso Loero 1976, 200. On the painfully real memories of the torture and disappearance of the Valencian-born priest Antonio “Toño” Lidó who was active in both MIR and the CpS, see the recent work Amorós 2007.

\(^{159}\) The concept of historical materialism was propagated strongly in one of the earliest philosophical books in the Soviet Union, Nikolai Bukharin’s *Theory of Historical Materialism*, published in Russian in 1921. See Bukharin 1922. In 1938, the imprisoned Bukharin was killed by Stalin as part of the great purge. On Bukharin’s history, see Oittinen 2006.
that was disseminated in Latin America. Louis Althusser remembered his student and her book:

Just one example: one of my students, Chilean Marta Harnecker, who, unless my memory fails me, lived in Paris between 1960 and 1965, returned to Latin America (Cuba), in order to publish a small handbook on historical materialism. Is it even known that they printed ten million copies of it? It was not good, though, but for lack of something better, it laid the basis for the theoretical and political training of ten thousand, yea, ten million Latin American activists. At the time, it was the only work of its kind on the continent. It repeated literally, often without completely understanding them, the ideas Balibar and I had put forth in *Lire le Capital*.

Althusser exaggerates the popularity of Harnecker’s manual. The Spanish version issued by the Mexican publishing house Siglo XXI never sold more than “only” 700,000 copies. The historical materialism it propagated was *commune bonum* to the legion of leftist thinkers and activists that began to sprout after the Cuban example – a kaleidoscope of axioms that were not open to criticism. The book is not normally mentioned in liberation theological works, with perhaps the only exception of Clodovis Boff’s dissertation.

In those days, if a Christian wanted to have a dialogue with a Marxist, he or she was obliged to accept the “scientific” nature of Marxism. A. G. Rubio also refers to this: “Since Marxism is a science, then from the Christian point of view there is no longer any problem in accepting it.” This was particularly true of the left wing of the French communist party PCF, to which Althusser belonged. The General Secretary of the PCF, Georges Marchais, suggested in 1970 that Marxist “science” could be separated from the ideology. This would make it possible for Christians to join the communists in defending the workers’ cause even if their “fundamental philosophical motivations” were opposite to those of the

160 Castañeda (1994, 57) states: “Harnecker would become the largest-selling Latin American author after Gabriel García Márquez, acquiring a distinctive niche of her own in the ranks of the Latin American left.”
161 Althusser 1993, 268. This is clearly inaccurate. Harnecker first returned to her native Chile where the revolutionary fervor was particularly strong in the late 1960’s. After the Pinochet coup she went into exile in Cuba.
162 Castañeda (1994, 176) reports that the Mexican printing company Siglo XXI also published works by Althusser.
163 C. Boff, *TP*, 285 n. 8 refers to the Belgian edition of the book, *Les concepts élémentaires du matérialisme historique*, and to the Brazilian edition that was published without mention of editor or place (s.ed., s.l.) in 1973. N.b.: in the German version of *TP (Theologie und Praxis)* all the footnotes have been changed and there is no reference to Harnecker.
communists. Juan Luis Segundo criticized this thinking for being a *sacrificium intellectus* in his book *Fe e ideología* (*Faith and Ideologies*), published in 1982.\(^{165}\)

In the same book, Segundo also criticized Althusserian thinking for this very separation. Was it possible, he asked, to maintain that Marx’s later works were devoid of any implicit ideals? There was no real justification for distinguishing the “pre-Marxist” Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) as different from the so-called scientific and real Marx. Althusser offered no proof of this “anti-humanism”.\(^{166}\)

The reason why “science” was so important lay in the very atmosphere of the 1960’s and 1970’s. It was an activist age. The relation between knowledge and will was reflected in the formalized relationship between science and ethics. Marxist analysis paved the way for transforming action, praxis. This is where an ecumenical example helps to explain the worldwide importance of this revolutionary thinking. For years before the World Council of Churches organized its famous meeting on Church and Society in Geneva in 1966, the member churches had been inundated with consistently ideological material. This material included an interesting text by the Brazilian sociologist Celso Furtado from 1962. As he wrote, “Marxism in any of its variants makes it possible to translate the diagnosis of social reality into norms of action.”\(^{167}\) The Hegelian and Marxist

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\(^{165}\) According to Segundo, there is “a zone which is not open to dialog”, namely the “scientific” nature of Marxist theory. It has to be accepted if one is to have a dialog with the Marxists: “Véase, como ejemplo de las propuestas hechas a cristianos desde el campo marxista, las de G. Marchais, secretario general del P.C.F., en una entrevista concedida al diario católico ‘La Croix’: ‘La distinción entre la edificación ‘científica’ del socialismo y ‘los fundamentos filosóficos últimos’ de esa misma construcción’ no impide de ninguna manera que los cristianos se adhieran plenamente al socialismo científico, es decir, a un análisis determinado de la sociedad y de su desarrollo, a una definición de los objetivos capaces de asegurar la liberación de los trabajadores, a un método de lucha colectiva – sin hacer suyos necesariamente los fundamentos filosóficos últimos del socialismo científico’ (‘La Croix’, 19 de noviembre de 1970). ¿Cuál es esa filosofía que se distingue de la ciencia marxista? Hay aquí un problema no aclarado, una zona no abierta al diálogo. En cuanto a las implicaciones políticas de tal reserva, véase la ajustada crítica de Christian Grenier (de quien tomo la cita), *La stratégie du P.C.F. par rapport aux masses chrétiennes*: ‘Lettre’, n. 202–203 (junio-julio 1975), pp. 13–17.” Segundo 1982, 234 n. 25.

\(^{166}\) Segundo 1982, 299. In a witty way, J. L. Segundo reflects (pp. 294–295) on the use of the word “materialism”, which is often blurred by Marxist propagandism. “Materialism” can mean 1. opposition to empty formalism, 2. the substitution of philosophy by science (which to philosophy is tantamount to self-denial), or 3. the denial of everything spiritual in the ontology and the acceptance of only mechanistic explanations. This third category, in turn, would imply the dismissal of every kind of transformative praxis as impossible – according to Segundo, even diamat would have to be negated.

\(^{167}\) In the larger context: “This brings us to the second point to which I would like to give attention: the need for a philosophy which orients our action. Many people here and abroad have asked me why there exists such a great penetration of Marxism among Brazilian young people today, the reason is a simple one: Marxism in any of its variants makes it possible to translate the diagnosis of
idealism behind liberation theology could be seen as the fashion philosophy of the Brazilian “idealist and active” youth of the early 1960’s.

However, the question came from praxis and activism back to science. One could argue that liberation theology originated more from humanist Marxism than from scientific Marxism. Did not, for instance, Johann Baptist Metz influence the thinking of Gustavo Gutiérrez? In his book Zur Theologie der Welt Metz made the point that theology needed a functional consciousness and a new unity of “theory and practice (Praxis), reflection and revolution”. 168 This was not scientific thinking, but theology made in a post-metaphysical and Kantian situation. It sounds more like the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas and others, than scientific and objectivist.

In fact, liberation theologians used words borrowed from Kantian and Habermasian critical thought. Theology was supposed to be a “critical reflection of praxis”, as Gustavo Gutiérrez formulated it169, but it was also supposed to accept the scientific knowledge provided by Marxist social analysis. As Gutiérrez argued in his breakthrough book published in 1971, “Marx constructed a scientific knowledge of the historical reality” and “a science of history”. 170 In methodological terms, Marxism seems like the perfect philosophy to combine the objective and the subjective.

Yet Rubio remarks critically that Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology of the 1970’s relied more strongly on scientific Marxist analysis than on Marxist humanism. He regarded this as “a lamentable lacuna”. 171 Since the 1960’s dialogue between Marxists and Christians had been based on the writings of the
young Marx and on humanism, and this basis for genuine dialogue was lost as Althusser grew in popularity. Marxism was marketed to Christians as a science. Yet according to Gutiérrez, it was more than a science because it also provided the revolutionary zeal.\footnote{Rubio 1983, s. 242–245 n. 59–65. Ref. to G. Gutiérrez, Marxismo y cristianismo. Santiago de Chile, 1971 (unpublished). José Miguez Bonino (1977, 71) also stresses the importance of utopia as the “third, intermediate level” between socio-political science and faith in Gutiérrez’s liberation theology.} Rubio points to Gutiérrez’s use of “utopia” as a link between the objective science and the subjective faith. Because Marxism could not eventually be split in two, Gutiérrez introduced it as a middle term.\footnote{Lukács (1967, 208) discusses the humanistic streaks in Marx’s thought and refers to a “dilemma of empiricism and utopianism” – this kind of thinking would lead one to think of utopianism as the opposite of empiricism, i.e. as humanism. Utopian thought stems from various sources (the Frankfurt School, Paulo Freire, Ricœur), and it also influenced liberation theology, even though it is different from Althusserianism. Cf. e.g., Gutiérrez, TL, 309–320. On the influence of Lukác in Brazil in the 1960’s, see Libanio’s article Conciencia crítica / conscientización. Boletín de Filosofía 9 vol. 2 (1997-1998), 175-185, 179.} However, at least in some cases, utopian thought goes back to the humanist roots of Marxism, with G. Lukács as an example.\footnote{On utopia, see also Gutiérrez, TL, 315, where he combines utopian thought, aspiring to ever new things, with “a cultural revolution which intends to forge a new type of a human being”: “La utopía, en efecto, se halla al nivel de la revolución cultural que intenta forjar un nuevo tipo de hombre.” On the “new man”, cf. Guevara 1965, 33: “En este periodo de construcción del socialismo podemos ver el hombre nuevo que va naciendo. Su imagen no está todavía acabada: no podría estarlo nunca ya que el proceso marcha paralelo al desarrollo de formas económicas nuevas.”} Gutiérrez’s utopian hope for the “new man” was openly inspired by Che Guevara, and he talked about a cultural revolution.\footnote{“Von etwa 45 Theologen, auf die sich Gutierrez bezog, sind über zwanzig Franzosen, 7 Belgier und Holländer, einige Schweizer, Italiener und Spanier und nur etwa 7 Westdeutsche. Man hat dies auf die Formel gebracht: ‘Die Theologie der Befreiung denkt französisch.’ Es handelt sich bei der ‘Instruktion’ infolgedessen auch darum, dass der Gegensatz verschiedener europäischer ‘Schulen’} It is therefore difficult to understand, for example, the central ideas of liberation theology as portrayed in an East German intelligence document. It rightly states that first-generation liberation theologians such as Gutiérrez were strongly influenced by French theology and philosophy and that “liberation theology thinks French”.\footnote{“Von etwa 45 Theologen, auf die sich Gutierrez bezog, sind über zwanzig Franzosen, 7 Belgier und Holländer, einige Schweizer, Italiener und Spanier und nur etwa 7 Westdeutsche. Man hat dies auf die Formel gebracht: ‘Die Theologie der Befreiung denkt französisch.’ Es handelt sich bei der ‘Instruktion’ infolgedessen auch darum, dass der Gegensatz verschiedener europäischer ‘Schulen’} Yet when it comes to the question of whether
liberation theology was Marxist-Leninist or neo-Marxist (and Western), it is more complicated. Neo-Marxists, Eurocommunists and revisionists are all lumped together, and even Althusser is considered to be a “French revisionist”. It also holds that “the ‘Marxism’ of the liberation theologians has little to do with scientific Marxism as understood in the GDR”. This Stasi document made Gutiérrez and the rest of the first-generation liberation theologians look like the “New Left” socialists of the 1960’s France and Germany.

Scientific Marxism was nevertheless very important to their system. It shared the same causal or meta-causal thinking as Maritain-type neo-scholasticism. Maritain knew God metaphysically as “the last instance” of being. His scholastic terminology overlaps the Marxist terms of the Althusser–Hennecker school of thought. Clodovis Boff’s *Teologia e prática* is an example of how the logic of matter and form in Thomism is considered in parallel with Althusser’s logic.

Althusser was by no means the only intellectual of the French left that was inspired by the revolutionary movement in Latin America. His *École normale* was well-known on account of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose eulogy on Che Guevara as “the

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177 “Unter marxistischer Analyse wird von den Theologen der Befreiung aber nur zum Teil verstanden, was Marx selbst gesagt und geschrieben hat. Sondern man bezieht sich direkt oder indirekt auf sogenannte ‘Neomarxisten’ bzw. ‘Eurokommunisten’ wie Herbert Markuse, Ernst Bloch, den französischen Revisionisten Althuser [sic] usw. Mit wissenschaftlichem Marxismus, wie man diesen in der DDR versteht, hat der ‘Marxismus’ der Befreiungstheologen wenig zu tun. Deren erste Generation bildete ihre Konzeptionen um 1968 aus, zur Zeit der ‘Studentenrevolte’ und der ‘neuen Linken’. Dieser damals vertretene Linksradikalismus (in Westdeutschland: Frankfurter Schule; in Frankreich analoge Richtungen) haben Gutierrez usw. beeinflusst.” MfS 1985, 6–7. This denial of Soviet influence in Latin American liberation theology and the classification of Althusser as a revisionist is suspect, because Althusser was a champion of the most Cuban-minded revolutionaries in Latin America. As Castañeda (1994, 177) points out, it was possible to be “rabidly pro-Cuba, sharply critical of and disencharged with the Soviet Union”. This is far from meaning that the pro-Cuban people (as the liberation theologians also were) were from the humanistic “New Left” ranks.


179 C. Boff (*TP*, 104) distinguishes between the “real object” and the “theoretical object”, which relate to one another as matter and form. Althusser and St. Thomas Aquinas provide a theoretical basis for this formal logic. See esp. *TP*, 105–106 n. 35 for quotations from *Lire le Capital* and *S. Th.*
most complete human being of our age” was to become famous.\textsuperscript{180} Althusser’s student, the French communist Régis Debray, became so enthusiastic about Che Guevara’s doctrine of guerrilla warfare that the teacher himself had to calm him down quite a lot.\textsuperscript{181}

Marta Harnecker, for her part, not only published over fifty editions of the Marxist manual, she also made the right contacts. In Chile, she became part of the social scientific group of Universidad de Chile in Santiago, and started laying the basis for Marxist propaganda.\textsuperscript{182} Having fled the Pinochet dictatorship to Cuba, she married Manuel Piñeiro, a former intelligence chief of the Cuban DGI. He was the leader of the American Department, or the “Ministry of Revolution” of the Central Committee of the PCC since 1974, and it was his duty to activate non-governmental organizations all over Latin America. These comprised trade unions, guerrilla groups, and other radicals.\textsuperscript{183}

The impact of Althusserianism as advocated by Harnecker is evident in liberation theology. The main tenets of Althusserianism are as follows:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Marxism is \textit{the science of history}. Within Marxism, \textit{a distinction can and must be made between the scientific and the ideological content}. Hence, Christians can also make use of Marxism. The need for this social analysis comes from the political interest that social Catholicism has helped to advance. The Catholic Action axiom
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{180} “To the Frenchman, Che was ‘not only an intellectual but also the most complete human being of our age.’” Sartre said that they were “witnessing happiness that had been attained by violence” but this happiness “wouldn’t last forever”. Anderson 1997, 468. Gianni Vattimo (2007, 114) applies Sartre’s intellectual pessimism to Chávez’s experiment in Venezuela.

\textsuperscript{181} Castañeda (1994, 70) relates that Althusser had criticized the excessive optimism of the \textit{Revolution in the Revolution} by Debray. The book was published just in time before Debray was to witness Che’s last trip to the Bolivian forest, where he was killed. After being freed from the Bolivian prison, Debray managed to come to witness Allende’s experiment with socialism in Chile.

\textsuperscript{182} Harnecker 1987, 17–18; Donoso Loero 1976, 21. The theologian Pablo Richard and the social scientist Franz Hinkelammert also worked at the University of Chile, in close co-operation with the Brazilian theologian Hugo Assmann. See Richard & Torres 1975, 27 n. 1. Assmann quit the priesthood and got married. Richard is involved as a priest in San José (Richard 2000, 241 n. *).

\textsuperscript{183} On the marriage of Piñeiro and Harnecker, see Castañeda 1994, 57; for more on Piñeiro, see pp. 51–67. Castañeda characterizes his activity: “Piñeiro and his comrades were banished from the Ministry of the Interior. Thus was born the (in)famous America Department of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, or, some might have called it, the Ministry of Revolution. This was, thereafter, where revolution was exported from; its agents were placed in embassies and press bureaus; its headquarters were just next to Fidel’s office in the Palace of the Revolution; its links with the Latin American left were extensive, intimate, and decisive.” Ibid., 57. Andrew & Gordievsky (1990, 425–426) suggest that the reason Piñeiro left the DGI was his unwillingness to accept the way the KGB had been continuously meddling in their affairs since 1970.
“see–judge–act” has made it easier to assimilate the idea of objective Marxist analysis, which can then be “judged” in Christian terms.

2. Everything in society is determined by economy in the last instance. This gives relative autonomy to social institutions and to religion. Yet this kind of relative autonomy is paradoxical to start with. Where is the main emphasis: on “relative” or on “autonomous”? Is the aim to find a balance between faith and life, or to start an ideological struggle to liberate people from religion altogether?

3. Following Althusser’s Leninist turn in the late 1960’s, class struggle is the last instance. It is the motor of history. Naturally, 3. and 1. are somehow contradictory since class struggle is obviously a value judgment [ethics, ideology].

4. The superstructure is ideological and it has no independent existence. It exists because the system (the ideological state apparatuses or ISAs) supports it. The central apparatuses are school, the church, information, and the political system.\textsuperscript{184}

5. The scientific procedure consists in a theoretical transformation of concepts, theoretical practice (pratique théorique, Port: prática teórica).\textsuperscript{185} The theoretical practice “generalizes” the scientific knowledge to philosophy and follows the Leninist idea of philosophy built on scientific results. The three stages or “generalities” of the method came from the positivist Gaston Bachélar, who thought that “Philosophy was characterized by static immobility; it was science that was the dynamic element.”\textsuperscript{186}

Althusser’s method was a fusion of Marxist and structuralist elements, and it is often called “dialectical structuralism”. The technical term that stands for his scientific Marxism is historical materialism, however. The latter part of Lire le Capital II was written by Étienne Balibar, who reflects at length on histmat as a

\textsuperscript{184} Althusser 1975a, xvii.
\textsuperscript{185} Clodovis Boff explains the three stages or “generalities” of Bachélar–Althusserian theory (G) as GI–GII–GIII in \textit{TP}, 144–150.
\textsuperscript{186} Majumdar 1995, 63.
concept. The word “materialism” meant “nothing else but science” to Balibar. Thus the word pair “historical materialism” is an exact synonym of “the science of history”. Balibar finds support in Lenin’s thinking. It is necessary to understand the historical shift from a materialist emphasis on histmat in Marx and Engels to the scientific concept of histmat in the thinking of Balibar and Althusser. Marx emphasized the material aspect against Hegel’s idealism; Althusser and his companions stressed the scientific aspect over humanist Marxism. It is the shift to the scientific that explains why the historical materialism of Althusser and Harnecker could be accepted in liberation theology.

It was Balibar’s intention to develop the Marxist theory of history from the “abstract” form to give it greater clarity, and the main point concerns how the idea of class struggle could become a scientific claim. The method applied is the “transformation” of practical concepts into theoretically “adequate” concepts of Marxist historical science. Coincidentally, a similar word (“adequate”) is used by the Althusser school and by Maritain, but what determines adequacy is different: for Balibar, it is a kind of philosophia ancilla oeconomiae but for

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187 The latter part of Althusser & Balibar 1971b (pp. 79–226), “Sur les concepts fondamentaux du matérialisme historique” written by Balibar, corresponds to Harnecker’s Los conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico. André Tosel’s dictionary article makes the critical point that if political class struggle is the central praxis, then the economic structure of production that imitates the economic class struggle cannot be taken to mean praxis (practice). Praxis can resemble production only formally. The critique is based on the difference between human political action and economic production. Tosel 1987, 1032. Libanio (with Murad) makes a similar type of criticism based on the difference between theological hermeneutics and economic production in IT, 321.

188 “Ce sont ces concepts qui permettent à Lénine de formuler un commentaire pour nous décisif: dans l’expression ‘matérialisme historique’, ‘matérialisme’ ne signifie rien d’autre que science, et l’expression est rigoureusement synonyme de ‘science de l’histoire’.” Althusser & Balibar 1971b, 80. Balibar refers to the book written by Lenin, Ce que sont les amis du peuple et comment ils luttent contre les social-démocrates. In: Lénine, Œuvres complètes I, Paris & Moscou, 1958. For a critical discussion, see Küttler & Petrioli & Wolf 2004, 329. The article written by Küttler et al. (329, 331), however, is reminiscent of Balibar’s self-critical “Quelques remarques critiques à propos de Lire le Capital” in Balibar 1974, 203–245. See esp. p. 231 where Balibar explains that the “general” Marxist terms of base, superstructure etc. only exist to “formally orient” the “problematic of histmat”, which he no longer calls a “theory”. On p. 234, echoing Mao, he declares that there is no “exterior” instance to the course of history but the internal, contradictory forces of history itself.

189 “Ce point est très important car il nous permet de formuler plus précisément la question de Marx, celle qui est enveloppée dans la Préface de la Contribution: à quelles conditions l’affirmation que l’histoire est histoire de luttes de classes peut-elle être un énoncé scientifique? Autrement dit: quelles sont ces classes? qu’est-ce que des classes? qu’est-ce que leur lute?” Althusser & Balibar 1971b, 82.

190 “Je me propose d’en amorcer ici le travail, un travail explicite de transformation de ces concepts ‘pratiques’ en concepts théoriques de la théorie marxiste de l’histoire, un travail qui les dépouille de leur forme théorique actuelle pour les rendre théoriquement adéquats à leur contenu pratique.” Althusser & Balibar 1971b, 89. Is this Marxist “adequate transformation” of the information not as theoretical as the “adequate” transformation of secular knowledge into theological knowledge? Is this not the combining link between Marxism and scholasticism?
Maritain it is the ancient *philosophia ancilla theologiae*. This is the core of the Althusserian procedure of theoretical practice, of which Clodovis Boff’s liberation theology made use.

Economy determines everything in the “last instance” in Althusser’s thinking. Later he stresses that it determines everything social (*tout social*). This seems to mean more: it is also the very determining structure on the practical level of social life. He makes the point in *Lire le Capital II* that no “real people” should be considered “subjects”, and that it is a question of the relations between production and the (bracketed) political-ideological relations of the superstructure.191 He goes even further in his subject-less philosophizing: human action is steered by “ideological state apparatuses”.192

The formula “in the last instance” in Althusser’s and Harnecker’s works comes from two main sources: Friedrich Engels and Joseph Stalin. Althusser quotes Engels:

\[ \text{But the determination in Marx’s mind is determination *only in the last instance*. As Engels put it (Letter to Bloch).}^{193} \]

"According to the materialist concept of history, the determining factor in history is, in the *last instance*, the production and the reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have affirmed anything more. If afterward someone should turn this to mean that the economic factor is the *only* determining one, this person will transform every part of it into an empty, abstract and absurd phrase.”

In the determination used in this rhetoric (*topique*), the last *instance* is indeed the *last* instance. If it is the *last one*, as in the juridical imagery that sustains it, it is because there are *others*, those which are located in the juridical-political and ideological superstructure. The fact that the last instance is mentioned in the determination thus has a double function: it delimits Marx from all mechanicism in a radical way, and it opens up the interplay of the

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191 “Non seulement l’économique est une région structurée qui occupe une place propre dans la structure globale du tout social, mais en son lieu même, dans son autonomie (relative) régionale, elle fonctionne comme une *structure* (régionale) déterminant comme telle ses éléments. Nous retrouvons ici les résultats des autres études de cet ouvrage: à savoir que la structure des rapports de production détermine des *places* et des *fonctions* qui sont occupées et assumées par les agents de la production […] Les vrais ‘sujets’ [au sens de sujets constitutants du procès] ne sont donc pas ses occupants ni les fonctionnaires, ne sont donc pas, contrairement à toutes les apparences, les ‘évidences’ du ‘donné’ de l’anthropologie naïve, les ‘individus concrets’, les ‘hommes réels’ – mais la *définition* et la *distribution* de ces *places* et de ces *fonctions*. Les vrais ‘sujets’ sont donc ces *définisseurs* et ces *distributeurs*: les *rapports de production* (et les rapports sociaux politiques et idéologiques).” Althusser & Balibar 1971b, 52–53.

192 This is stated in Althusser’s famous article “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État (Notes pour une recherche)” (*La Pensée* n. 151 (juin 1970)), which was also published in *Positions*. See Althusser 1976, 67–125.

193 “Mais la détermination que Marx pense est détermination *seulement en dernière instance*. Comme le dit Engels (Lettre à Bloch): […]. Althusser 1976, 139. On the importance of this article by Engels and his correspondence with Mehring, Ernst and others, see Moisonnier 1985, 494–495.
different instances in the determination. It is an interplay of real difference, in which the dialectic is situated.\footnote{194}

Marx and Engels had referred to a materialist concept of history (\textit{materialistische Geschichtsauffassung}), and the term was also used in this 1890 letter. It was later developed into “historical materialism” by Franz Mehring.\footnote{195} In “Zur historisch-materialistischen Methode” (1894) Mehring refers to the two levels of causes in the same way as Engels did: cause and effect must not be “opposite poles without interaction”.\footnote{196} Even if ideological spheres, such as religion, do not have an \textit{independent} historical existence, they nevertheless may have some historical \textit{effect}. This logic is based on the notion of matter as an Aristotelian \textit{prima causa}, and on ideological superstructures as \textit{causae secundae}. Joseph Stalin’s much-quoted idea of their relation originally comes from Engels and Mehring:

3) \textit{Historical materialism.} The question remains to be clarified: what, from the point of view of historical materialism is meant by the “conditions of the material life of society” which in the last instance determine the physionomy of society, its ideas, views, political institutions, etc.\footnote{197}

\footnote{194 Althusser 1976, 139–140. The text in the original German 1890 letter is this: “... Nach materialistischer Geschichtsauffassung ist das in letzter Instanz bestimmende Moment in der Geschichte die Produktion und Reproduktion des wirklichen Lebens. Mehr hat weder Marx noch ich je behauptet. Wenn nun jemand das dahin verdreht, das ökonomische Moment sei das \textit{einzig} bestimmende, so verwandelt er jeden Satz in eine nichtssagende, abstrakte, absurde Phrase.” Marx \& Engels 1953, 502–503. [My translation from the German.] It is to be noted that Althusser here thought of the economic “last instance” as a kind of a Supreme Court in a juridical sense, but this understanding is widened: it is both “anti-mechanical” and it stands for a primary causality in which it has an active role as it “opens” (ouve) and works out the interplay of the ideological superstructure and the basis, i.e. an Aristotelian \textit{primus motor}.}

\footnote{195 On Mehring’s role in the formation of the term, see Küttler \& Petrioli \& Wolf 2004, 316. J. L. Segundo erroneously ascribed the concept of histmat to Marx himself: “I believe that he [Marx] found what he was looking for in the notion of \textit{historical materialism}.” Cf. the idea on the following page 15: “[...] of determining the exact content of the term ‘historical materialism’ in Marx’s mind.” Cf. the Spanish original Segundo 1975, 20–21. These expressions are problematic since “histmat” was only formulated a decade after Marx’s death (1883). Cf. the equally anachronistic title (\textit{Historiallisesta materialismista / Ob istoricheskom materializme}) of the Soviet collection Marx \& Engels \& Lenin 1972.}

\footnote{196 “Versteht Paul Ernst denn nicht, dass wenn die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung den verschiedenen ideologischen Sphären eine \textit{selbständige} historische Existenz abspricht, sie ihnen keineswegs jede historische \textit{Wirksamkeit} abspricht? Paul Ernst denkt metaphysisch, nicht dialektisch, wenn er Ursache und Wirkung als starr entgegengesetzte Pole auffasst und die Wechselwirkung ganz vergisst. Wann hat der historische Materialismus denn bestritten, dass ein historisches Moment, sobald es einmal durch andere, schließlich ökonomische Ursachen in die Welt gesetzt ist, nun auch reagiert, auf seine Umgebung und selbst auf seine eigenen Ursachen zurückwirkt?” Mehring 1975, 384–385. Mehring’s writing is an appendix to his major collection \textit{Die Lessing-Legende}.}

\footnote{197 Stalin 1950, 42; also in Harnecker 1975, 279 [cf. next note]. The text was originally written in September 1938.}
Marta Harnecker’s dependence on Stalin is visible at the end of the manual. He is not mentioned in the body text she wrote herself. Yet it is just this presentation, *On Dialectical and Historical Materialism* of 1938, that begins the large text reader part at the end of the book, and this is the first paragraph.

In terms of contents, Althusser’s philosophy could be considered nihilistic: he admits that materialism has been “a philosophy without an object”. In his view, philosophy is linked to the political and social polemic and it takes place on the “battlefield” of society where theses and antitheses rival each other. He claims to have represented Gramscian participatory philosophy without knowing anything of Gramsci yet. Althusser describes his social and scientistic notion of philosophy in the following:

> “Philosophy represents science in politics and politics in science.”
>
> and later
>
> “Philosophy is ‘in the last instance’ class struggle in theory.”

His philosophy was hegemonic discourse (German: “*Herrschaftssprache*”) as opposed to Habermas’s democratic tendency. It was the task of philosophy to govern everything: both the “totality” and its parts. The same goes for the philosopher, although to a lesser degree. Althusser reminds his readers how he had criticized the PCF in 1978. The essential thing is the “theory of philosophy as lordship over both the totality and its elements and the parts of these elements”.

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198 “... *El materialismo histórico*. Resta sólo contestar a esta pregunta: ¿Qué se entiende, desde el punto de vista del materialismo histórico, por ‘condiciones de vida material de la sociedad’, que son las que determinan, en última instancia, la fisonomía de la sociedad, sus ideas, sus concepciones, instituciones políticas, etcétera?” Harnecker 1975, 279. The 17 pages long quote is part of Stalin’s lecture on diamat and histmat 1938, pp. 279–295. Harnecker removed the reader part (“Textos escogidos”) from the 51st edition of her book (Harnecker 1987). Likewise, every reference to Mao was removed.


200 Althusser 1993, 195. The second sentence is to be found in Althusser 1976, 61: “Depuis Lénine, nous savons clairement que la philosophie représente la lutte des classes dans la théorie […].” (In the article “Marxisme et lutte de classe”, pp. 61–66.)

201 “Und ich entwickelte natürlich als Theorie der Philosophie eine Theorie der Philosophie als Herrschaft sowohl über sich als auch über das Ganze und seine Elemente und die Gliederungen
Philosophy thus has “an enormous responsibility”, which is bound to bring a great deal of loneliness.202

Is philosophy, then, going to return to the questions of interest and power? This seems to have been the case toward the end of Althusser’s career: he stopped considering Marxism a “mere science” at exactly the same time as a great number of Latin American theologians began to argue just that. The “shibboleths of Althusserianism were one by one demolished by their own creator” at the end of the 1970’s.203 Curiously enough, liberation theologians kept insisting on the scientific nature of Marxism and of historical materialism in particular. Here, the widespread dissemination of Harnecker’s manual in Latin America must have had its effect. What happened to Althusser’s ideas and followers in France was not so important.

Karl Marx, in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach, wrote, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”204 This means that Althusser, amongst other Marxists, was somehow bound to take a stand on critical social theory, too. Most clearly, it was Jürgen Habermas who held that sociology and the social sciences were based on an emancipatory interest.205 The
word “interest”, according to Habermas, referred first of all to the human will to
do things (Machenwollen), and not to pure knowledge as such.\footnote{206}

Even the Althusserian brand of Marxism could not survive without an ethical
type, the place of ethics being taken by the theory of class struggle. A few years
after the first edition of Lire le Capital, Althusser wrote in the introduction to
Harnecker’s manual that class struggle, too, was determining “in the last instance”.
Economic phenomena were en última instancia relationships of class and class
struggle.\footnote{207} Marta Harnecker interpreted this to mean that “class struggle is the
motor of history”.\footnote{208}

In Althusser’s thinking, there is a certain, concrete “multi-layer” quality in
the nature of the State and so-called ideological state apparatuses. There is the
repressive “state apparatus” which is one and public, but the ideological
apparatuses are distinct and specialized.\footnote{209} Althusser lists eight of these ideological
state apparatuses, or ISAs:

1. religious ISA (the system of different churches)
2. educational ISA (the system of private and public schools)
3. family ISA
4. judicial ISA
5. political ISA (the political system including the various parties)
6. professional ISA
7. mediatic ISA (press, radio, TV, etc.)
8. cultural ISA (literature, art, sports, etc.)\footnote{210}

\footnotetext{206}Habermas (1972, 432–433) saw Marx’s thinking as a continuation of Kant’s critique of practical
reason: “Kant und Marx folgern daraus übereinstimmend: solange die Menschheit als Gattung ihre
Geschichte nicht mit Willen und Bewusstsein macht, lässt sich der Sinn der Geschichte auch nicht
aus reinen Theorie bestimmen; er muss vielmehr aus praktischer Vernunft begründet werden. [...] 
Sowohl Kant wie Marx leugnen gegenüber Hegel, dass sie Naturuabsicht oder Vorsehung im
transzendentalen Rekurs auf die Logik, welchen Subjekts auch immer, erkennen können. Während
Kant es bei einem experimentierenden Entwurf der Idee einer weltbürgerlichen Gesellschaft als
einer regulativen Idee bewenden lässt, ohne sie zur Voraussetzung des Erkenntnis der realen
Geschichte im ganzen zu erheben, erklärt Marx in Ansehung der Geschichte das Machenwollen zur
Voraussetzung des Erkennenkönners.”

\footnotetext{207} “No hay producción económica ‘pura’, no hay circulación (intercambio) ‘pura’, ni hay
distribución ‘pura’. Todos estos fenómenos económicos son procesos que tienen lugar bajo
relaciones sociales que son en última instancia, es decir, bajo sus apariencias, relaciones de clase, y
relaciones de clases antagónicas, es decir, relaciones de lucha de clases.” Althusser 1975a, xv. Cf.
p. xvii: “[...] la teoría científica de Marx nos da la demonstration de que todo está relacionado con
la lucha de clases [...].”

\footnotetext{208} Harnecker 1975, 202.

\footnotetext{209} Althusser 1976, 82–83.

\footnotetext{210} Althusser 1976, 83. Libanio (n. 579) lists only six ideological “sets”. Religion is one of them,
but there is no equivalent of “family ISA”. On the other hand, socialist anarchists were bent on the
abolition of the traditional family. See e.g., Mikhail Bakunin: “Abolition not of the natural family
but of the legal family founded on law and property. Religious and civil marriage to be replaced by
free marriage. Adult men and women have the right to unite and separate as they please [...] Neither
violence nor passion nor rights surrendered in the past can justify an invasion by one of the liberty
He considers ideology, first of all, a consequence of alienation: “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of the individuals with the real conditions of their existence.” He lists a number of reasons why, for example, the imaginary world of religion exists. The classic French atheism of the 18th century had resolved the issue in stating that “it is the fault of the priests and the despots.” Yet Althusser goes further than the positivist-Marxist thesis and also claims that the existence of ideology is material and not spiritual in nature, arguing that “ideology only exists in certain apparatuses, their practice or practices. This existence is material of nature.” Religion also exists in its practices, or in prayers, church attendance, and so on. Althusser quotes Pascalian thought: “Kneel, move your lips to prayer, and you will believe.”

“Activism” meant having the starting point in the praxis – yet this praxis was considered to be objective and capable of turning observations of reality into norms. We are back to the question of what history really “means”. It is also a question of its relevance to theology.

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211 “L’idéologie représente le rapport imaginaire des individus à leurs conditions réelles d’existence.” Althusser 1976, 101. As a 18th-century example (p. 102), Althusser mentions that God was an imaginary representation of the true king (Dieu c’est la représentation imaginaire du Roi réel).


213 In arguing that ideology cannot be spiritually existent, Althusser reminds us that its material existence is not like that of a paving stone or a rifle: “Bien entendu, l’existence matérielle de l’idéologie dans un appareil et ses pratiques ne possède pas la même modalité que l’existence matérielle d’un pavé ou d’un fusil.” Yet one could speak of the ideology as having its material existence “in different modalities”. Althusser 1976, 106. For a criticism of this, see Majumdar 1995, 157.

2.4. The influence of historical materialism

In his book *Teologia da libertação* Libanio followed J. C. Scannone’s distinction between different liberation theologies, suggesting that the most radical adopted “the instrument of Marxist analysis (historical materialism)”. In other words, he classified the radicals, particularly H. Assmann and the Christians for Socialism, as supporters of Althusserian historical materialism. However, both Scannone and Libanio stated that this did not mean that radical liberationists were atheists because they did not accept dialectical materialism (diamat); these groups sometimes even avoided the term “theology of liberation” with reference to themselves.215

Paulo Sérgio Lopez Gonçalves explained the use of historical materialism in liberation theology in an article published in *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* in 2000. This was necessary, he stated, because Christians and revolutionaries had together fought to eliminate poverty.216 He denied that liberation theology had appropriated dialectical materialism which “absolutizes matter and negates God’s mystery”.217 He also argued that Marxism was used as an “analytical instrument to understand the causes of poverty and oppression” but also “in its humanist

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215 Libanio emphasizes the radicality of the radicals: “Vertente extrema. Considera a teologia anterior esvaziadora da linguagem libertadora [...] Por isso, às vezes, evita o nome de TdL. Perfilham esse modelo H. Assmann e algumas posições dos Cristãos para o Socialismo. Usam o instrumental de análise marxista (materialismo histórico) ainda que não aceitem em nível filosófico o materialismo dialético ateu.” *TdL*, 259. Scannone (1983, 272) does not regard Marxist analysis (=histmat) as scientific. Those who favor historical materialism use it “with few corrections” (con pocos correctivos) and “as if it were scientific” (como si fuera cientifico). He nevertheless holds that dialectical materialism “on the philosophical level” is refuted by the radical liberationists as atheistic. Yet Scannone remarks that the “kenosis” the Incarnation signifies is understood in such a way that it “empties” (vacia, s. 273) the liberating praxis of everything that is Christian. Faith comes in “too late”. The question of atheism seems to have been a paradoxical one. After all, Scannone’s article appeared in *Medellin*, a periodical published by CELAM, which waged a battle against liberation theology.

216 “O uso do materialismo histórico na teologia da libertação deve-se à necessidade histórica de aproximação entre cristãos e revolucionários na luta contra a pobreza e a morte prematura dos pobres.” Lopez Gonçalves 2000, 173. The author recognizes the problem of class struggle and defends the use of violence as a kind of *ultima ratio* “in certain moments”. However, he does not explain the notion of class struggle as such. Jesús Espeja was more critical of this use of histmat, even though he did not seem to question the distinction between Marxist analysis (histmat) and Marxist ideology (diamat). Referring to the four-fold division of LT by Scannone (cf. n. 9), he states: “Interpreta la realidad con el análisis marxista (materialismo histórico) sin apenas correctivo, aunque no acepta el materialismo dialéctico ni el ateísmo que conlleva.” Espeja 1986, 41–42.

character”. However, it should be pointed out that the scientific and humanist brands of Marxism are not the same thing. In particular, the 1960’s humanist “New Left” represented something that was different from orthodox, scientific Marxism.

Lopez Gonçalves built his argument on the 1990 article “Teologia de la liberación y marxismo” by the famous liberation theologian, the philosopher Enrique Dussel. Dussel argued in an Althusserian manner that there had been the humanist young Marx and the “definitive” Marx (el Marx “definitivo”) after 1857 who was an economist and a social scientist. Liberation theology was influenced more by the latter, “theoretical” Marxism and the theory of dependence. According to Dussel, “there is a unanimous rejection of dialectical materialism” among liberation theologians. However, Dussel is very open about the way Marta Harnecker and Louis Althusser influenced liberation theology. Harnecker’s interpretation of Althusser “influenced not only liberation theology [...] but also the whole of Latin American Marxist thought”.

Althusserianism came from French-speaking Europe in various ways. The Louvain and Brussels professor of the sociology of religion, François Houtart, was a clear representative of Althusser’s philosophy. As the teacher of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo and many other Latin American theologians, he was an influential figure. Althusserian Marxism was part and parcel of the thinking of many liberation theologians, and influenced the two Boff brothers Leonardo and Clodovis in particular. Clodovis was, in fact, one of Louvain’s students. The focus in this section is on how Althusserian ideas are manifest in their production.

François Houtart states that the superstructure of society has relative autonomy. His and André Rousseau’s joint work *Ist die Kirche eine antirevolutionäre Kraft?* contains a complete subchapter entitled “Die relative Autonomie des religiösen Bereichs” [‘The relative autonomy of the religious domain’], in which they question how social change can be promoted when

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220 “Y, principalmente, la obra de Althusser, que [fue] traducido pedagógicamente por Marta Harnecker en sus famosas obras, influirá no sólo en la teología de la liberación (a su segunda generación principalmente), sino en la totalidad del pensamiento marxista latinoamericano.” Dussel 1991, 125.
221 Houtart & Rousseau 1973, 302–305. Perhaps the most visual role of Houtart was as the long-term editor-in-chief of *Social Compass*. He has been an open supporter of the Castro regime. The university in which he worked, the Catholic University of Louvain (Leuven), had educated the
religion also keeps functioning autonomously. In other words: can a revolutionary group committed to a religious community succeed in overcoming the religious legitimation of oppression? Some ambiguity remains in the final outcome but the chapter ends with a thought that is reminiscent of “original” Marxism: the ideological combat against religion, or anticlericalism, is no longer a viable option. Religion may, in some sense, even assist the renewal process when it is forced to do so, or voluntarily.

At the beginning of his own book Religión y modos de producción precapitalistas (French 1980), Houtart reflects on the meaning of historical materialism in completely Marxist terms. He offers an indirect argument as he rhetorically asks: Does historical materialism mean that the phenomenon of religion is “incompatible” with both scientific information and with transparent social relationships? Is one compelled to accept the Marxist idea that “the more religious a person is, the less human he is”, and vice versa? He sums up the essential problem: “Everything consists in knowing whether religion is identified with its social functions.”

guerrilla priest Camilo Torres and the liberation theologians Segundo, Gutiérrez and C. Boff. Houtart also led the Centre Tricontinental in Louvain, the publisher of Alternatives Sud series. There is an open eulogy to Cuba in Boron 2005, 44–45: “Quand nous écrivons que Cuba a réussi à avancer significativement dans la construction d’une société démocratique nous voulons insister sur le fait que [...] ce pays a réussi à garantir à sa population des standards de santé, d’alimentation, d’éducation et de droits généraux – femmes, enfants, handicapés, etc. – que n’atteignent même pas certains pays du capitalisme développé. Si Cuba l’a fait dans ces conditions, quel seraient les insurmontables obstacles qui empêchent, dans les pays qui évoluent dans des conditions beaucoup plus favorables, d’accéder à de tels succès?” (Emphasis added.) The rest of the articles in Alternatives Sud (2005:2) are not as openly pro-Cuban, however.


224 “Sin embargo, la objeción parece más importante todavía cuando se trata del fenómeno religioso. Al estudiar las funciones sociales de la religión, ¿no se llega necesariamente a la doble conclusión (sobre todo con el marco teórico del materialismo histórico) de que es incompatible con el conocimiento científico, por un lado, y con relaciones sociales transparentes, por el otro? En otras palabras, al tener que denunciar el fetichismo de las representaciones religiosas con tanta fuerza como el de las mercancías, ¿hay que concluir con Marx que cuanto más religioso es el hombre, menos hombre es, y tanto más hombre cuanto menos religioso sea?” Houtart 1989, 34. Emphasis added.

225 “Todo consiste en saber si la religión se identifica con sus funciones sociales.” Houtart 1989, 34.
found in sociology, although the argument came from Marx’s philosophy and can only be expressed in philosophical and theological terms.

Many of the views on the essence of religion expressed by Houtart are more philosophical than sociological. The following is a good example concerning the origin of religion: “The lack of social mechanisms generates a representation that leads into the supernatural.” Religious institutions have been instituted by man, and they correspond to human relations of power:

The construction of Pantheons and of corresponding myths becomes more and more hierarchized. It reproduces the social hierarchization and makes it a model: the instituted, both the Pantheon and the myth, turn into the instituting. Also, some theological productions arise and they converge in functional terms: the theology of the authority (divine origin), of the hierarchy, of the unity of the world and of the cosmos with the king at the center (Buddhism); theology of the universal monarchy of the popes (Catholicism, etc.).

The way in which Houtart mixes up sociology and philosophy is undoubtedly rather metaphysical, even metaphysically atheist. This can be seen in his assessment of the great religious systems at the beginning of the fourth chapter:

Even where the material bases of their functions disappear under the impact of the capitalist relationships, they maintain their coherence. Certainly, the vocabulary that we use is very inadequate to express the sociological reality. The religions should not be “reified” (cosificarse) as if we were talking about something that exists in itself. From the sociological perspective, we are talking about ideological structures or systems of organization that are seen to be constantly reproduced by the social practices of the agents. They are moved by cultural codes that are transmitted by successive generations that in turn are oriented by them in their practices. There is a constant flux (flujo) between beliefs and forms of religious expression that lead to social and other practices that in turn consolidate the symbolic systems.

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226 “La falta de control de los mecanismos sociales suscita una representación que desemboca en lo sobrenatural.” Houtart 1989, 90.
227 “La construcción de panteones y de mitos correspondientes se hace cada vez más jerarquizada y reproduce la jerarquización social haciendo de ello un modelo: de instituidos, tanto el panteón como el mito, se convierten en instituyentes. También emergen producciones teológicas que convergen funcionalmente: teología de la autoridad (origen divino), de la jerarquía, de la unidad del mundo y del cosmos con el rey como el centro (budismo); teología de la monarquía universal de los papas (catolicismo, etc.).” Houtart 1989, 109.
228 “Incluso cuando las bases materiales de sus funciones desaparecen bajo el impacto de las relaciones capitalistas, conservan una gran coherencia. Es cierto que el vocabulario que utilizamos es muy inadecuado para expresar sociológicamente la realidad. No deberían ‘cosificarse’ las religiones como si se tratará de algo existente en sí mismo. Desde el punto de vista sociológico, se trata de estructuras ideológicas o de sistemas de organización que se ven reproducidos constantemente por las prácticas sociales de los actores. Estos se mueven por códigos culturales transmitidos por generaciones sucesivas, que a su vez orientan sus prácticas. Hay un constante flujo entre creencias y formas de expresión religiosas que inducen prácticas sociales y otras prácticas, que a su vez consolidan los sistemas simbólicos.” Houtart 1989, 113–114. Emphasis added.
The way in which Houtart refers to religions as expressions of “ideological structures” is Marxist. More accurately, it follows the Althusserian line put forth in his writing on ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). He preferred to speak of a “sociological point of view” when what we see in fact is Marxist atheism. Unlike Althusser, however, he does not incite people directly to take up an anti-religious ideological campaign. Yet the idea of the non-real character of religion is similar. Religion does not really exist, or rather its existence is based on the system (“apparatus”) that lends support to it, as does that of the other ideologies.

There are also clear signs of Althusserian thinking in liberation theology. This is especially true of Juan Luis Segundo’s book *Fe e ideología* and of the Boff brothers. In his book *O caminhar da Igreja com os oprimidos* Leonardo Boff asks what kind of Marxism can assist theology, and answers: “Marxism as the scientific theory of the socio-historical facts”, which “helps to understand, not God, grace, or the Kingdom, but the formation, conflicts, and development of human societies”. He terms this Marxism historical materialism, stating in a completely Althusserian tone:

We need to clarify the terms of the scientific theory of historical materialism. [...] The idealism, typical of the Western tradition, culminating in Hegel, makes the idea (the consciousness that an epoch has of itself) primary and the determining factor, in the last instance, in the explanation of the formation, structuration and evolution of the human societies. The Marxism maintains that the material conditions of the production and reproduction of life are to be found in the base, in the last instance, of the whole socio-historical tower block (edifício), and of the ideological and juridical-political instances. These are not just a mirror image of the economic instance (Marx always refused to affirm this, against the Vulgate of dogmatic Marxism); these have a relatively autonomous existence and their own functional laws that maintain a permanent reference of the *last instance* to the economic infrastructure.

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229 “Or, dans la période historique pré-capitaliste que nous examinons à très larges traits, il est absolument évident qu’il existait un appareil idéologique d’État dominant, l’Église, qui concentrait en elle non seulement les fonctions religieuses, mais aussi scolaires, et une bonne partie des fonctions d’information et de ‘culture’. Si toute la lutte idéologique du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle, depuis le premier ébranlement de la Réforme, s’est concentrée dans une lutte anticléricale et antireligieuse, ce n’est pas par hasard, c’est en fonction même de la position dominante de l’appareil idéologique d’État religieux.” Althusser 1976, 91. This is an example of Althusser’s Marxist interpretation of history: the Reformation is nothing but another “antireligious” project. He sees no difference between its anticlerical and antireligious logic.


231 L. Boff 1988a, 278.

232 “Cumpre esclarecer os termos da teoria científica do materialismo histórico. [...] O idealismo, típico da tradição ocidental, culminando em Hegel, privilegia a idéia (a consciência que uma época faz de si) como o fator determinante, em última instância, na explicação da formação, estruturação e evolução das sociedades humanas. O marxismo sustenta que as condições materiais de produção e reprodução da vida encontram-se na base, em última instância, de todo o edifício sócio-histórico e das instâncias ideológicas e jurídico-políticas. Estas não são mera reflexão especulativa da instância
However, when Leonardo Boff refers to “historical” materialism, he means a “dialectical” relationship between these instances, or between the base and the superstructure. It is perhaps a question of taste whether this thinking is more historical than it is dialectical. Society has its material conditions of existence, but they vary historically:

It is also called historical materialism, in other words, the material conditions within a certain social totality are not defined once and for all; they vary historically and they are related to each other, and to all the other instances, dialectically.233

From the Christian point of view it was Juan Luis Segundo, however, who demonstrated what was perhaps the most problematic reception of Althusserian Marxism with his “metaphor of verticality” in the same way as Houtart did. In a complex passage he states:

This prompted the metaphor of verticality: the higher thought rises, the less its guarantees of realism. The upper level was named the superstructure. By the same token, the more thought remains attached to the material base of existence, the more it offers guarantees of realism and preciseness. And since the material base of human life is economic activity, Marx talked about the economic (or material) structure or infrastructure. By that he meant the means of production and human relations of production.234

Hence, it is no surprise that Segundo, too, should make good use of Althusserian vocabulary:

“Ideology”, even though defined in the last instance by the material base of structure and its forms, must necessarily leave room for a definition in the first instance of the meaning-structure. This defines a sphere prior to, and independent of, ideology. Marx did not dwell
on this prior sphere, but it became a critical problem when his ideology found realization in socialist societies. 235

These examples of the major production by Juan Luis Segundo and of Leonardo Boff suffice to show that it was just Louis Althusser and Marta Harnecker who stood behind the Marxist influence in liberation theology. Libanio was also familiar with the discussion and mentioned Leonardo Boff (and the less well-known T. Cavazzuti) as supporters of historical materialism. According to Libanio, L. Boff intended to present the atheism inherent in historical materialism as a merely “methodological atheism” because it was possible to detach Marxist science from Marxist ideology. Libanio suggests that liberation theology “most commonly” adopted only certain categories of Marxist social science. 236 This very point was extremely controversial after the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe had written his letter on “Marxist Analysis by Christians” to the provincials of Latin America in 1980, and after the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had issued the instruction *Libertatis nuntius* in 1984. 237

Hence we could argue that the Marxist interpretation offered by Althusser and, in his footsteps, Harnecker, was very influential among the liberation theologians. In support of this, it has been shown that the same holds for the sociologist of religion François Houtart, who had a long career in Louvain and who has been an open supporter of the Castro regime. It could be said that certain liberation theologians made an open commitment to the historical materialism advocated by Althusser, Balibar, and Harnecker, the most influential Brazilians

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235 Segundo 1984, 111; Segundo 1982, 143. This passage shows that, unlike the Boff Brothers as late as the 1980’s and Gutiérrez in his main work in 1971, Segundo had already adopted the late position of Althusser according to which “ideology” is not merely pejorative. He indeed speaks of the “realization” (Sp: se realizó) of Marxist ideology in the socialist countries. With the 1960’s Althusserian distinction of [good] Marxist science and [bad] ideology, this would have been untenable. Yet it is just the early Althusser that the Boffs insisted upon well into the 1980’s when Segundo had adopted the late Althusser. Of course, the whole Althusser school in Europe had run into difficulties earlier.

236 “Alguns filósofos marxistas (L. Althusser, eurocomunismo) e autores cristãos (L. Boff, T. Cavazzuti) tentam operar o corte entre marxismo como filosofia e como ciência. A relação entre o materialismo dialético e materialismo histórico não é intrínseca, mas histórico-conjuntural (L. Boff). O ateísmo do materialismo histórico é um ateísmo metodológico, na continuação da afirmação de Laplace a Napoléon, que em relação à existência de Deus para suas teorias científicas disse: ‘Je n’ai pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là.’ A posição mais comum, porém, consiste em assumir da análise marxista, não o conjunto, mesmo considerado científico, mas algumas categorias que interessem no caso.” *TdL*, 196. For a quote from L. Boff, see n. 46. Cf. Clodovis Boff’s commitment to histmat, n. 830.

237 Arrupe 1990; cf. discussion in ch. 6.
obviously being the Boff brothers Clodovis and Leonardo. For reasons of brevity, I have considered only Leonardo here, but I will return to Clodovis later.

What the liberation theologians received from Althusserianism was the emphasis on Marxism as a science, which only characterized the early Althusser, however. The longer it went on, the more Althusser – and liberation theology – started to emphasize the fact that Marxism was an ideology, not merely a science. As mentioned, this is obvious in Juan Luis Segundo’s book *Faith and Ideologies* which was published in Spanish in 1982 and in English in 1984.

There was probably a very “scholastic” reason for Althusser’s popularity in Louvain and in Latin America, too. I am referring to Althusser’s “dualistic” epistemology. It is not easy to put this into words, but I will try to explain it as a modern form of Cajetanian scholasticism. In her study on Althusser, M. Majumdar argues that *Lire le Capital* emphasizes the “fundamental distinction of the real object and the thought object”. This trait of Althusser’s thinking is even more scholastic than in Lenin. At least, it is far more dualistic and scholastic than in Lenin’s late writings after *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. According to Majumdar, Althusser

> also insists that the processes involved in the production of the two objects are fundamentally distinct, the one involving the real historical order and the other, the logical order.

It is just this kind of dualistic rationale that makes us wonder if some scholastic thinking has indeed influenced Althusser, who spent his pre-WWII

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238 Cf. the same logic in Harnecker, who first maintained a strict dualism of “theoretical concepts” and “empirical concepts”: “Llamarémos, siguiendo Althusser, CONCEPTOS TEÓRICOS a los conceptos que, por formar parte de una teoría científica, no nos dan un conocimiento de ninguna realidad concreta: los conceptos de la teoría general y de las teorías regionales del materialismo histórico. Llamarémos CONCEPTOS EMPÍRICOS a los conceptos que nos dan un conocimiento de una realidad concreta. Estos conceptos empíricos no son un puro y simple calco de la realidad, una pura y simple lectura inmediata de ésta. Sin embargo, no pueden existir sin utilizar los datos provenientes de la observación y de la experiencia.” Harnecker 1975, 230. In a later edition she removed the strict division into theoretical and empirical concepts, but retained the [theoretical] thought itself: “El materialismo histórico, como toda teoría, no nos da ningún conocimiento concreto, pero nos da los medios (instrumentos de trabajo intelectual) que nos permiten lograr un conocimiento científico de los objetos históricos concretos.” Harnecker 1987, 276.

239 Majumdar 1995, 96. A. Tosel also criticized Althusser for his division between the theoretical and the experimental: “Mais L. Althusser s’est trouvé comme prisonnier de son acceptation implicite de l’épistémologie néo-positiviste: il se pose la question décisive en cette perspective, des mécanismes producteurs de ‘l’effet de connaissance’, distinguant même le niveau formel de l’évidence théorique (l’idée vraie répondant de sa vérité) et le niveau expérimental. Mais il est apparu très vite une impasse: le niveau formel reste pétition de principe et tautologie, car comment produire cet effet de connaissance?” Tosel 1984, 311–312 n. 60.
youth in Catholic Action circles. We could well think of scholasticism as a dualistic philosophical system even before we open any scholastic manual. Take V. Remer’s *Summa philosophiae scholasticae* of the late 19th century, for instance. It is divided into three parts: Logica minor, Logica maior, and Ontologia.240 The idea of considering something “logically” or epistemologically, and “ontologically” in two separate “orders” is scholastic and pre-critical. It has been considered a common feature of both Roman Catholic and Marxist philosophy, which may account for the many similarities.241 Here we must leave aside the question of whether the so-called scientific Marxism with all its scholastic features was loyal to Marx himself: in all its theoreticism and mind–body dualism, it seems a long haul from his *Theses on Feuerbach*.242

There are many similarities between Maritainian scholasticism and Althusserian Marxism, the most striking being in the area of epistemology. This leads to the question of how Libanio interpreted the “two-step” methodology of liberation theology that became controversial in the 1980’s. How was it possible “firstly” to establish that-which-is (*quid est*) in social scientific terms and “secondly” to interpret it in theological terms? In considering this question I will first take a look at Libanio’s fundamental theology.

240 Remer 1933; Remer 1934; Remer 1936. Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, Libanio’s house-mate from 1969 until his death in 2002 and the mentor of a whole generation of (liberation) theologians, said that it was exactly the Remer scholasticism that was used by the Brazilian Jesuits in the late 1940’s. Remer used to teach at the Gregorian University in Rome. See Vaz 1982, 416. Remer’s scholastic manuals were approved by Pope Leo XIII, who also advocated Cajetan’s commentaries on St. Thomas in the *Editio Leonina* of the *Summa theologica*. See the approval of the first edition in 1895 by Leo XIII in Remer 1933, p. v.

241 *Il materialismo dialettico sovietico* by Gustav Wetter S.J. was written in Rome in 1948, but it is hardly mentioned by any liberation theologians, not even Jesuits trained in Rome such as Vaz. See, however, the Roman dissertation by F. C. de Andrade (Andrade 1991), which makes use of three writings by Wetter. Habermas (1972, 392–393) summarizes Wetter’s point as follows: “Wetter kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die thematische und die stalinistische Scholastik nicht nur im exekutiven Verfahren, sondern sowohl im ontologischen Ansatz als auch in bestimmten Lehrstücken übereinstimmen. [...] Denn es ist das große Verdienst des Werkes [Der dialektische Materialismus], klargestellt zu haben, dass die objektierte, der Subjektivität als ihrer Legitimitätsbasis beraubte Dialektik des durch Stalin kodifizierten dialektischen Materialismus vom kritischen Prinzip nichts mehr behalten hat, und somit zum Prinzip geradezu der Restauration einer vorkritischen Ontologie geworden ist.”

242 Majumdar (1995, 97) contrasts the early, anti-scholastic Marx with Althusser’s expressly theoretical practice: “What Marx is stressing here [Marx 1845, 2nd thesis] is more that the question of objective truth only matters when an idea is put to the test in practice. Otherwise, if there is no relation between thought and practice, it remains a mere scholastic, academic issue. In Marx’s terms: ‘The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.’”
3. Fundamental theology

3.1. Augustinian and Thomist thought

Given that Libanio has worked as a professor of fundamental theology for decades, it should be no surprise that he started his theological production with an apologetic text. The first work of interest here is his article in *A teologia do Santuário Mariano* from 1968, which shows clearly how he related to Marxism and to the task of the church. It also gives a good example of how he used to combine Augustinian personalism with Thomist realism.

Let us take the issue of Marxism first. After writing some lines on two other masters of suspicion, Feuerbach and Nietzsche, he states, “Marxism presents any search for religion and for a transcendent being as religious alienation”. To Marx, man’s work produced self-alienation and led to yet other forms of alienation: “Man forgets that the earth is his homeland and escapes to a transcendent God who is an imaginary projection of the ideal to which he aspires.” This leads Marxism to the conclusion that only a change in reality will truly liberate the human being.²⁴³

This article also gives the first sight into what Libanio was to write about the church only a couple of years after the Second Vatican Council. The church had “a double constitutive element, office and charism”. Both office and charism were needed to make Christ’s redemptive act visible to us. It was important that this double element persisted in the church because otherwise there was the risk of unsacramental spiritualism or empty formalism.²⁴⁴ Sacraments were “personal saving acts of heavenly Christ and actualizations of his redemptive act”. Yet it was important to remember and experience the real presence of Christ in the eucharist.

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²⁴⁴ “A Igreja graças a seu duplo elemento constitutivo, ofício e carisma, nos visibiliza por meio dos sacramentos o ato redentor de Cristo. Como ofício que ela é, esta atualização é colocada na ordem visível-jurídica, como carisma, é-nos garantida sua eficácia. Este duplo elemento jamais faltará á Igreja, pois do contrário ou cairíamos num espiritualismo a-sacramental ou num formalismo vazio.” Ibid., 154.
Echoing St. Paul, Libanio wrote that the holy communion was not only the eating (manducation) of Christ’s body but also participation in his sacrifice: there was “a body in the state of a victim” in its center. It was also a banquet with food and a festivity (festa) with wine, all of which suggest a lively communion with brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{245}

This post-Vatican II article reflects Libanio’s roots as a Catholic theologian. In the mid-1960’s he worked as a mentor of Brazilian students of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, and this gave him a first-hand insight into the springtime of the church, as it was then experienced. The liturgical renewal was there, but the questions “of this time”, huius temporis, such as atheism and Marxism, were also pressing.

In this time of testing and renewal, Libanio took the side of the church. He worked out a theological synthesis based on an existentialist reading of St. Augustine and linked with transcendental Thomism. The transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner and others was the progressive theology of the 1960’s, yet it is this very mixture of existentialism and realism that sometimes gives Libanio’s readers a hard time. For one thing, there are no fixed entities, and for another, everything needs to be based on what is really real.

Libanio responded to the challenge of the modern philosophies by pointing to Augustine. This time he sought the answer not in the human being, but in God himself. He quotes the famous passage of the Confessions: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and restless is our heart till it findeth rest in Thee.”\textsuperscript{246} The love that a human being has will lead him or her where it will, as a kind of Augustinian “weight” (pondus).\textsuperscript{247} Augustine is the archetype of human longing, yet in his

\textsuperscript{245} “Corremos sempre o perigo de coisificar os sacramentos e mesmo a presença real de Cristo na Eucaristia. [...] Não se comunga para ter Cristo fisicamente dentro de mim e nada mais. Então seríamos como um cibório. [...] São Paulo, S. Lucas acentuam que a comunhão é uma participação do sacrifício de Cristo e não simplesmente uma manducação do corpo de Cristo. N. S. disse que cessessem aquele corpo que ia ser entregue pelos homens, expressão nitidamente sacrificial. Logo é um corpo em estado de vítima, que nos une ao ato sacrificial de Cristo. E finalmente este encontro com Cristo por meio do sacramento eucarístico tem um caráter nitidamente comunitário. Eucaristia é conivivo, koinonia (1 C 10:16). Ninguém celebra uma festa, um banquete sozinho. Pois bem, Eucaristia é banquete – há alimento; é festa – há vinho. Logo tudo nos fala de comunhão com nossos irmãos.” Ibid., 156.

\textsuperscript{246} “[...] nos criaste para ti e nosso coração está inquieto até que descanse em ti.” Ibid., 133; cf. orig. Latin in p. 133 n. 3: ”’[...] fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te’ (Conf. 1, 1,1).”

\textsuperscript{247} “Pois o nosso ‘pondus’ é o nosso amor e ‘por ele sou levado para onde sou levado’, conforme observa Agostinho.” Ibid., 134; cf. orig. Latin in p. 134 n. 4: ”’Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror.’ (Conf. XIII, 9,10).”
youth he did not realize that this longing was due to God’s presence. God was with him although he was not with God. This presence, according to Augustine, was “more inner than my inmost, and higher than my highest”. 

At this point Libanio linked Augustine’s fundamental longing with the *desiderium naturale* of St. Thomas Aquinas. He introduced the Aristotelian philosophy on which Thomism is based, wishing for a moment to forget the discussion concerning the supernatural in post-war theological discourse. Instead, he accepted the Rahnerian thesis of the supernatural existential: God’s call was so inscribed in human nature that it could not be said to be extrinsic to the human. It was a question of the “condition of the possibility of every supernatural order”, and of the call that “further deepened the ontic desire of God”, being “related to the proper intuitive vision of God”.

Libanio clearly states that the divine call was not something that could be philosophically argued, but that the concept of supernatural desire, or the existential, was based on revelation. In other words, he was dealing not with any philosophical prolegomena to the philosophy of religion, but with fundamental theology or dogmatics proper. He wrote that the concept of the supernatural existential took us away from the level of the pure analogical knowledge of God (i.e. philosophy) to the mystical faith-life in grace and, ultimately, to the beatific vision.

All of this was based on the Aristotelian logic, according to which “the final cause determines the structure of the essence”, and this had in fact happened in the case of the human being. This was true even though the human being might not always – perhaps during the whole of his or her life – give reflected attention to it. This was the mystery: “How many times in going against God, because of invincible ignorance or deformation, he is precisely trying to follow this inner call

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248 “‘Estavas comigo, e eu não estava contigo.’ [...] ‘Tu estavas mais dentro de mim que o meu mais íntimo e mais elevado do que há de mais elevado’ em mim.” Ibid., 135; cf. orig. Latin in p. 135 n. 1, 2: “‘Mecum eras, et tecum non eram.’ (Conf. X, 38)”; “‘Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summum meo.’ (Conf. III, 6:11)”

249 “[...] nos ensina a revelação que Deu se adiantou e colocou no coração humano um atrativo mais profundo que seu horizonte de criatura espiritual podia exigir. Naturalmente este apelo de Deus se insere nesta tendência natural – condição de possibilidade de toda a ordem sobrenatural. Trata-se de um chamamento espiritual, sobrenatural, pessoal de Deus Trino. Este chamamento aprofunda mais ainda aquele desejo ôntico de Deus, dando-lhe não somente como objeto possível – como até então – mas proporcionado à própria visão intuitiva de Deus.” Ibid., 138. Libanio cites Rahner’s texts in *Schriften zur Theologie* to support the fact that God’s call is not “extrinsic”. See p. 139.

250 “Trata-se de uma superação do conhecimento analógico de Deus, na fé-graça de um modo tendencial e na visão efetivamente.” Ibid., 138.
of God in the heart.”\textsuperscript{251} In this sense, he was using the philosophical category of final cause to support a theological argument.

There was, however, a sense in which philosophy \textit{per se} made up part of the argument, namely the anthropological mind–body argument. The human being is formed of body and spirit as a corporeal–spiritual being. Because of the spirit, he or she is open to the being (\textit{tem uma abertura para o ser}). It is on the level of anthropology that it is still possible to argue philosophically, along the lines that the human being has “an untiring tendency toward the Supreme Being”. This is something that we can know, albeit only analogically. We are “always in the search of being”, in the state of “walking and continuous becoming” and of “restless seeking”. In each piece of knowledge the tendency is once more affirmed, yet not satisfied. In Libanio’s words: “The human being experiences this tendency as an unlimited one in a non-conceptual perception.”\textsuperscript{252}

Theology comes into play in the following chapter of Libanio’s text: human longing is indeed satisfied as the individual “attains the Supreme Being, the ‘quid est’ of the Ultimate Cause”. This leads the reader back to the question of the supernatural existential, because human nature as such is “only movement, only searching, only a steady overcoming of one’s self”. This, of course, is the opposite of the beatific vision in which there may be no more movement or search as they have both been satisfied. Grace is not part of nature since “the vision does not belong to the human being by nature”.\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{251} “É que o homem já foi criado em vista de Deus Trino. Esta causa final estruturou sua essência concreta. Na ordem fáctica o homem é essencialmente orientado para o encontro pessoal com Deus Trino. Devido a muitas circunstâncias, pode ele passar toda a vida sem descobrir de modo reflexo, sem colocal isto em noções claras, mas a realidade está em seu coração. Como, de fato, em cada passo de sua fida ele é fiel ou infiel a este apelo, é algo que nos escapa. Quantas vezes ao ir contra Deus, por causa de ignorância invencível ou por deformação, ele está procurando exatamente seguir este apelo interno de Deus no fundo de seu coração.” Ibid., 138.

\textsuperscript{252} “À luz da Filosofia e da Revelação podemos chegar a uma análise metafísica desta realidade. O homem é um ser corpóreo-espiritual. Como ser espiritual [ele] tem uma abertura para o ser. Pois o espírito é um ser imaterial, simples e substancial, capaz de possuir-se a si mesmo mediante a auto-consciência e a livre auto-determinação, bem como de compreender e realizar valores supersensíveis. Nele existe tendência incansável para o Ser Supremo, ainda que somente analogicamente conhecido. É próprio de seu estado de espírito criado ter este dinamismo. É algo que não se cansa, sempre em busca do ser. Não há realidade nenhuma terrestre que o satisfaça; daí ele estar sempre em movimento. O caminhar, o estar em perene tornar-se, é próprio dele. Abertura dinâmica, abertura ativa, sempre em busca intranquilí. Esta tendência da inteligência para o ser, é natural, apriorística, anterior ao próprio conhecimento. Em cada conhecimento esta tendência se afirma, mas não se sacia. O homem experimenta numa percepção aconceitual esta tendência como ilimitada.” Ibid., 137.

\textsuperscript{253} “Mas ela [=a tendência do homem] só descansará quando atingir o Ser Supremo, o ‘quid est’ da Última Causa. Para ai tende o homem com sua inteligência. No fundo tende para o conhecimento
These citations from Libanio’s 1968 article show that his solution to “the question of natural and supernatural”, so important in Catholic theology, was in line with the conciliar theology of the 1960’s. The philosophical prolegomena shows the human condition as an “opening to the being”, which the revelation will come to fulfill. This occurs by way of Rahnerian theology: God’s grace does not come from far away, but it is already present as a non-conceptual reality in each and every human being. Libanio clearly states that God’s call is universal.

His solution has all the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments put forward by other theologians. Without going into detail about what Rahner, de Lubac and others maintained, I will refer to the question of “what” really has happened in the human being. As Libanio put it on the one hand, the very thirst of God has been planted by God. The tendency toward God was God-given. Yet something happens – or better: has happened – as God sends his call of grace: the “natural” tendency turns “real”. Was this desiderium naturale natural in the first place, if it was given by God? On the other hand, what makes the supernatural existential “super”natural, if it was given by God in the same way and at the same time as the natural desire was given? What is the difference between them, after all?

The obvious answer to this lies in the Aristotelian distinction between potency and act (potentia – actus). The natural human tendency or desire is “obediential potency” (potentia oboedientialis) as he later explicitly mentions. By calling human desire “potency” he leaves room for grace as an actualizing factor. This makes his statement on the sacraments as “actualizations” of Christ’s redemptive work highly understandable. It also leads us to perceive the meaning of

de Deus como Deus. Contudo o atingir a Deus como tal não lhe pertence por natureza, pois a sua natureza é somente movimento, somente busca, somente superação contínua de si; ora na visão já não há movimento, nem busca, pois está-se plenamente saciado. Portanto a visão não convém ao homem por natureza.” Ibid., 137.

254 “Este apelo de Deus é universal no tempo e no espaço.” Ibid., 138.

255 “Não podemos esquecer que se existe no homem esta tendência para Deus, não é como que o homem exigisse Deus, mas sim que Deus quis dar-se ao homem e então colocou no homem esta sede dele.” Ibid., 139.

256 Libanio sought to explain that the desiderium naturale was merely “possible”, whereas the call for grace made it “real”: “Na tendência natural, Deus como Deus é um fim absolutamente possível para o qual o espírito tem uma abertura, mas pelo chamado da graça ele se torna real.” Ibid., 138.

257 ECNC, 219.
another sentence about the sacraments: “The realism of the redemption does not allow a purely subjective anamnesis [remembering].”

Libanio explains his fundamental theology in *ECNC*, published in 2000. Obediential potency is elevated by God’s ineffable transcendent power. This “attraction” by God consists in the human self-conscious tendency in which God is “the end” and “not an object that we can formulate”. He develops his theological anthropology in accordance with the interpretations given by Rahner and the leading Spanish theologian Juan Alfaro. Even if the basis of faith is personal and “ineffable”, God’s revelation comes as both subjective and objective. God’s testimony is believed because of God himself, and the *fides qua creditur* and *fides quae creditur* are inseparable.

This theological formulation corresponds to Libanio’s early vision of the nature of religious faith. It was not based on certain evidence, nor did it sprout from irrational emotions. In other words, it excluded both strict evidentialism and fideism. In another article from 1972, he clearly states that the human being “always oscillates between sterilizing and dry rationalism and sentimental, irrational fideism”. After the First Vatican Council (1870–1871) the emphasis was very much on the rational side, which also accounts for the subsequent anti-intellectualist wave in the Catholic church.

Having shed light on Libanio’s balanced attitude toward faith, I will now consider in detail how he came to understand its personal and “subjective” aspect. He used both critical and affirmative means as he criticized the excessive subjectivism of the Protestants, but he also accepted the Augustinian, personal aspect of faith.

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260 “Em termos da teologia clássica, a *fides qua creditur* e a *fides quae creditur* são inseparáveis e essenciais no asenso da fé divina.” *ECNC*, 220. By way of comparison, for Paul Tillich, “[...] the term ‘ultimate concern’ unites the subjective and the objective side of faith – the *fides qua creditur* (the Faith through which one believes) and the *fides quae creditur* (the faith which is believed).” Tillich 1957, 10.


262 “[...] o homem oscila sempre entre um racionalismo esterilizante, seco e um fideísmo sentimental, irracional.” Creio para que possa entender. *Convergência* 5 n. 44 (1972), 9-20, 10.

263 Ibid., 11.
3.2. The aspect of faith: the personal decision

Thus, there was a strong existential emphasis in Libanio’s early theology. He supported the Augustinian idea of cor inquietum: faith and revelation come to fulfill the individual’s existential need. This existential aspect is very strong in the articles that make up his book O eterno problema da fé, which was published in 1973. Here is this “eternal problem of the faith” put into very existential terms. He explains the situation in Roman Catholic theology:

The dogmatic fortress also suffered an attack by the subjective side of faith. This aspect, so accentuated by the Protestants, began to be emphasized in the Catholic world. Faith is a personal commitment. It is a fundamental existential option in which the person is involved with God’s person.264

This new subjectivity is thus a fact that touches Catholics and Protestants alike. It came to replace the age-old Catholic security in which the authority of the revealing God which could not deceive itself nor be deceived, guaranteed the truth of the doctrines and the authority of the Church [guaranteed] its faithful conservation and exposition throughout the ages.265

Modernity has come to shatter the old securities and to provide “an astonishing pluralism”, as Libanio wrote in a later article in EPF. In the past it was different: “dogmatic forms were always repeated in materially the same way”, and “they did not dare to make new formulations” of these doctrines.266

Yet if there was something wrong about the Catholics and their traditionalism, the Lutherans did not fare much better. For Libanio, it was Luther in particular who was really the great subjectivist of church history:

Luther did not say that the faith did not include an element of intellectual assent. He rather expressly affirmed it. Yet he denied that it should have any value in the order of salvation. This is because he put less emphasis on such [i.e. intellectual] aspects of faith and put almost exclusive emphasis on its meaning in its salvific aspect, in its for me aspect. The

265 “A autoridade de Deus revelante, que não pode enganar-se e ser enganado, garantia-lhe a verdade dos dogmas e a autoridade da Igreja a sua fiel conservação e explicação através dos tempos.” Ibid., 11.
266 “Sobretudo os católicos não estão habituados ao pluralismo teológico, pois foram educados antes para a unidade e uniformidade que para o pluralismo. As formas dogmáticas eram repetidas na sua materialidade sempre igual, sem que se ousasse criar nova formulação. Hoje as formulações surgem em estoneante pluralismo.” Fé e linguagem I. Convergência 5 n. 51 (1972), 9-19, 18.
only faith that makes the person righteous (justifica) is the fiducial faith, faith-trust, by which the person, totally corrupted by sin, always remaining sinner in himself or herself, in all firmness trusts that the justice of Jesus Christ is imputed individually to him or her by God. So the sins are no longer counted for his or her condemnation. In this trust is included all the certainty of his or her own justification.\textsuperscript{267}

The question of Libanio’s criticism of Luther needs some further examination. It is important to point out, however, that his criticism of the subjectivism of Luther and the Protestants extends to his most recent works. On the level of words it is even stronger, as he mentions the “exclusion” of the intellectual in Lutheranism. He clarifies Lutheran soteriology from this perspective:

Without denying the cognitive aspect or the intellectual assent (assentimento) of the act of faith or God’s salvific mysteries, Luther values more their saving significance “for me” and not so much the intellectual dimension of the act of faith. The saving value of the faith is restricted to the element of trust. The intellectual is excluded.

In his or her intellectual assent to God’s written Word, the human being has complete confidence that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to him or her by God individually, and his or her sins are not imputed for condemnation. It is an act of trust that includes an absolute certainty of one’s personal justification.

The work of salvation is a work only of God. The fiducial faith [faith-trust] is the gift and work exclusively of God. Only by faith, sola fide, which is total confidence in God’s mercy—while remaining a sinner on the inside, though—is justification applied to the person as if it were his or her own. That is why a human being remains righteous and a sinner at the same time, simul iustus et peccator.\textsuperscript{268}

Two things need to be said about this passage. First of all, Libanio does not sound very convincing as to the “exclusion” of the intellectual in Luther’s

\textsuperscript{267} “Lutero não negava que a fé incluísse um elemento de assentimento intelectual. Antes afirmava-o expressamente, mas negava-lhe valor na ordem da salvação. Por isso atende menos a tal aspecto no ato de fé, dando quase uma exclusividade ao significado da fé, no seu aspecto salvífico, para mim. A única fé que justifica é a fé fiducial, fé-confiança, pela qual o homem, totalmente corrompido pelo pecado, permanecece sempre pecador em si mesmo, confiá com plena firmeza que a justiça de Jesus Cristo lhe é imputada individualmente por parte de Deus. Então tais pecados não lhe são mais contados para sua condenação. Nessa confiança está incluída toda a certeza da sua própria justificação.” Creio na santa Igreja católica. \textit{Convergência} 5 n. 46 (1972), 9-19, 9–10. Emphasis in the original. Libanio cites Alfaro 1968, 29, for this. In so doing he was correct, yet Alfaro’s and Libanio’s ecumenical thinking seem to have evolved in two different directions: Alfaro’s later writings (e.g. Alfaro 1972) testify to an opening toward a discussion with the Lutherans, whereas Libanio was citing Alfaro’s 1968 dissertation and its \textit{Kontroverztheologie} until as late as 2000 in ECNC.

\textsuperscript{268} “Sem negar o aspecto cognitivo e o assentimento intelectual do ato de fé ou os mistérios salvíficos de Deus, Lutero valoriza mais a dimensão de seu significado salvador ‘para mim’ e não tanto a dimensão intelectual do ato de fé. O valor salvífico da fé restringe-se a seu elemento fiducial. Exclui-se o intelectual. Dado o assentimento intelectual à Palavra de Deus escrita, o ser humano confia firmemente que a justiça de Cristo lhe é imputada por Deus individualmente, e seus pecados já não lhe são imputados em ordem à sua condenação. É um ato de confiança tal que inclui uma certeza absoluta da justificação pessoal. A obra de salvação é unicamente de Deus. A fé fiducial é dom e obra exclusivamente de Deus. Somente pela fé, sola fide, que é uma confiança total na misericórdia de Deus, mesmo permanecendo interiormente pecador, aplica-se como quem a própria justificação. O ser humano permanece, por isso, ao mesmo tempo, justo e pecador, \textit{simul iustus et peccator}.” \textit{ECNC}, 157–158; ref. to Alfaro 1968, 29–30.
theology. If one puts one’s trust in God because of his “written Word” and this is a result of “intellectual assent” (assentimento intelectual), how can he state on the previous line that “the intellectual [aspect] is excluded”? In fact, he seems to criticize not so much the experiential aspect of the Lutheran faith-trust, but the excessive emphasis that – to his mind – is given to the “inner” experience:

As the faith-trust is accentuated, the attention turns to the internal experience of the individual, which allows him or her to be certain of its divine origin. In this case, the subjective element of the personal experience becomes the decisive criterion of the manifestation of salvation, which is realized by God.269

There is one more comment to be made on this part of the text. How can “the subjective element of the personal experience” be the “decisive criterion” if one’s experience starts with an intellectual assent to God’s Word? We need to remind ourselves of what Philipp Melanchthon, Luther’s great theological assistant, said: “Fides et promissio sunt correlativa”, or “Faith and promise are correlative”. This means that faith is based on God’s saving word, which does what it says, and not on itself.270 Libanio’s critique misses the point when it comes to what sola fide means.271

We could of course dwell on the question of whether Libanio understood Luther and Lutheranism in the right way. After all, was it not the Lutheran reformation that stressed the importance of the vernacular translation of the Bible and of popular schools? Was it “unintellectual” in these terms at all, compared to medieval Catholicism? Church history in places like Germany, Sweden and Finland may point to the opposite.

It seems that Libanio was criticizing Lutheranism for another, more important purpose: he wanted to criticize its counterpart, Roman Catholic intellectualism. Whereas “the Protestants kept on Luther’s subjective track”, the

269 Libanio continues: “Ao acentuar a fé fiducial, a atenção se volta para a experiência interna do indivíduo que lhe permite ter certeza de sua origem divina. Nesse caso, um elemento subjetivo da experiência pessoal interna se torna critério decisivo da manifestação da salvação realizada por Deus.” ECNC, 158.

270 Jürgen Moltmann (1999, 103–104) explains the sola fide principle: “Das reformatorische Verständnis des rechtfertigenden Wortes promissio und des rechtfertigenden Glaubens fides und ihrer Korrelation – ‘promissio et fides sunt correlativa’ (Melanchthon) – ist aus der Kritik am mittelalterlichen Bußsakrament entstanden. [...] Der junge Luther machte aus dem priesterlichen Absolutionswort das Evangelium der Sündenvergebung, das ‘allein durch Glauben’ rechtfertigt. Das Evangelium der Sündenvergebung ist ein Tatwort, das wirkt, was es sagt, und ein Satz heiligen Rechts: ‘Wem ihr die Sünden vergebt, dem sind die vergeben.’”

271 On the general Roman Catholic criticism of Lutheranism as subjectivist and spiritualist, see Busquets 1986, 266–267.
Catholics emphasized objective knowledge more and more.\textsuperscript{272} This refers to the Tridentian counter-Reformation. Libanio’s deep intention was to bring the existential and the ontological aspects of the faith together. He takes a Rahnerian turn:

From an ontological perspective, faith affects the intelligence (\textit{logos}) of our being (\textit{ontos}). Apart from that, as all \textit{logos} becomes human inasmuch as it is conceived, captured and understood, faith involves all of our consciousness and our life (\textit{vivência}). Faith is existential in kind, and it is an existential. It is existential in kind in the sense that we perceive that our existence is touched by it on the inside as it provokes us to accept our existence simultaneously as a task to do and to think. In turn, this situation, which has been gratuitously created by God, is given to our nature in such a way that it [the faith situation] will never be denied in the present historical order. Faith affects the formal ontological structures of our human existence. The act of faith involves the totality of the human being.\textsuperscript{273}

Libanio’s text from 2000 indeed has an existential tone. He argues that “all \textit{logos} becomes human inasmuch as it is understood”, which is not far from the Lutheran, hermeneutic fideism that he had just criticized. Yet there is a crucial difference and it has to do with his Rahnerian methodology. Faith and grace affect the \textbf{being} of man. There is an area in which natural theology and revealed theology are supposed to meet: the human person and nature.

This leads us to the core of Libanio’s apologetic: it is not about accepting some religious \textit{Schwärmerei} or excessive spiritualism and subjectivism, and likewise acknowledges the fact that the time of the old certainties has passed. He mentions the “exaggerated emotional and sentimental” character of some youth movements as one extreme, and the manualistic theology of the First Vatican Council as another.

Yet he struggles to find faith meaningful. In the well-titled article “Creio para que possa entender” (‘I believe so that I may understand’), he balances the reasonable character of faith with the absurd, stating that “faith is not reduced to reason, although it does not come to pass without reason”. In other words, neither

\textsuperscript{272} “Os protestantes perseguiram esse veio subjetivo de Lutero, produzindo no meio católico uma retração diante de tal dimensão da fé, enfatizando o aspecto de conhecimento objetivo. A fé, dessa maneira, foi pouco a pouco sendo cada vez mais identificada, no meio católico, com a aceitação de verdades reveladas [...].” \textit{ECNC,} 158.

\textsuperscript{273} “Numa perspectiva ontológica, a fé afeta a inteligência (\textit{logos}) de nosso ser (\textit{ontos}). Além disso, como todo \textit{logos} se torna humano à medida que é apreendido, captado, percebido, a fé envolve nossa consciência, nossa vivência. A fé é existencial e um existencial. É existencial (\textit{Existenziell} [sic, pro \textit{existentiell}]) no sentido de percebermos nossa existência internamente atingida por ela, provocando-nos a assumi-la (a existência) ao mesmo tempo como tarefa de nosso agir e pensar. A fé é ‘um existencial’ (\textit{Existenzial} [sic, pro \textit{Existential}]) no sentido de atualizar uma condição que é uma determinação ontológica e real de nosso ser. Por sua vez, essa situação, criada gratuitamente por Deus, é dada à nossa natureza de tal modo que nunca nos será negada na atual ordem histórica. A fé afeta estruturas formais ontológicas de nossa existência humana.” \textit{ECNC,} 158.
evidentialism nor fideism adequately accounts for what faith is. He expressly claims that “the assent of faith is not determined by evidence from the created world, because faith is not a science”. It is rather based on testimony. Being religious, faith cannot be “rational” (rationalis), yet it can be “reasonable” (rationabilis). In other words, it acts in accordance with reason, even “guided by reason” as it makes its own free choices. People need to know why they have believed. Faith is not a result of intellectual reasoning (racionício), however, but is a decision made in freedom.274

It is in this sense that Libanio interprets St. Anselm’s famous phrase credo ut intelligam: reason is needed in order to believe, yet “no reason ever gives the excuse not to believe”.275 In order to make room for this fides rationabilis against the arguments of atheist humanism, he uses an argument borrowed from natural theology. “Why is it rational to believe (é racional crer)?”, he asks, and answers: “Because human existence is not an absurdity but has an ultimate meaning.”276 He employs an ad absurdum argument to explain the absurdity of atheism: “Not believing destroys all the deep meaning of existence”.

In contrast, the ever greater experiences of beauty, truth and love cause one to be even more “thirsty” for such realities. In a manner reminiscent of St. Thomas’s fourth way, Libanio speaks of the one “something” (algo) the human being hopes will come to settle the anxiety within. The transitory daily experiences make one notice that there is something that transcends the “concrete, fleeting and passing” experience.277 This is based on St. Thomas’s so-called henological

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274 “De modo mais conciso e preciso, podemos dizer que a fé não se reduz a razão, ainda que não acontece sem a razão. O assentimento da fé não se determina pela evidência da realidade criada (sic pro criada), pois a fé não é ciência. A fé essencialmente fundamenta-se no testemunho e não na percepção interna da realidade. Em outras palavras, a fé não se apresenta como o termo de um raciocínio, mas se faz através da liberdade aderente e decisiva do homem. Neste sentido não existe uma ‘racionalidade’ da fé. Seria a destruição de seu elemento religioso, de sua liberdade, de sua opção-resposta à proposta salvífica de Deus. No linguajar técnico teológico diz-se que a fé não é ‘rationalis’, mas ‘rationabilis’. Se ela não se reduz na verdade à razão (não é ‘rationalis’), contudo só se dá em consonância com a estrutura racional do homem ‘rationabilis’, cuja característica é de agir em conformidade com sua índole racional deixando-se dirigir pela razão nas suas decisões livres. A fé, portanto, não acontece na cegueira alienante e alienadora, contra a razão e inteligência. O homem deve saber-se explicar porque aderiu à proposta de um Deus que se lhe revela como Salvador.” Creio para que possa entender, 10. Cf. FC, 43–47; ECNC, 171–189.

275 “Nenhuma razão de crer dispensa de crer, ainda que não se possa crer sem razão.” Ibid., 14.

276 “Por que então é racional crer em Deus e não é uma loucura nem irracionalidade? Porque a existência humana não é um absurdo, mas tem um sentido último. De fato, não [sic] só há sentido em crer em Deus, como o não-crer destrói todo o sentido profundo da existência.” Ibid., 15.

277 “Quanto mais pura for sua experiência de beleza, de verdade, de amor, tanto mais feliz, mais realizado, mais intimamente plenificado se sente. Doutrano lado, o homem percebe que tais experiências aumentam dentro dele uma sede de tais realidades. Se reflete em profundidade, nota
proof, paraphrased as follows: because no limited thing or creature possesses any qualities to the maximal degree, there must be one (Gr. *hen*) reality in which the qualities are present to the maximum. God as the highest good (*summum bonum*) is the one in which the transcendental qualities of the true and the good exist as pure actuality (*actus purus*), whereas they are present as only partly actualized in lower beings. Karl Rahner’s *Vorgriff auf Mehr* is a contemporary equivalent of the *magis* of St. Thomas’s Latin. This argument must be carefully separated from the “more” logic of later neo-scholasticism and its subsistence thinking (the 100 “real” dollars).

This Thomist argument once more turns Augustinian: whenever the person wants to create beauty, truth and love by himself or herself, he or she will feel the “failure and emptiness”, just as Augustine felt, after trying it in his youth. One que experimenta na transitoriedade das vivências concretas algo que transcende tal transitoriedade. Este algo é apreendido no obscuro da experiência concreta, fugaz, caduca. É um algo que se o homem se pergunta com sinceridade e seriedade, deve dizer, que responde aos seus anseios e que exerce sempre sobre ele atração irresistível.” Ibid., 15.

278 “Quarta via sumitur ex gradibus qui in rebus inveniuntur. Invenitur enim in rebus aliquid magis et minus bonum, et verum, et nobile; et sic de alis huiusmodi. Sed *magis* et minus dicuntur de diversis secundum quod appropinquant diversimode ad aliquid quod *maxime* est: sicut magis calidum est, quod magis appropinquat maxime calido. Est igitur aliquid quod est verissimum, et optimum, et nobilissimum, et per consequens maxime ens [...] Quod autem dicitur magis maxime tale in aliquo genere, est causa omnium quae sunt illius generis: sicut ignis, qui est maxime calidus, est causa omnium calidorum, ut in eodem libro dicitur. Ergo est aliquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse, et bonitatis, et cuiuslibet perfectionis: et hoc dicimus Deum.” S. Th. I q. 2. a. 3. Emphasis added.

279 “Nun aber stellt der Vorgriff auf Mehr, als es der einzelne Gegenstand ist, eine genügende und einsichtige Bedingung der Möglichkeit dar für die Verneinung und so für die Erkenntnis der Endlichkeit des unmittelbar Erfahrenen. Das Nichts ist nicht vor der Verneinung, sondern der Vorgriff auf das Ungegrenzte ist an sich schon die Verneinung des Endlichen [...].” Rahner 1941, 80. Rahner (p. 82) goes on to say: “In diesem Sinn kann und muss man sagen: Der Vorgriff geht auf Gott.” The word *Vorgriff* is the German for *excessus*, which Libanio also knew: “Em cada conhecimento, em cada ato de decisão, de amor, o sujeito percebe um ‘mais’, um ‘excesso’.” *TdR*, 189.

280 Cf. n. 114: Jacques Maritain firmly believed that the hundred “real” thalers were more than the merely thought-of Kantian thalers. In neo-scholastic terms the word “more” means the difference between subsistence and existence. In *Summa theologiae*, one finds the “magis” of the fourth of his *quinque viæ*. This means that the neo-scholastic “more” takes its cue from the Aristotelian logic of potency and act, whereas the henological proof is based on the logic of the part and the whole (or particular–universal, or categorial–universal). Maritain put more emphasis on the former, and Rahner on the latter. Libanio also points to the “real” aspects of being (*TdL*, 176 in particular), which seems neo-scholastic and “quidditative”. Maritainian thinking is essentialist, while Rahnerian thinking is transcendentalist and existentialist.

281 Libanio stresses that the transcending “greater” reality cannot be controlled by the human being: personal freedom “is perceived to be limited by this reality”. It is in these terms that “it is not the human being that makes the beauty, the truth, the love”: “Não é o homem que faz a beleza, a verdade, o amor. Quando ele as quer fazer a seu arbítrio, sente o fracasso, o vazio. Talvez na experiência do amor isso apareça mais claro. O homem sente que é feito para amar.” Creio para que possa entender, 15. It should be noted that precisely this idea of human freedom limited *a priori* by a greater reality has been one of historic atheist arguments. Some circularity in Libanio’s argument persists.
tries in vain to instrumentalize the other, but this will not render happiness. Instead, love often calls us to suppress what is natural and spontaneous.  

On the other hand, the experience of love will demonstrate the opposite: “the human being feels made for love”. The human tendency is toward Love with a capital L, eternal love. This is because of what love is like:

Love understands that it is eternal. Love wants be eternal. Love makes eternity. Love is eternity.  

One has therefore to choose between a reasonable belief in meaning and love, or the belief that everything is made of illusions and absurdities. The question of faith is indeed the existential one:

The problem of the rationality of the faith is, in the last analysis, a question concerning its coherent or consensual character. That is, I need to ask myself:

Is it more coherent and more in line with my reason to accept that the reality of my life has a meaning and that it is not explained by the absurd destiny but by order, by love, by beauty and by truth

or

Is everything just illusions, absurdity, transitoriness and subject to passing away so that nothing can explain why I should take existence seriously?

The one who answers such a question answers the problem of the rationality of faith in God.  

We could thus conclude that Libanio’s theology is a clear combination of Augustinian and Thomist elements. To a certain degree, they contradict each other. The question of faith is, at its core, an existential one, yet it can be motivated by the philosophy of religion, which Libanio manages to popularize in very readable language. In addition to the “fourth way”, that of the henotic (magis) argument, I will mention the second Thomist argument of prima causa, which Libanio combines with an existential leap of faith:

To use spatial imagery, faith is situated beyond this world of sense-data. It affirms the reality of that which makes all this reality possible. The visible is only visible because there is the invisible that makes the visibility of the visible. * To make this leap (salto), the person feels he is missing the solid ground. He is no longer in the natural world, in its earthly and tangible humus. When he affirms that there is God, he has the daring courage of a shipwrecked man. This man can only see the threatening movements of the waves but believes that there is a calm and quiet shore around the sea. Everything speaks of water. It

282 “[O homem] Transforma o outro no instrumento de seu amor. Pode sentir satisfeito no momento e mesmo isto pode ser um período de sua vida. Mas cada vez vai fazendo a dolorosa experiência de que não pode instrumentalizar o outro. Este se lhe impõe como uma exigência de amor. Muitas vezes esta exigência vem contradizer seus desejos naturais, espontâneos.” Ibid., 15. The passage is reminiscent of Augustine’s distinction between uti and frui: the selfish love (uti) will not lead to a lasting and positive experience of love.


284 Ibid., 16–17.
is the only certitude that he has at the moment. He is tempted to surrender to it. The solid
ground is invisible but nevertheless real to him. It is his only hope of salvation.285

I have placed an asterisk (*) inside the passage to show where the Thomist
prima causa logic gives way to a Kierkegaardian figure of speech, that of a “leap”
in a place where there is no solid ground. Here the imagery is borrowed from a
shipwreck. Of course, one might ask whether there are warranted grounds to hope
for salvation, or whether the leap of faith is nothing but a salto mortale – a jump
into one’s death. In the story, Libanio combines the traditional proof of God’s
existence and the nature of religious faith as an existential option one has to make.
In this sense, he approaches the Jamesian “will to believe” logic.286 He stated in an
article: “Human existence is such that it cannot help making decisions”.287 Faith is
about a risk that must be taken but which is also worth taking. It is in this sense
that Libanio speaks of faith as a risk: “To be able to realize the human being (para
ser realizadora), human freedom must face the risk of error and human
adventure”.288 Yet the intellectual assent and the existential risk are correlated, and
faith does not consist of empty voluntarism.289

Libanio acknowledged in his book Deus e os homens: os seus caminhos of
1990 that the “sustaining bulwark” of Brazilian religiosity was the continuity of
baptism and religious marriage in people’s lives. This has been challenged by the

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285 O eterno problema da fé, 12. The argument here implies causal thinking: the “possible” being
implies God as the necessary being in a Thomist sense. Yet Libanio does not confront the problem
of the contingency of the created being: the relationship between the possible and the necessary is
not a necessary one.

286 According to William James, a genuine option must be “living” as the opposite of dead,
“forced” as the opposite of avoidable, and “momentous” as the opposite of trivial. In his 1896 essay
“The Will to Believe” he referred to these options: 1. living or dead; 2. forced or avoidable and 3.
momentous or trivial. A living option makes (at least) some appeal and one cannot help taking it
seriously. The forced nature of option means one must choose, and it is not whether to “go out with
your umbrella or without it”. The “momentous” option has the dimensions of a Pascalian wager: if
Dr. Nansen invited one to join a North Pole expedition, one would have to think of it as a once-in-
a-lifetime chance (James 1979, 14). The shipwrecked man’s situation called for the two last
dimensions of the faith option because the “living or dead” dimension was obvious in the first
place. Libanio argued along Heideggerian “Sein zum Tode” lines that “whoever has the choice, has
the cross” (“qui a le choix, a la croix”, POF, 48). By this he meant that death was the mediation of
life: getting married meant “dying” to the other options (infinitas moças, ‘infinite girls’) but at the
same time “getting richer with the riches of the once-made decision”.

287 “A existência humana é tal que o homem não pode não tomar decisões.” Pecado e culpa. REB
34 n. 133 (1974), 108-122, 113. This is a clear Jamesian axiom of life’s options as “forced”. The
article was not taken into POF, but the logic goes along with the existential-ontological and
Maritainian logic of the book.

288 POF, 45.

289 Libanio refers to faith as a “risk” in a Tillichian manner. However, it was important for Tillich
also to acknowledge that the obedience of faith must not become an arbitrary “will to believe” in
misrepresented Jamesian terms. Tillich 1957, 36–38. Concerning the risk of faith, see ibid., 16–22.
existential and individualist thinking of the present time, however.\textsuperscript{290} In order to make the question of personal faith clearer, he suggests another image, that of a play in three acts.\textsuperscript{291}

He starts this tri-partite “play” with human experience. It has to do with one’s enchantment before the world’s wonders, significant existential situations or one’s commitment to historical causes and religious traditions. This human subjectivity cannot remain alone because “no man is an island”, in John Donne’s terms.\textsuperscript{292} We are always faced with something objective, and religiously does not end up with the subject as Feuerbach suggested in his criticism. Finally comes the third act, that of encounter. Libanio once more depicts the human walk as a walk toward God because God’s call has always been there. The first act is, in fact, the second act.\textsuperscript{293}

Once more, we are faced with the question of God as the first cause. Namely, first-cause logic makes it possible to criticize any phenomenological analysis because it does not deal with the essential – which is only available to theology. This means that it eventually makes a dividing line between the secondary cause and “what meets the eye” and the primary cause, which is invisible – yet reasoned or revealed to be ultimate.

It would therefore seem that Libanio has worked out an existential interpretation of the faith that also gives room to a Tillich-type of “ultimate concern” in objective terms. This explains his theory of the fundamental option, for example.\textsuperscript{294} He also defends the faith as a personal reality. His article “O livre risco da fé” in \textit{EPF} put faith and love in parallel: there is “the free choice” and the “free risk” of love. Unitng these terms with the classical idea of trusting the self-revealing God, he states:

\textsuperscript{290} \textit{DH}, 10–11.
\textsuperscript{291} This subchapter “O encontro entre os dois caminhos” is in \textit{DH}, 14–16.
\textsuperscript{292} Libanio falsely attributes the phrase to Thomas Merton (\textit{DH}, 15). Although Merton did write \textit{No Man Is an Island}, the phrase originates in the \textit{Devotions upon Emergent Occasions} by the Anglican Dean John Donne.
\textsuperscript{293} “A ordem e sucessão dos atos, como vêm apresentadas no livro, correspondem à nossa experiência e não à natureza mesma do atuar salvífico. Pois na verdade dos fatos, o primeiro ato é o aproximar-se de Deus que possibilita o próprio caminhar do homem a ele.” \textit{DH}, 16. If we take these “acts” in connection with Gustavo Gutiérrez’s famous thesis of praxis as the first “act”, although in a different context and meaning, should we not see Libanio’s implicit criticism of this starting with the praxis, i.e. human experience, in theology?
\textsuperscript{294} On Libanio’s concept of the fundamental option and moral theology in general, cf. n. 55.
Faith means accepting the divine testimony in trust (confiança). [...] The person, as he or she believes in any revealed truth, commits an act of faith, and in the same act, [believes] in the revealing God. Because he believes in the God who reveals, he believes in what God reveals. In other words, the divine testimony is believed in every act of faith as the first reality. God, as the first truth, is self-believable (auto-crível) and is believed because of himself.²⁹⁵

Libanio seems to interpret this traditional idea of God as veritas prima from a personal, existential point of view. In this he is once more an heir of the Rahnerian school and of Vatican II. Yet, would not this personalist emphasis take the edge from his criticism of the Lutheran “fiducial faith”, since to him faith was confidence in its essence? In fact, he later pointed to the fact that “the polemic with the Protestants dims the existential dimension”²⁹⁶ in these terms:

This existential–communitarian dimension of faith was often put on a second level, particularly among the Catholics. For many, believing consisted primarily in accepting the doctrines, a set of truths. This situation is understandable in the context of the polemics that followed the Protestant reformation. In fact, the Protestants especially accentuated this subjective and existential side of faith. Luther referred to the “fiducial faith”, faith-trust in God, as a commitment to the Absolute of God who saves us and justifies us in Jesus. He thus put the objective sides of truth and the teachings of faith in the shade.²⁹⁷

In Libanio’s opinion it was the Protestant overstatement that made the Catholics over-react, and go to the extreme opposite of exaggerating faith as a “belief in” objective realities. Thus the fides qua aspect, or faith “in” God as a person, was dimmed: “In reality, though, the faith includes, as a constitutive factor, this subjective, personal and existential–communitarian dimension.” He points to the etymology of “to believe” (crer, of the Latin credere) as ‘giving one’s heart’ (cor dare).²⁹⁸ Therefore faith means

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²⁹⁶ “Polêmica com os protestantes obscurece dimensão existencial” [title of a paragraph]. DH, 180.
²⁹⁷ DH, 180.
²⁹⁸ I have translated the contrasted “fé a” (credere Deum, ECNC, 161) vs. “fé em” (credere in Deum, ECNC, 167) as “belief in” vs. “faith in”, because Libanio was obviously pointing to the objective and subjective sides of faith (fides qua, fides qua), even though without recourse to these concepts as he does in ECNC, 220. On page 166 of ECNC he does not refer to credere in Deum and fides qua at the same time, although on p. 161 he does refer to credere Deum as fides qua. This would be more understandable if the “fides qua creditur” were somewhere made distinct from credere Deum, since one could in principle speak of the objective content of faith (belief) apart from the believing subject, but not of the subjective and existential “option” of the faith apart from the subject. In this sense, one could argue that “credere in Deum” is subjective, fiducial faith (fides qua creditur), but “credere Deum” cannot be the same as fides qua.
committing to him the inmost of our being, leaving the core of our person at his disposal, offering our freedom to him in a gesture of a trusting gift (num gesto de dádiva confiante) and of rendering to him oboedientiam fidei – the obedience of the faith.299

This passage from Libanio’s student-type “catechism” Deus e os homens shows a clear distinction between faith as subjective trust and faith based on “reasonable” grounds. The “will to believe” is always contrasted with the “reason to believe”, which equates to the tension between fideism and evidentialism and between fides qua vs. fides quae. Somehow, the different concepts are kept in constant tension. Libanio does not really enter into a serious ecumenical discussion with Protestant theology, but repeatedly contrasts the Lutheran “faith” with the Roman Catholic “belief”. This contrast is anthropologically unhelpful, and he admits that religious faith has both a “credere Deum“ and a “credere in Deum” aspect, both an objective and a subjective side.

The existential and existential-ontological ideas of faith give room to the more evidentialist side of Libanio’s theological thinking. This is the question of natural theology and prima causa logic, which is addressed in the next section.

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299 DH, 180.
3.3. Christ and creation

Libanio widely uses prima causa logic in the apologetic parts of his production. This logic helps in portraying God as transcendent and not as an agent. However, it is in accordance with secondary causality that he acts and intervenes in the world process. This leads us to the very core of the problem of human and divine freedom and to the possibility of knowledge of God by means of the analogy of being.

In his early article on the free risk of faith, Libanio makes the following apologetic point: “All the atheist humanists have declared a bitter fight against God because he would empty the human being. They have called him dead so that the human being may live.” Yet this death of God also means human death; human freedom is at stake. There is no psychological analysis that can account for the whole of the human act, much less make room for human transcendentality or “the free play of God’s love”.

God, who is a transcendental cause (causa transcendental), cannot be analyzed by empirical means. He can only be perceived in faith.300

God’s call is inscribed in human reality in such a way that the human being cannot do anything outside the scope of his grace. The “ontological call” has already been made to all people. They have been called to realize their desiderium Dei in the absolute manner.301 Libanio continues:

Grace invaded the structure of the world. Any creature can be a sacrament of God, since it is full of God, and the human being in his or her psychic structure can actualize this dynamism toward God.302

Libanio used the term “Christic” coined by Teilhard de Chardin to explain the unity of the history of humankind and of God.303 Elsewhere, he continued to

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300 “Deus sendo causa transcendental não se deixa analizar pelos métodos empíricos. Só é perceptível na fé.” O livre risco da fé, 16.
302 “A graça invadiu a estrutura do mundo. Qualquer criatura pode ser sacramento de Deus, já que ela está prenhe de Deus e o homem, na sua estrutura psíquica, pode atualizar esse dinamismo para Deus.” Ibid., 18.
refer to the Christic structures of the world and its history.\textsuperscript{304} In following the Teilhardian line, he accepted the thesis that was expressed in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s \textit{Teología de la liberación}: mankind has one, Christo-finalized vocation.\textsuperscript{305}

He applies the Thomist logic of the first cause to explain the relationship between man’s free will and God. In his article on \textit{credo ut intelligam} he wrote:

God is not immanent to the world in the sense of being someone who is part of the chain of human events, of cosmic life, evolution or history, acting in a categorial manner, but present in the order, virtue, sin, disorder, absurd, good, bad, success and in the failure of our lives. Faith makes us experience God in all these experiences.\textsuperscript{306}

The idea of the first cause is present in Libanio’s system in order to show how God does not diminish human freedom. He is not an enemy of human autonomy as the secular philosophies would have it. Explaining the sacraments, Libanio argued in 1973 that “the closer God is to the human person, the more this person is himself or herself, free and pure in his or her being”.\textsuperscript{307} He went a step further and advocated a synergistic theory based on the same idea:

God does everything that the human being does, acts in everything that the human being acts, but \textit{in a different manner}. That is why the sacrament is not distanced from the human action.\textsuperscript{308}

Libanio’s subsequent production contains even more about God’s action in human time and space. In his writings on the subject, he maintained that liberation theology was not as much concerned with distinguishing human action and

\textsuperscript{303} On the term “Christic” (christique, crístico) in Teilhard de Chardin, see n. 906.
\textsuperscript{304} This Christic quality gives a strong continuity from the present world to the one to come: “O cosmo e a história estão impregnados de ‘estruturas crísticas’, pois tudo foi criado à imagem de Cristo. E o que o homem faz de bem, antecipa já a humanidade e sociedade glorificada […]” DH, 208. Libanio also clearly postulates the unity of mankind, and the ontological unity of the different dimensions: of the human being (humanism), of God (the theological dimension) and of Christ and the church, i.e. the christological and ecclesiological dimensions. See DH, 202–203.
\textsuperscript{305} Gutiérrez, \textit{TL}, 199–200; quoted in n. 72; cf. n. 487.
\textsuperscript{306} “Deus não é imanente ao mundo no sentido de ser alguém que faz parte da cadeia dos acontecimentos humanos, da vida cósmica, da evolução, da história, agindo de modo categorial, mas presente na ordem, na virtude, no pecado, na desordem, no absurdo, no bem, no mal, no êxito, no fracasso de nossa vida.” Creio para que possa entender, 18.
\textsuperscript{307} “Quanto mais próximo Deus estiver de uma pessoa, mais esta pessoa é ela mesma, livre, pura no seu ser.” Reflexão teológica sobre os sacramentos II. \textit{Atualização} 4 nn. 37-38 (1973), 587-596, 594. This led Libanio to argue that “the freest person who ever existed was Jesus Christ”.
\textsuperscript{308} “Deus faz tudo que o homem faz, age em tudo que o homem age, mas de \textit{modo diferente}. Por isso, o sacramento não se distancia do agir humano.” Ibid., 594. This is in the preceding paragraph on the same page, but logically posterior to the idea presented in the subsequent paragraph (note above).
salvation as with uniting (articulare) them.\textsuperscript{309} He repeated exactly the same point in \textit{TdR} five years later in 1992\textsuperscript{310}, using the terminology made famous by Jacques Maritain (\textit{distinguer pour unir}) meaning that God’s action is not far from human action. In fact, it seems to be part of it, since God works through human beings. He wrote in \textit{Teologia da revelação} in 1992, and in \textit{ECNC} in 2000:

God works in history in and through human freedom which he himself sustains. God makes man be and exist as he is. Because God is a free being, he makes man exist in freedom. God creates the human being as a free otherness before him, and any self-manifestation of his will pass by the response of this freedom. They [the self-manifestations] are therefore not punctual and extraordinary actions in the margin of action that would be understood in an almost magical way.\textsuperscript{311}

Libanio has preferred to refer to the “last cause” (última causa)\textsuperscript{312} rather than the “first cause”, but he means the same.\textsuperscript{313} He bases his argument on the Rahnerian idea of the ontological change the supernatural existential has brought about in each and every human being. The point is clear: our knowledge of God is no longer merely analogical i.e. philosophical. It would be analogical “if we only used our natural capacity to know God, the last cause, starting from the second causes”. Yet things have changed, and “in the present order all knowledge of God is really provoked by God himself, beyond our simple reasoning”.\textsuperscript{314} This

\textsuperscript{309} \textit{TdL}, 273.

\textsuperscript{310} “Na perspectiva da América Latina, a preocupação principal não se põe, quando se assume a unidade da história, na distinção entre os planos sagrado/profano, espiritual/temporal, eclesial/político, mas em sua articulação, a fim de evitarem-se os riscos de idealismo formal e intimista, ineficaz no tocante às relações entre os homens.” \textit{TdR}, 442.


\textsuperscript{312} For an early (1968) reference to “última causa”, see n. 253.

\textsuperscript{313} Speaking of medieval thinking, Libanio mentions “Causa das causas [the Cause of the causes]”, “Causa primeira” and “Causa última” in parallel. \textit{ECNC}, 133.

\textsuperscript{314} “A graça fundamenta o conhecimento sobrenatural, elevando o conhecimento analógico de Deus ao mesmo nível do conhecimento da vida e essência íntima de Deus. O conhecimento analógico seria aquele que teríamos se usássemos somente a nossa capacidade natural de conhecer a Deus, última causa, a partir das causas segundas. Entretanto, na ordem atual todo conhecimento de Deus é realmente provocado pelo próprio Deus para além de nosso simples raciocínio. Nesse próprio raciocínio está Deus presente chamando-nos a uma vida íntima com ele. Nesse sentido, não acontece na ordem atual nenhum conhecimento de Deus puramente analógico, sem uma presença de graça do mesmo Deus, que eleva tal conhecimento a um nível novo de relação.” \textit{FC}, 62; \textit{ECNC}, 217.
soteriological passage implies that Libanio considered analogical knowledge a positive possibility, and even a reality, since it had been empowered by God.\textsuperscript{315}

Is a cause necessarily an agent, and can it be? Unless we accept the deistic notion of a “watchmaker” God, we are supposed to accept at least some kind of \textit{creatio continua}. The extensive \textit{ECNC} shows how theological thinking has generally developed. Libanio argues that the God of Thomism is not a demiurge, an “artisan who works [ready-made] material into a piece of art”, because in that case he would not be a cause. The passage is meant to explain the way people thought in the Middle Ages: God was “the universal cause of all being”. The analogy of being was possible\textsuperscript{316}, yet in modern times the idea of God as a “cause” has changed as scientific knowledge has expanded. Libanio borrowed ideas from A. Gesché’s book and from the current Catechism to argue that God gives creatures “the dignity of being causes”\textsuperscript{317}, stating expressly that “God is not an agent in the world that would substitute it in its autonomy”.\textsuperscript{318}

He nevertheless engages in a strong defense of the modern application of \textit{prima causa} logic, and takes up the argument of \textit{causa finalis} to explain how God can “excite causal chains” today, in D. Lambert’s words.\textsuperscript{319} Two things need to be said, however. Firstly, this final cause is not different from the first cause because the temporal sequence is of no importance in the first place: Libanio uses the “last” and the “first” causes interchangeably. Secondly, we must admit that this kind of God as the \textit{primus motor} of the continuous creation is not problematic in itself: God remains a “cause” and not an “agent”. However, the idea of God “promoting

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[315]{Vitor G. Feller (1988, 83–84; n. 360) openly refers to liberation theology as a historical \textit{analogia entis}.}
\footnotetext[316]{\textit{ECNC}, 133.}
\footnotetext[317]{“Deus, como Causa, faz que as coisas se façam como elas se fazem.” \textit{ECNC}, 147. Cit. from A. Gesché, \textit{Dieu pour penser IV}: cosmos. Paris: Cerf, 1994, 71. The other phrase “comunicar às criaturas a dignidade de serem causas” is obviously from \textit{Catechism} 2000, 81 (#306): “For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other [...]” Libanio here refers to S. Th. I q. 22 a. 3.}
\footnotetext[318]{“Mas Deus não é um agente no mundo que o substitua em sua autonomia.” \textit{ECNC}, 147.}
\footnotetext[319]{“Por sua ação transcendente está continuamente sustentando-as no ser e como causa final, verdadeira chamada (appel), ‘Deus suscita, se o quiser, o desenovar de cadeias causais cuja possibilidade está inscrita no cosmos; pode provocar ‘como causa final a vinda à existência, a realização de condições iniciais compatíveis com seu projeto’. ‘Ver a criação como relação implica que se deixa a Deus seu direito à criatividade, à inovação no respeito de nossa autonomia que ele quer, ao mesmo tempo, promover.’” \textit{ECNC}, 147. Cit. from D. Lambert, \textit{Sciences et théologie: les figures d’un dialogue}. Bruxelles & Namur: Lessius & Presses Universitaires, 1999, 57. The idea of a “final cause” may prompt us to ask if Libanio – at least mildly – supported the argument from Intelligent Design (ID). This is particularly relevant with regard to the “evidentialist” passage in \textit{DH}, 103–116 about “creatures as the pergament of God’s writing”.
\end{footnotes}
our autonomy” (Lambert) leads us right to the heart of the problem with Libanio’s idea of theonomy. He maintains that God supports our autonomy and is not an “agent”, yet he “acts” precisely through human freedom and autonomy. Is this not a discrepancy?

This seems to be Libanio’s conception of human–divine synergism. It may be helpful to reflect on what two other theologians have said to this effect. I refer to José Comblin of Brazil, and to Ignacio Ellacuría, who was killed in El Salvador in 1989. José Comblin sounds very much like Libanio in his book on the Christian freedom of the 1970’s:

God’s action must not be understood on the side or outside of human action. God acts in man, starting from the core of his being. God’s action is also man’s action. Because of this, the proclamation is at the same time a call. The Gospel is a call to man that he may make himself free, because God’s action that gives the freedom and the human action that conquers this freedom is one single process (proceso).320

Ignacio Ellacuría tackled the same question, explaining what the salvation historical approach in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology meant. It was precisely the question of transcendence rising from the praxis that would combine the divine and human realities. Accordingly, it is possible to see

something that will allow us to notice a momentual structural difference without accepting a duality; something that will allow us to speak of an intrinsic unity without falling back to a strict unity because of that.321

Ellacuría apparently agreed with Gutiérrez on the point that there are no two histories, one of God and the other of man, one sacred and the other profane.322 He wrote of “the historical reality”, not history as such.323 It would unite them both. With unsurpassable clarity he stated:

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320 “La acción de Dios no ha de entenderse al lado o fuera de la acción humana. Dios actúa en el hombre a partir del núcleo de su ser [del hombre]. La acción de Dios es también acción del hombre. Por eso el anuncio es, al mismo tiempo, llamada. El evangelio es llamada al hombre para que se haga libre, porque es un único proceso la acción de Dios que da la libertad y la acción del hombre que conquista esa libertad.” Comblin 1979, 30. Comblin continues: “Por eso hay que decir al mismo tiempo que la libertad viene de Dios, que Dios está haciendo libre al hombre y que el hombre es llamado a asumir su libertad.”

321 “[P]odemos ver en él algo que permite notar una diferencia momentual estructural sin tener que aceptar una dualidad; algo que permite hablar de una unidad intrínseca sin por eso caer en una estricta unidad.” Ellacuría 1991b, 327.

322 On this, cf. n. 72 and the following footnotes.

323 Cf. Ellacuría’s posthumous and unfinished but yet extensive Filosofía de la realidad histórica (1991a). The very title reveals the intention to combine “realism” and “historicism”.
Rather that which exists is one single historical reality in which God intervenes and in which the human being intervenes, in such a way that there is no intervention by God without the human being present in one or the other way and that there is no intervention by the human being without God becoming present in some way. It is necessary to discern the different interventions by God and the human being, and the different modes of “relation” in these interventions. The intervention and presence of God is of a different type when it takes place in the range of sin (en el ámbito de pecado) and when it takes place in the range of anti-sin, of grace. There is an omnipresence of God in history which is, by definition, always divine, even if this presence may take different forms that could hardly be classified according to the simplist division into natural and supernatural.\textsuperscript{324}

Ellacuría saw ethics as human action in which God was also involved. He made a distinction between sin and grace, which inevitably leads the reader back to an ontological type of thinking even if it were his intention to criticize the division into the natural and the supernatural. The question is whether it is possible to develop any kind of processual theology without always going back to some type of distinction, dichotomy, or duality.

Libanio’s book \textit{Gustavo Gutiérrez (GG, 2000)} shows how difficult it is only to “unite”: one needs to distinguish as well. He now appears to emphasize the distinction, however. The following quotation will help to clarify the problem:

In a context so different from the European one, he [Gutiérrez] works out a binomen that had been the object of a great polemic in the previous decades in European theology: grace and nature. Grace is God’s gift that prompts people to express solidarity with the poor; nature is the liberating process with the demands of historical action and socio-political liberation.

As [with] all bipolar theology, the elements of which remain in continuous tension, no text can be understood without this perspective. In the most contemplative moments, the action, struggle and commitment cannot be depreciated. In the most active moments, one cannot cease to acknowledge God’s grace, gratuity, and infinite freedom.\textsuperscript{325}

\textsuperscript{324} “Más bien lo que se dá es una sola realidad histórica en la cual interviene Dios y en la cual interviene el hombre, de modo que no se da la intervención de Dios sin que se en ella se haga presente de una u otra forma el hombre y no se da la intervención del hombre sin que en ella se haga presente de algún modo Dios. Lo que se necesita discernir es la distinta intervención de Dios y del hombre y el distinto modo de ‘relación’ en esas intervenciones. De distinto tipo es la intervención y la presencia de Dios en la intervención del hombre cuando está se da en el ámbito del pecado y cuando se da en el ámbito del anti-pecado, de la gracia. Hay una omnipresencia de Dios en la historia que es, por definición, siempre divina, aunque esa presencia puede tomar formas distintas que difícilmente pueden clasificarse en la división simplista de naturales y sobrenaturales.” Ellacuría 1991b, 327–328.

\textsuperscript{325} “Num contexto tão diferente do europeu, elabora o binômio que foi motivo de tanta polêmica, nas décadas anteriores, na teologia européia: graça e natureza. Graça é o dom de Deus que move as pessoas à solidariedade com os pobres: natureza é o processo libertador com as exigências de ações históricas, de libertações sociopolíticas. Como toda teologia bipolar, cujos elementos permanecem em contínua tensão, nenhum texto pode ser entendido fora dessa perspectiva. Nos momentos mais contemplativos, não podem ser desprezados a ação, a luta, o compromisso. Nos momentos mais ativos, não se pode deixar de reconhecer a graça, a gratuidade, a liberdade infinita de Deus.” GG, 45. Emphasis added.
I have written the two words “binomen” and “bipolar” in bold type in order to emphasize Libanio’s idea of liberation theology as a project that will always maintain that grace and nature are distinct. Is this not very different from what he said in the 1980’s and even in the 1990’s? The tables are turned in *GG*: it is now the distinction that gives its flavor to all liberation theology, and it is called “bipolar”, like all other theology. However, Gutiérrez’s liberation theology was known particularly because it used the unity of the three levels (politics, individuals, and God) as the starting point.326

Of course, strict unitarian thought is problematic. It was at the heart of the International Theological Commission’s criticism of liberation theology in 1977.327 Libanio knew the challenges involved in theological monism. For example, it was Grace Jantzen’s philosophically sound opinion that any truly serious pantheistic solution would necessarily mean a blurring of the subject’s boundaries with the rest of the world. This is because the polarity of immanence and transcendence is central to Western symbolism.328

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326 This is also the interpretation offered by Míguez Bonino: “The originality of this theology is not to have discovered these three levels of meaning but to have started from their *unity* as the fundamental point of departure.” Míguez Bonino 1977, 70.

327 See esp. Lehmann 1978, 14: “Estas vaguedades en la definición de la relación entre historia y trascendencia o revelación no son inoperantes, sino que revelan toda su peligrosidad, por ejemplo, en el documento final del congreso latinoamericano de ‘Cristianos por el socialismo’ (abril, 1972): lo cristiano queda tan vaciado de sentido en esta interpretación de la unidad de la historia, que amenaza con difundirse en pura historia profana.” In the same paragraph, Lehmann refers to Gutiérrez, *TL*, 108, where Gutiérrez says: “Estamos pues ante la afirmación de un mundo cada vez más autónomo, ‘no religioso’, o positivamente, un mundo mayor. Pero también ante la vocación única a la salvación que valoriza cristianamente – aunque de modo diferente al del pasado – toda la historia humana.” Gutiérrez calls this apparent contradiction between total secularism and total christianization a “double movement” (doble movimiento). Lehmann (1978, 13 n. 30) criticizes the way he used Urs von Balthasar to support this idea in *TL*, 108 n. 44.

328 In her *Becoming Divine*, Grace Jantzen asks a tough question motivated by pantheistic “solutions” to the basic world-view problems. There seems to be no escape from binary polarities: “To suggest that in some sense the divine is inseparable from the physical universe, as pantheism does, would not merely be to suggest a change of theological doctrine of interest only to those theologians and philosophers who entertain themselves with abstract debates. If pantheism were seriously to be entertained, the whole western symbolic, constituted as it is by the binary polarities which run through it like a fault-line, would thereby be brought into question. Pantheism rejects the split between spirit and matter, light and darkness, and the rest; it thereby also rejects the hierarchies based on these splits. Moreover, it suggests a different set of associations and linkages which need to be explored: one place to begin, as I shall do below, is from an analogy of the divine/world relationship to the relationship of a person and her or his (gendered) body. But since, as already discussed, our identities are constituted by entry into the symbolic, a threat to the dualisms which structure that symbolic is a threat precisely to those identities, a threat that is compounded by explicitly taking bodiliness and sexuality into account in relation to the divine. To entertain pantheism seriously would jeopardize the self-definitions achieved by the expulsion of alterities: how could subjects then maintain proper boundaries and self-identities?” Jantzen 1998, 267.
In his book *Deus e os homens* of 1990, Libanio utilizes the logic of the first cause to advocate a clearly evidentialist type of natural theology. Once more, it happens by means of a *distinguer pour unir* presentation: one needs first to distinguish God from creatures. He is not a mythical demiurge who would have had to fight the personalized forces of chaos in creating the universe. It was not an emanation from ready-made elements, but a creation by the word.\(^{329}\) Yet, he stresses the fact that nobody can be excused for not being able to find the traces of the creation in the universe. He uses a text from the Book of Wisdom, ch. 13:1, and particularly the passage at the beginning of St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans, Rom. 1: 18–32, to support his case. God is both detached from the creation and close to it:

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God approaches us, according to Paul, in creatures so that he remains distinct from them but also recognizable in them. This is because any thought of atheism was completely unknown to the religious world of his time. The fundamental problem is to arrive at God through creatures and not to remain attached to them by considering them divine. This would be idolatry.\(^{330}\)
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Libanio thus finds in the epistle to the Romans strong support for the “great chain of being”, or the *analogia entis* as a way of approaching God by means of natural, analogical reasoning. He seems to forget that atheism was also an option in Paul’s time – if not among the Jews, certainly among the Romans to whom Paul belonged by citizenship. Libanio refers not only to analogical knowledge of God, but also to the “evidence” from creation. This “evidence” inspires the psalmist in Ps. 104:24: “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures [NIV].” This evidentialist stance concerns not only the creation, but also the order of redemption:

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In another instance, Paul further deepens the idea of God’s approach in creation. It is not only evident (*evidente*) that everything was created by God and that the human being may
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\(^{330}\) “Há, portanto, uma aproximação de Deus nas criaturas que, segundo Paulo, deve permitir distinguí-las delas, mas também reconhecer-las nelas, já que qualquer ideia de um possível ateísmo está fora de toda cogitação no mundo religioso em que se vivia. O problema fundamental é chegar a Deus pelas criaturas e não deter-se nelas, considerando-as divinias: idolatria.” *DH*, 111–112.
arrive at him by way of his creatures, but also that the creation appears to be in a direct relationship with Christ.\textsuperscript{331}

This Christian understanding of the creation is based on St. Paul’s text in Colossians 1:15–20 in which Christ is portrayed as the firstborn over all creation. According to Libanio, this means something special: “Everything, therefore, reveals the salvific presence of Christ.”\textsuperscript{332} However, we are led to believe that the basis of his argument is the long citation from Teilhard de Chardin’s \textit{The Phenomenon of Man}, according to which everything in the universe is going toward a predetermined “end”.\textsuperscript{333} This is another example of the way Libanio uses the \textit{causa finalis} to support the idea of analogical theological knowledge. Teilhard’s universalistic mystique is put to the service of fundamental theology in the same way as the \textit{causa prima} in St. Thomas’s philosophy. Does it cease to be a mystique and become natural theology here, too?

Libanio has written a number of books since 1990, but he has returned to the same idea of the Book of Wisdom and the “insanity” of atheism, in at least two different ways. The first way out the evidentialist dead end appears in \textit{Teologia da revelação} (1992), in which he reiterates that “today” people are no longer in a state of pure nature because everyone has been created within the order of salvation. This is the first solution, the idea of the supernatural existential à la Rahner. Libanio uses it precisely to mildly criticize the evidentialism, not only of the Book of Wisdom and Psalm 104, but also of the First Vatican Council. The words “evidence” and “evident” are no longer used in \textit{TdR}.

Secondly, Libanio sought different expressions and different texts for his treatise \textit{Eu creio, nós cremos}, published in 2000. He refers to St. Thomas Aquinas and mentions the natural mysticism of St. Francis in his Song of Creation, which is about an “immense harmony with nature” and the “mild and mysterious peace” Francis felt when he died.\textsuperscript{334} The unity of the world, a Teilhardian theme, now

\textsuperscript{331} “Em outro momento, Paulo aprofunda ainda mais essa aproximação de Deus na criação. Não só é evidente que tudo foi criado por Deus, que o homem pode chegar a Ele pelas criaturas, mas também que a criação aparece diretamente relacionada com Cristo.” \textit{DH}, 112.

\textsuperscript{332} “Jesus Cristo é o primogênito. Nele, por meio dele, para ele, tudo foi criado. Tudo revela portanto essa presença salvífica de Cristo.” \textit{DH}, 113.

\textsuperscript{333} Libanio cites the well-known ideas put forward by Teilhard de Chardin: Christ as the “Omega Point”, as the Alpha and the Omega, Plenitude, etc. \textit{DH}, 113–114. He also cites an interpretation given by R. Rezek, according to which Christ is like an “immense cesium 137 radiating to life, not death, the energies that take all the universe to God the Father” (p. 114).

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{ECNC}, 132–133. The word “contemplation” seems to replace the idea of “evidence” in \textit{ECNC}.
becomes a perfectly modern, spiritualist interpretation of the universe: “Everything is life.”335

In short, Libanio advocated at least a mild type of evidentialism in his thinking until 1990. In the 1990’s, however, he sought to suppress the problematic ideas of “evidence” in creation. It is of importance for this study, however, to understand his reasoning in his earlier works. God is the first cause or the last, ultimate cause. Christ is the center of creation.

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335 “Tudo é vida.” ECNC, 140.
3.4. Revelation as mediated immediacy: the principle of correlation

Libanio deals with the question of revelation particularly in *Teologia da revelação*, published in 1992. There are, however, two reasons for not concentrating only on this work. Firstly, it does not shed light on the background of his thinking in the 1970’s because it is much more recent. Secondly, it is vast (almost 500 pages) and to a great extent unsystematic book and contains fifteen different chapters on various conceptions of revelation “in history”, “in the Bible”, for example. We should rather start at Libanio’s theology of culture, which shows how he came to understand the principle of correlation. This is, after all, the backbone of his thinking on the revelation.

The question of unity and distinction is also relevant to Libanio’s theology of culture, according to which which the human and the divine meet. In his 1985 article on evangelization, he refers to the “two oscillations” between God’s free initiative and the human cultural movement:

They are distinguished by the first moving principle. They are mixed in the historical and the concrete. So the first [oscillation] starts from God’s free initiative. The other one is fed by the human cultural movement. Their starting principles are different: God and human culture. But they are interlaced in the concrete. It is because God does not reveal his salvific project except through the human cultural structures (*suportes*) that are inserted in the human cultural current. In turn, no human culture is alien to the transcendent presence of God. They are all touched by the colorful rays of God’s creative and saving light.336

This is, in fact, a cultural or religious historical understanding of revelation. Libanio distinguishes and unites the two principles, God’s saving project and human culture. They are distinguished because the *primus motor* is different, but they are “mixed” and “interlaced” in the concrete reality.

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Libanio expresses the same thought in another article written two years later, in different words perhaps, but more strongly. The article is entitled “A vida religiosa no pós-concílio: um modelo concreto na A. Latina”, and Libanio criticizes “charismatic” subjectivity and all kinds of irresponsible “quietism”:

Being is in the last instance (em última instância) linked with the Sacred Mystery [but] it is not experienced in a situation empty of human mediations. The rejection of all human, concrete, historical experience in the eagerness to experience God in his own reality, immediately, was always regarded by the Church as unfitting preposterousness. It is in human experience that God is co-experienced. [...] We can only have access to Him through creatures, whether it be in the order of knowledge (conhecimento), or in the world of experience.337

Libanio explains the “mediated immediacy” of the human encounter with God: because God as “a real person” is encountered, the encounter is immediate. He makes the paradoxical statements: “We only manage to experience God in a concrete historical mediation”, yet “every experience of God has an aspect of immediacy”. Everything is both mediated and immediate because of God’s real presence in the religious sign and his transcendence at the same time.338 Unfortunately, he does not go into detail about the implicit notion of religious language involved in this logic.

Nevertheless, he does explain the mediated quality of this encounter. He takes two metaphysical principles, the law of incarnation and the law of transcendence. God is “co-experienced” by us in human experience. On the historical and concrete level there is an identification of the experience of God and of human mediation “in an inseparable and indivisible unity”. They are not temporarly separate in terms of first and second experiences.339 There is only one

338 Libanio stretches the “mediated” and “immediate” character of the religious experience to the maximum: “Só conseguimos experimentar a Deus numa mediação histórica concreta, isto é, numa realidade humana que, ao mesmo tempo, continua na sua consistência autônoma humana e é também sinal da real presença de Deus que a transcende. Portanto toda experiência de Deus tem um aspecto de ‘mediatez’. Pois experimentamos a Deus, sua real pessoa. Doutro lado, o experimentamos juntamente com outra [sic!] realidade humana: portanto é uma presença ‘mediada’.” Ibid., 43.
339 This is the “chronological” misunderstanding caused by Gutiérrez’s “two steps” approach to which Vuola (1997, 51) refers.
experience: God in the mediation, although this transcendental experience (experiência transcendental) becomes concrete in each historical mediation. Libanio mentions Jesus as an example: it is Jesus’ humanity that is “the only access we have to his divinity”, and in the same way human, historical and concrete realities allow us to experience God. This is how Libanio interprets Karl Rahner for Latin America.

However, he makes what he calls a “metaphysical distinction”: on the level of formality (no nível da formalidade) there is no space for confusion or mixture. The law of transcendence makes God greater than everything else. There is no one and only historical mediation that will exhaust God’s revelation and the founding experience. Here Libanio is not only “continuing and complementing” the article he wrote two years earlier in 1985, but in fact almost contradicting it: the emphasis has shifted from the “immediacy” to the “mediation” of God. This is a problem with Libanio’s transcendental methodology: if our experience of God is

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340 “4. Identidade e diferença entre a experiência fundante e as mediações. [título] Deus é co-experimentado por nós numa experiência humana. Esta afirmação pode ser considerada sob dois ângulos diferentes. No nível existencial histórico e concreto, há uma identificação entre a experiência de Deus e a mediação humana. Faz-se a experiência numa unidade inseparável e indivisível. Não se experimenta Deus e depois uma realidade humana, ou primeiro uma realidade humana e depois Deus, separada e divididamente. A nossa percepção é de uma só realidade: Deus na mediação. Funciona a lei da encarnação. A experiência transcendental de Deus se concretiza em dada mediação histórica. Assim como em Jesus Cristo a sua humanidade é o único acesso que temos à sua divindade, e no excesso do humano de Jesus aparece para nós a sua realidade divina, assim também é nas realidades humanas, históricas, concretas que experimentamos a Deus. A afirmação feita sobre Jesus, ‘humano assim só pode ser Deus mesmo!’ (L. Boff), vale da experiência de Deus. Não é na fuga e pela fuga do humano que encontramos a Deus, mas no profundo do humano está presente a Transcendência de Deus. No nível da formalidade, há uma distinção inconfundível e imesclada entre a Transcendência de Deus e a realidade humana. É a lei da Transcendência. Deus não se reduz a nenhuma mediação humana. Deus é maior que todas elas. Há uma inesgotabilidade da experiência fundante por parte de uma mediação histórica. Com o mesmo vigor que se afirma a identidade concreta, deve-se também salvaguardar a distinção metafísica entre as duas realidades.” A vida religiosa no pós-concilíio, 45. Emphasis in the original.

341 “Este artigo é uma continuação e complementação de: ‘Discernimento vocacional: a experiência fundante’ [...]” Ibid., 40 footnote “#*”.

342 Libanio’s first article (Discernimento vocacional: a experiência fundante. Convergência 20 n. 182 (1985), 195-206) obviously provoked a positive response from some who thought that the politization of the theological training had gone too far. See Netto de Oliveira 1986 and his critiques. Cf. n. 1018. In this article, Libanio wrote of the need to cultivate the “founding experience” in an “explicit” manner: “Em todas essas formas, o fundamental é a continua referência explicita interior ao ‘teológico’ da realidade, isto é, ao aspecto de presença de Deus em determinado ato que fazemos. [...] tal experiência dever ser alimentada dentro das práticas. [...] É necessário que se cultive explicitamente esse aspecto de presença de Deus. Somente assim se alimenta a experiência de Deus. Pois experiência supõe sempre atenção à realidade e não basta viver a realidade como tal, na sua materialidade.” Discernimento vocacional, 201. We may well wonder what made him change his style in 1987 so abruptly. Yet the later article “A vida religiosa no pós-concilíio” (p. 45, cf. n. 340) remains ambiguous because he nevertheless goes back to the “founding experience” – human mediations do not completely hide the divine aspect of the transcendental co-experiencing. In other words, the mediation must not replace the immediacy.
incomplete, can it still be immediate? The idea of “mediated immediacy” also seems to be a literary expedient that could be used to stress either the mystical immediacy of faith or its ethical and contextual mediation.

In *ECNC*, Libanio accepts Paul Tillich’s idea of correlation according to which human existence provides the questions that the revelation answers, and understanding of the revelation also depends on human existence. Tillich also has “two starting points” and a hermeneutic circularity in his methodology:

The divine-human relationship is a correlation also in its cognitive side. Symbolically speaking, God answers man’s questions, and under the impact of God’s answers man asks them. Theology formulates the questions implied in human existence, and theology formulates the answers implied in divine self-manifestation under the guidance of the questions implied in human existence. This is a circle which drives man to a point where question and answer are not separated. [...] In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions.  

Libanio knew of Tillich’s book, witnessed by the fact that he gives a one-page quotation from it in *Eu creio, nós cremos*, taken from the passage on the “actual and final revelation” of *Systematic Theology I*. Here, Tillich suggests that “the word ‘final’ in the phrase ‘final revelation’ means more than last”. He states, and Libanio repeats, that “Christianity often has affirmed, and certainly should affirm, that there is continuous revelation in the history of the church.” Jesus as the Christ is the “point of reference” to all revelation in the history of the church. He is “the decisive, fulfilling, unsurpassable revelation”. Libanio translates the word “fulfilling” as “culminante” [from the Spanish version] which does not convey all the meaning that Tillich intended.

Libanio does see the “final” importance of Jesus Christ:

Until Jesus Christ and the primitive community, people lived the constitutive moment of the revelation. After Jesus Christ, there is no new intervention of God except to “remind of what I (Jesus) have said to you” (John 14:26). The understanding of the revelation is advanced by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the laws of human knowledge. It is an interpretative, dependent moment.

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345 Tillich 1984, 132–133; *ECNC*, 334.
346 “Até Jesus Cristo e a comunidade primitiva, viveu-se o momento constitutivo da Revelação. Após Jesus Cristo, não há nenhuma nova intervenção de Deus a não ser para ‘lembrar o que eu (Jesus) vos disse’ (Jo 14,26). Avança a compreensão da Revelação por obra da ação do Espírito Santo e por meio das leis do conhecimento humano. É o momento interpretativo, dependente.” *ECNC*, 342; cf. *TdR*, 297.
By this he meant that the “constitutive” revelation occurred in the people of Israel, with Jesus and with the church of the apostles. Our post-constitutive task is to understand and to interpret. This is reflected in some earlier texts as well, such as his article “Evangelização: fundamentos teológicos” from 1985:

Jesus is more than an announcer. He is God’s Kingdom itself made a person. [...] Jesus will be the maximum point of the revelatory oscillation (ondulação) of God. The last and eschatological Word of God. The Alpha and Omega of the process of God’s manifestation. [...] Jesus breaks for good the high mountains that kept the waves captive to the fjords in order that they could extend to the untouched lands of Roman paganism, and even transform the waves that have come from Judaism.347

I have now dealt with the question of the revelation as “constitutive” and “final”, to a certain extent. A brief look at articles outside of Libanio’s main theological works on the subject, TdR and ECNC, has shown how he accounts for the religious experience as “immediate” and “mediated” at the same time. He once more followed Rahnerian transcendental logic, the Catholic equivalent of Tillich’s method of correlation. In his Grundkurs des Glaubens, Rahner refers explicitly to the “immediacy to God as mediated immediacy”. It was his intention to show that immediacy to God does not imply that all the “un-divine simply disappears”.348 In this, Rahner and Libanio share the same interest. However, Rahner also argues that the fact of being mediated (Vermitteltheit) and the immediate state (Unmittelbarkeit) are not opposites: one comes to God’s immediate presence through some mediation. This mediation is not something “concrete”, however: it is the human subject himself or herself as a finite spirit. The encounter with God does not mean that the subject is reduced or should disappear; instead, it receives its fulfillment and autonomy. Rahner concurs with Tillich’s idea of theonomy: the final revelation fulfills reason and has a liberating effect.349

There is one crucial difference in style between Libanio and Rahner. Libanio states that “no one and only mediation” will exhaust our experience of God.

349 “Final revelation does not destroy reason; it fulfills reason. It liberates reason from the conflict between heteronomy and autonomy by giving the basis for a new theonomy, and it liberates reason from the conflict between absolutism and relativism by appearing in the form of a concrete absolute.” Tillich 1984, 150; on moral theonomy, see p. 85; on theonomous reason, see p. 155.
Rahner puts it differently: No categorial and finite thing “as such” (als solches) can be a representation of God, for it is precisely the experience of “God as such” (Gott als solcher) that is the meaning of immediacy to God, not the co-experience as primarily human. According to Rahner’s model of the transcendental and the categorial, God is the first cause, or the Grund and Urgrund, of his creatures. He also expresses the idea of God’s freedom in the Scotist sense: one cannot derive any divine information from his creatures. Each single being can only mediate God in its categorial limitedness and finitude up to the point that it truly experiences God in the transcendental way. This means that the “mediated” quality of human experience does not exclude the transcendental experience of the unlimited and immediate. It is not about a historical progressus in infinitum where one could or should keep venerating the creation in order to arrive at God. Instead, created reality brings the human being to the verge of God’s revelation where he or she hopes that God “as such” gives himself to the people and that they in turn are able to accept this divine self-communication.

Immediacy to God is therefore a specific moment. This is in contrast to the historicist notion according to which everything is determined on the basis of the historical process. Libanio’s TdR contains a long passage explaining what this historicist relativism could look like: the mediation of history shows history itself. “History is what determines the reality”, Libanio critically remarks. By way of contrast, he referred to revelation, which “as a reality is greater than human history and transcends it on the ontological level”. This is, indeed, immediacy interpreted in philosophical language.

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350 This is the implicit meaning of the words “Wenn es überhaupt eine Unmittelbarkeit zu Gott gibt – d.h., wenn wir wirklich mit ihm selbst als solchem etwas zu tun haben können [...]” Rahner 1977, 90; n. 348. Why then does Libanio stress the “human” aspect even when it comes to the “immediacy” with God?

351 In Grundkurs, Rahner asks the hypothetical question of whether a person should keep praying “to the world” in a pagan manner. It would also be the wrong way to understand God as the Urgrund if one “would venerate nature as the Divinity” (Rahner 1977, 92). It was an early insight that religion was about God who was “world-transcending (weltüberlegen), absolute, personal, true and living” (Rahner 1941, 216).

352 Libanio illustrates the problem with the idealist-type expression of “mediations”. There is no longer “immediacy”, only history as “a mediated mediation and a mediating state of being mediated”: “A história, numa expressão sofisticada de W. Schulz, é um mediatizar mediatizado e um ser mediatizado mediatizante (vermitteltes Vermitteln und vermittelndes Vermitteltsein). Conhece-se a realidade pela mediação da história (mediatizar), que, por sua vez, é conhecida na realidade (mediatizada). Ao ser conhecida (ser mediatizada), a história possibilita conhecer a realidade (mediatizante). A realidade é determinada a partir da história.” TdR, 285–286.

353 TdR, 288.
Libanio makes a distinction between Leonardo Boff’s concept of revelation and his own. He mentions this in both *TdR* and *ECNC*, in practically the same words, and both times in the third person. According to L. Boff, God’s transcendent word has its categorial objectivation in the Bible. This could be compared to “transcendent inspiration”, which has been categorized as literal inspiration. God is thus “the author of the impulse which leads a human being to re-act literally to this initiative of God”. Yet the human response is full of “fragility and also of openness” in reaction to this transcendent proposal. Libanio has one reservation, however. Whereas Leonardo Boff argues that the transcendental revelation knows no limits, Libanio recollects that, according to Karl Rahner, revelation only happens within the ecclesial community.

Vítor Galdino Feller’s extensive study on revelation in liberation theology, *O Deus da revelação* (1988), is worth quoting. It also deals with Libanio’s theology, which makes it relevant to this study. Feller makes the general remark that there are “certain omissions and lacks” in liberation theology. In other words, his study is rather critical. He observes that there are two kinds of religious logic to be found in liberation theology, Platonic-Augustinian and Aristotelic-Thomist. The former represents an encounter with God through “illumination and the interior of the soul”, as “unconditional and immediate certainty” (*certeza incondicionada e imediata*). The latter is the other way round: it goes “from the finite to the infinite” and perceives God as “mediate certainty” (*certeza mediata*), starting from the human being and making use of the human sciences. The first notion corresponds

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354 *TdR*, 337; *ECNC*, 358.
355 “Posição de L. Boff. [título] Interpreta a inspiração no horizonte da Palavra transcendente de Deus que encontra na Escritura uma objetivação categorial. Essa palavra transcendente é interpretada como inspiração transcendente que se categorializa na inspiração literária. Deus é o autor do impulso que leva o homem a re-agir literariamente diante dessa iniciativa de Deus. O homem responde, em sua fragilidade e também abertura, a essa proposta transcendental de Deus, traduzindo-a em escritos. Sagrados, porque encontram sua origem nessa ação de Deus. Humanos, porque são tematizações feitas por seres humanos, dentro das condições históricas. Rahner vê o fenômeno no interior da comunidade eclesial, enquanto L. Boff o encara no horizonte da história da humanidade, que é idêntica à história da salvação em sua facticidade.” *ECNC*, 358 (=*TdR*, 337). First emphasis in the original; second emphasis added.
356 “Contudo, uma análise da linguagem teológico-libertadora sobre Deus há de revelar certas omissões e deficiências que precisam ser cobertas ou corrigidas, se se quiser que a teologia da libertação continue a ser uma reflexão séria sobre o diálogo Deus-homem no continente latino-americano [...]” Feller 1988, 302.
to the popular and intuitive God who is “greater than all”, whereas according to the second, God gives “fullness and meaning” to all transformative struggle.357

Feller’s conclusion is interesting. He claims that liberation theology, even if it shows awareness of both kinds of theological logic, only emphasizes the Thomist and “mediated” aspect. These mediations are so prevalent that all direct talk about God, and about God the Father in particular, is nothing but “rare jewels, scattered here and there”. There is more emphasis on the “historical combat for life and freedom”. This is the reason why liberation theology has been criticized for being too sociological, anthropological, and political.358 As he remarks, all “theology” should treat precisely the question of God [Theos]. The mystery of God is “the inner condition of the theologizing itself” and the “beginning and end of all liberating praxis”.359 Thus Feller questions the idea of an unspecified principle of making theology of everything, or that “everything is theologizable”. Instead, he wants to return to the principles of the seventh question of the first article of Summa.

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357 “Não se pode negar que existe na teologia da libertação uma certa tendência platônico-agostiniana, pela qual Deus é percebido como iluminação, no íntimo da alma, com certeza incondicionada e imediata. A teologia da libertação não poderia fugir a essa via do conhecimento de Deus, porque sua reflexão tem como ponto de partida a práxis da fé do homem latino-americano, vivida no contexto de uma religiosidade popular, na qual Deus é intuitado e pensado como maior e anterior a tudo. Por outro lado, a via aristotélico-tomista, que parte do finito para o infinito e percebe a Deus com certeza mediata, também tem lugar na teologia da libertação, à medida que esta elabora seu discurso sobre Deus partindo do homem e do contexto, pela mediação das ciências humanas, históricas e sociais. Deus aí aparece como aquele que plenifica e dá sentido a toda luta pela transformação da realidade.” Feller 1988, 299.

358 “Partindo da fé cristã e de sua práxis na história, a teologia da libertação tem por objeto a ação de Deus na história. Segundo ela, Deus se revela e é experimentado presente no combate histórico do homem pela vida, pela liberdade. Uma primeira dificuldade em aceitar e usar essa chave está no fato de que os próprios teólogos da América Latina, por estarem empenhados com os frutos que devem surgir da fé em Deus, se esquecem talvez de explicitar a origem mesma e o fim de toda sua preocupação com o homem pobre da América Latina. Os argumentos aduzidos nesta obra sobre a reflexão libertadora acerca de Deus, em particular de Deus Pai, não são senão jóias raras, dispersas aqui e acolá, no meio de tantas considerações que nem sempre os têm como centro de reflexão.” Feller 1988, 303–304.

359 “Com efeito, se por teo-logia se entende o discurso sistemático do crente sobre as razões de sua fé, vale dizer, sobre Deus, como razão primeira e última do seu ato de crer, não há por que não afrontar a discussão do que se diz concretamente sobre Deus quando se intenta compreender a teologia da libertação. Querer entendê-la somente a partir de análises sociais e políticas ou mesmo em base às suas contribuições à história e ao método da teologia e à evangelização do continente não é senão perambular pela margem do caminho, em meio ainda a tantos escolhos que, embora importantes, impedem a visão do essencial. O que se pretende afirmar, aqui, é que, na teologia da libertação, o essencial é Deus. O fato de o seu discurso sistemático sobre Deus ser apenas incipiente, posterior ao discurso sobre o homem, a Igreja, Jesus Cristo, não impede esta asserção. O mistério de Deus, como condição interna do próprio teologizar e como princípio e fim de toda práxis libertadora, seja em sua globalidade, seja nos diversos campos em que ela trabalha.” Feller 1988, 303. Emphasis added. Feller’s words clearly refer to the “principium et finem” of S. Th. I a.1.q.7, cf. n. 103.
Feller gives an insightful assessment of liberation theology: it is a historical kind of analogy of being, *analogia entis*. It does not consider God “statically and aesthetically but in the dynamics and dialectics of history”. Thus it seems to unite Thomism and Hegelian idealism. It is possible to talk about God in an analogical manner, yet not as a “pyramid” but as an “abyss”, because he is hidden in the negativity of history. It is only by being involved in the struggle of the poor that one can capture the meaning of this God-talk. In this struggle, the negative is turned into the positive, and liberation comes from the “iconoclastic labor on the cross of Christ”.360

There is a movement in the other direction, too. In order for liberation theology to reveal what these “conducts and actions of God in history” are, it once more has to make good use of realistic thinking which this time takes place through the social sciences. V. G. Feller employs Clodovis Boff’s term of socio-analytical mediation, concluding as follows:

> If revelation takes place in history and if history “means the understanding and transformation of the historical reality”, then revelation takes place in the liberating word and action. Therefore, liberation theology calls for socio-analytical mediation. It interrogates the phenomenon of oppression, its causes and its roots.361

According to Feller, the concept of revelation in liberation theology is religious-historical and liberal. He cites Leonardo Boff’s idea that its “main content is not the same for all generations”.362 Religious-historical minimalism is

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360 “[... ] é na nova conduta da práxis de libertação que se permite encontrar a transparência do Deus vivo e verdadeiro. Interessa, pois, à teologia da libertação encontrar por trás da conduta libertadora dos cristãos a mesma conduta libertadora de Deus. [...] Um Deus que ama, liberta, sofre, opta pelos pobres e neles se esconde, numa *analogia entis* que não será compreendida estática e esteticamente, mas na dinâmica e na dialética da história e, além disso, com a capacidade de transformar o negativo em positivo, e de extrair das malhas de injustiça o mundo de Deus na terra dos homens. O vazio-plenitude é o vértice da revelação de Deus. Um vértice que não é piramidal, mas abissal, porque se encontra nas profundezaes mais misteriosas das ambigüidades do homem e da história, quais agente e meio chamados à penetração no mistério do ser e do agir de Deus. Esse vértice único, desvelado pelo labor iconoclástico na cruz de Cristo, pode ser captado, na atualidade da história da América Latina e do mundo, só por quem se deixa envolver pela força dos pobres, pelo poder de seu sofrimento e pela sua consciência de libertação.” Feller 1988, 83–84. The cross is important since God is encountered in the “reverse” and the “hiding place” of history (p. 55 n. 43: no reverso, no esconderijo da história).


362 “[...] a teologia da libertação se interessa em descobrir o principal da revelação para nós hoje, sabendo que ‘este principal não é igual para todas as gerações’.” Feller 1988, 55. Cit. from L. Boff,
evident in the fact that the continuity of the Old and New Testament is “a succession of religious ideologies”, and the only permanent thing is the relationship between God and the oppressed. This means the transposition of a religious historical idea to the socio-political language.\footnote{O caminhar da Igreja com os oprimidos. Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1981, 218. [The 1st edition was published by Codecri, the 2nd and 3rd by Vozes. The editions are not fully identical.]

Libanio’s fellow Jesuit and professor of philosophy Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz criticized historical-theological hermeneutics in his seminal article in Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira from 1972. He claimed that there could be no unified picture of the modern world, and more specifically, that there could be no image of history as such because all science in its analyticalness is always a simplification. When lived history is made into interpreted history, \textit{Geschichte} into \textit{Historie}, the question of what is included and what is excluded in this account of \textit{Historie} remains. No total view will suit the scientific procedure, Vaz sceptically concludes.

Quoting M. Certeau, Vaz suggests that all total opinions verge on “ideologies and myths”. History itself is – again in Certeau’s words – “a substitutive myth of non-religious society”. He found the interpretation of history in the documents of Vatican II problematic. Could there be any direct parallel between the Biblical idea of world peace and today’s world, and could it be justified by political or social science? The main problem is the question of language. Biblical language signified transcendence, whereas modern language is a sign of immanence. In the former, “the Lord says”, and in the latter, it is human language in a world turned anthropocentric.\footnote{Vaz 1986, 217–218.} Libanio was familiar with the article and dealt with it in Vaz’s Festschrift in 1982.\footnote{See Libanio’s article \textit{Sinais dos tempos, quais?} (1982), 276–279.} He also quoted it at length in \textit{TdL}.\footnote{\textit{TdL}, 223–227.}

Libanio does not subscribe to the sceptical philosophy of history, and his theology is rather built on the duality of God’s freedom and human situatedness.
He claims in *Teologia da revelação* that history is not non-theological but rather the stage on which God’s activity takes place in the background of human action:

> Revelation is born out of God’s free and gratuitous act (*livre e gratuito*). He wishes to communicate himself and his salvific plan to a human being who is situated in history. History is the construction of man who is outlining his destiny. Because God’s revelation is made to a human being in history, it is linked with history. Because human historical thinking cannot, whether it knows it or not, disassociate itself completely from its condition of being a partner of the divine revelation, it will always have something to tell him or her. [...] Before anything existed, God’s project to reveal himself in his Son was already in his mind and presided over everything that was created. * History cannot be understood in its ontological reality without this first word of God, this a-thematical revelation. Revelation, as a spoken and written word, comes later to make the ontological marks of God’s project explicit. They are engraved in all realities. Nevertheless, human intelligence, in the order of knowledge, first gets to know human history. Within it, it discovers God’s revelation, whether in that which signifies the constitutive aspect of human history or in its manifestation in time.367

Libanio here takes the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of revelation to mean that we can understand history (*entender a história*) on the basis of the revelation. This is a hermeneutic, historical dialectic. He criticizes secularist historicism according to which there cannot be any “absolute or eschatological” event that could determine history from the outside.368 This would be positivism. The solution he proposes lies in epistemological optimism: we can make explicit (*explicitar*) whatever “ontological marks of God’s project” there are. The problem with this text is precisely what Vaz had shown: how to combine modern historical consciousness and the classical idea of the world as the stage of God’s action.

Libanio opposes historical scepticism, but he also presents a metaphysical type of eschatological reserve. God’s reality surpasses human reality “on the ontological level” (*no nível ontológico*).369 At its core, human history is marked by God’s revelation because God is not only the Creator of the world, but he also...


368 Libanio criticizes purely intra-historical thinking as well: “A revelação corrige um conceito de história que pretende possuir em si mesma toda a sua inteligibilidade e refugia qualquer evento que a transcendê como impossibilidade histórica. Só merece a credibilidade histórica o que for inteligível, aceitável, constatável no vasto conjunto da história geral humana. Todos os eventos gozam de estrita temporalidade, caducidade, in-transcendência. Não há evento absoluto possível, escatológico, que supere a pura inteligibilidade intrínseca histórica e a determine. A história é regida e determinada unicamente por leis rígidas que não permitem nenhuma automanifestação transcendentê. Esta seria relegada ao mundo do mito, da projeção, da alienação.” *TdR*, 288. This is, in fact, a pro-Hegelian argument: one can find traces of the Absolute in history.

continuously communicates himself. On this ontological basis it is natural to argue that God’s reality is also superior in the epistemic sense. This is the very meeting point of the philosophy of consciousness and Thomism, the encounter of idealism and realism:

Revelation also surpasses history on the level of knowledge (no nível de conhecimento). History is governed by the unique and exclusive possibilities of human reason. Divine revelation awakens the human being to the presence and action of God, which without this free touch by God would never be perceived. Revelation, therefore, as the source of truth, signification and norms of action surpasses the interpretative schemas that humans have created throughout history, even if it can only be learned as it is mediated by them.370

Libanio distinguishes the two “levels” of being and knowing. He argued in *TdL* that the starting point of theology was both praxis and the revelation of God, but in a different sense: praxis was the starting point in the epistemological sense, and revelation in the ontological sense.371 Factual history needs to be interpreted and humanly considered. This leads necessarily from the facts to the ethical and philosophical domain:

The liberation of the poor is, first of all, a historical fact (um fato histórico) and as such it falls under the analysis of the historical and social sciences. But it is at the same time a fact that affects the human being as a human being and has a radical human dimension. It therefore falls under the analysis of ethics and philosophy. There is no ontological distinction between these two dimensions, only an epistemological one.372

Those who take a positivist and scientific look at history stop short of considering the ethical and theological implications of what they observe. Libanio adopted a critical tone in *TdR* five years later:

[For them] There only exists that which an analytical observer can verify, detect and observe in his or her empirical reality. God cannot be detected or verified as an object of science. In historical action, God’s footprints would never be found in principle, *a priori*.373

Libanio puts the emphasis on the theological interpretation of history, but history is not something theologically neutral. It is linked with salvation history,

370 *TdR*, 289.
371 *TdL*, 176. See n. 705.
372 *TdL*, 176.
and with the person, the message and the action of Jesus.\textsuperscript{374} Yet in some sense the word “fact” is a key to his thinking. The reason why some particular fact can reveal the universal is in the universal – in God.\textsuperscript{375}

At the end of \textit{TdR} he turns to the specific Latin American theology of revelation. He does not mention the “facts”, but implies the factual aspect as he refers to the signs of the times, this time with the very concrete verb “capture” (\textit{captar}). It is the salvific meaning that is “captured” from these signs, and this helps to widen (\textit{ampliar}) understanding of the revelation.\textsuperscript{376} There is more than that: the positive aspect [of liberation theology] seeks the theological places from which “the revelation of true God can be captured”.\textsuperscript{377} These theological places are found where the poor person experiences God. Libanio quotes Feller’s dissertation.\textsuperscript{378}

There is some ambiguity as to what the formula “in the light of the revelation” signifies. It could have two meanings: general historical hermeneutics that is opened up by the “key” that the revelation gives, or biblical hermeneutics that maintains the polarity between the Bible and the world in a theological sense. Clodovis Boff pointed to this ambiguity in his \textit{Teoria do método teológico} (1998), and supported distinctly biblical hermeneutics: “God’s word is the source, not the means of theology.”\textsuperscript{379} This ambiguity gives reason to study Libanio’s christology and the “maximal” concept of revelation, which are addressed in the two following sections.

\textsuperscript{374} “Todos os fatos e mensagens da história da revelação e da salvação estão ligados ao evento, pessoa, mensagem e prática de Jesus.” \textit{TdR}, 297.

\textsuperscript{375} “A razão de um fato particular ter alcance universal só pode estar em Deus.” \textit{TdR}, 299. We could ask, however, if this is a vicious circle: God in his universality is the reason that something has universal relevance. Namely, if it is recognized that creation and providence are not self-evident, how can a historical-theological argument be made?

\textsuperscript{376} “A teologia da libertação faz uma leitura dos sinais dos tempos mais importantes para o continente latino-americano, ao buscar captar-lhes o sentido salvífico e ao ampliar também a intelecção da revelação.” \textit{TdR}, 440.

\textsuperscript{377} “A face positiva pretende estabelecer lugares teológicos a partir dos quais se possa captar a revelação do verdadeiro Deus.” \textit{TdR}, 443.

\textsuperscript{378} “Estes três lugares que, ao final, se concentram num só, o pobre e sua experiência de Deus [...]” \textit{TdR}, 443. Cit. from Feller 1988, 25.

\textsuperscript{379} “Palavra de Deus: fonte e não meio da teologia.” C. Boff 1998, 207. This is, naturally, C. Boff’s self-criticism: in his dissertation he promoted a general, social hermeneutics according to which the Christian revelation was but an interpreting horizon.
3.5. Jesus and Christ, the particular and the universal revelation

Libanio’s article on Jesus Christ of 1972, subsequently published in *EPF*, demonstrates the tensions in his christology. There is both a Christo-centric focus on the “abyss” between God and man, and an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus that echoes Leonardo Boff’s highly humanist approach. There is also some ambiguity between the idea of permanent revelation and Jesus Christ as its culmination.

Libanio began the article with an idea that was in complete conformity with the ongoing historical character of the revelation. The passage reveals the circular logic of the universal and the particular that permeates his production:

God is the eternal revealer. All human structures, in spite of their ambiguity, reveal God. There is a permanent revelation. But alongside all this, Christianity presents itself as the end, the fullness (plenitude) of all revelation, the point of understanding (ponto-intelecção) of all human reality in depth, the key to understanding human history, all of which is the history of salvation and condemnation.380

Thus it would seem that Christianity is an Archimedic point in the world of religious traditions. This was a notion Libanio reiterated in his later texts, as shown in the preceding section. However, he goes on to say that the Old Testament God is holy and that there is a huge difference between God in the “flames of his divinity” and the weak human being. This is an “unbridgeable gap” (abismo intransponível).381 Yet the God of the Old Testament is not only holy and inaccessible: the people of Israel also knew God’s loving presence, and the experiences of election and salvation.382

Jesus came as God’s “maximal revelation” to show that it was no longer the flames, rays, earthquakes, sinking mountains and victories in war, nor rites and

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380 Creio em Jesus Cristo. *Convergência* 5 n. 45 (1972), 9-20, 10. Libanio refers here to an article by Heinrich Fries to defend the absolute and culminating nature of Christianity (Fries 1957, 72-73), but he differs from Fries in giving all history a saving quality. In fact, speaking of “salvation and condemnation history” he repeats what his philosophical Jesuit mentor and the grand old man of Brazilian post-war philosophy of religion, Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, had said in in 1961, the crazy year of Brazilian student revolt: “A subjetividade é criadora como liberdade ética e é, portanto, no plano mais profundo das opções concretas que a verdadeira ambigüidade da história se manifesta: ela torna-se para a liberdade o terreno da salvação e da perda.” Vaz 1968, 265 [from the final paragraph of his well-known article “Cristianismo e consciência histórica II”].

381 Creio em Jesus Cristo, 11.

382 Ibid., 12.
sacrifices, that marked his presence. He was “God made human”\(^\text{383}\). Of particular significance here is the idea that “so human can only God be”, in Leonardo Boff’s classic words\(^\text{384}\). Jesus reveals God in his humanity:

> Jesus reveals a strange God. God is not known in the empty and cold speculation at the office. He is not understood in the deductive reasoning of the human mind. Who God is can only be answered by looking at and by learning from Jesus the human being. In him we can slowly form our idea of God\(^\text{385}\).

Libanio stresses two things about this encounter with Jesus. It decides people’s destiny, since they are divided between God and the prince of this world, but he also emphasizes the humanity of Jesus: “The human [aspect] of Christ is the only way we may come to God.”\(^\text{386}\) He mentions Jesus’ obedience, the way he loved and let himself be loved, and the way he answered the ultimate question of love.\(^\text{387}\) Last but not least, he argues that “Jesus Christ, being God, reveals the human being”.\(^\text{388}\) He sets out in his creed on the last page:

> I do not believe in a mythical god who appeared in a human form in order to satisfy human curiosity and anxieties.
> I believe in the most human of humans who in this excessive humanity (nesse excesso de humano) reveals God to me.
> I believe in him who was-only-for-the-others and who reveals God to me in this total self-commitment. [...] I finally believe in him who, being God, revealed to myself my own reality of a human being. He shows to me the meaning of my anxieties. He truly is the logos of my life, because He is the Logos who was made into our life, our history.
> Believing in Jesus Christ is believing in God and believing in the human being, because He is God and a human being. Believing in Jesus is being-hope, is having-hope (é ser-esperança, é ter-esperança), because where the transcendent and the historical meet each other, there is the place for hope. Without the historical there is no hope, because everything is static. Without the transcendent, there is no hope, because everything is fleeting and transitory. But where the two meet one another in the person of Jesus Christ, there is a privileged place of hope.\(^\text{389}\)

Libanio does not suggest that Christ came because of the fall of man. In fact, he uses the Scotist argument: the incarnation preceded the very existence of the

\(\text{383}\) “No momento em que nos encontramos com Jesus Cristo, Deus feito homem, podemos começar a compreender esse mistério do homem.” Ibid., 18, emphasis added.


\(\text{385}\) Ibid., 13.

\(\text{386}\) Ibid., 14.

\(\text{387}\) Ibid., 14–16.

\(\text{388}\) Ibid., 17.

\(\text{389}\) Ibid., 19.
human being since everything was created in Christ, through Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:16 RSV). In any case, he does not attach much importance to the question of sin. He does mention the fact that Jesus forgave the adulterous woman (John 8), yet he seems to be more occupied with the existential questions of modern times, such as the “questionability of what it means to love”.

The question of being saved from “sin” does not appear in the later article in EPF that expressly deals with salvation, either. Salvation is a never-ending process. Jesus Christ is the example of perfect and exemplary love. Man overcomes the frenzy to possess and the “mercantilistic” mind that makes him give in order to receive (do ut des). According to Libanio, Jesus teaches us to “give in order to give”, which we do gratuitously. He repeats many times that “only faith saves” and “only love saves”, but the role of faith is to free the person’s love from egoism. Yet, it is important to receive love in order to be able to give it. He refers to modern psychology and to the biblical idea that God loved us first (1 John 4:10).

It was logical to start this section on christology with Libanio’s early texts about Jesus Christ and salvation. How did he build his arguments? Alongside these rather existential ideas, he also makes a scholastic distinction between matter and form, between ontology and logic. What exists as essentia is distinguished from

390 “A encarnação precedeu o próprio existir do homem. Pois foi no Cristo, que o homem foi criado. Para ele e por ele. [Col. 1, 16].” Ibid., 11. However, Libanio seemed to take a moderate position that was neither Thomist or Scotist, in QCCA (2004). He nevertheless quotes St. Thomas, according to whom, he says, the Son of God “could have incarnated, even if sin had not existed (teria podido, mesmo não existindo o pecado, ter-se encarnado)”. QCCA, 79. Would this argument, if it had existed before, not have seriously undermined the christological hermeneutics of history and the ontologically certain “Christic structures”? Hypothetically, if man had not sinned, “incarnatory philosophy” would have been impossible as a starting point.
391 Creio em Jesus Cristo, 15.
392 “O nosso amor para um outro homem contém uma terrível dúvida radical, que atinge a sua raiz. Esta última questionabilidade do sentido de amar é vencida pela realidade concreta da vida de Jesus. [...] Nele aprendemos o segredo e o mistério do amor humano [...]” Ibid., 16.
394 “Por contraste percebemos a impureza e incompletude de nosso amor. Jesus Cristo vive o amor na sua dupla dimensão, numa perfeição total e exemplar.” Ibid., 15.
395 Libanio sought a balance between the magical giving and the agape-type of giving in rather Augustinian terms: “Cristo nos ensina que a raiz do amor é dar. O querer possuir contaminia o amor, sobretudo quando sofre da avidez manipuladora do espírito mercantilista. ‘Do ut des.’ Dou para que me dês. Aí está o fundamento do negócio, mas não do amor. Dou para dar, na sua terrível gratuidade.” Ibid., 17.
396 Libanio refers to “agape and eros” in the words of A. Nygren, yet without mentioning him by name. Ibid., 18.
397 “Somos amados em primeiro lugar por Deus. Precisamente porque Deus nos amou primeiro (1 Jo 4, 10), podemos amar nosso irmão.” Ibid., 18.
our form of knowing. This is neo-scholasticism in Maritainian terms, and is supported in his recent texts:

Human intelligence tends to be reassured as it owns its object. However, the divine Mystery does not let himself be owned. He is the fundament of all truth, present in all knowledge, but he transcends the objectivation of any knowledge. [...] The divine Mystery is the first intelligible being in the ontological order, but not in the logical order. He founds all logic, without being captured totally by it, by human reason.398

Here lies the fundamental problem of the “intelligible” (=gnoseological) being part of God’s ontological being but yet not knowable. How can something that is intelligible before anything else still remain unknown? We are faced with a form of metaphysical logic according to which our sense perception does not limit our concepts, and we can conceptualize something that we only implicitly know. As in the 1972 article on christology, this opens the door to hermeneutic thinking: Jesus Christ becomes the “key” that people did not possess before:

In the Old Testament, the Alliance became the hermeneutic key to everything that had come before and would come after it in the history of the people of Israel. In the phase of the realization, Jesus Christ turns into the hermeneutic key to everything that came before him (in the inverse order: people-rest – people in totality – Moses/Alliance – Exodus – Abraham – Noah – creation) and everything that will come later (the time of the Church and the final eschatology). The Revelation does not occur in simple linearity, but along some fundamental moments that are important and decisive, and which constitute the interpretative key of every other event of human history, whether prior, simultaneous, or posterior to these explicit moments of the history of salvation and of Revelation.399

This passage, of course, does not say anything surprising. It is clear that in the Old Testament the foundational moments and events were different and that the “key” to everything that is seen in the New Covenant is Jesus Christ. Libanio does not state that the Revelation is “continuous” [after Christ], but neither does he state when or whether it ended. In fact, he continues in the next paragraph to suggest that apart from Jesus Christ, “there will be no other foundational (fundante) moment of the Revelation” and that “everything will have to be

398 “A inteligência humana tende a se tranquiliizar possuindo seu objeto. Ora, o Mistério divino não se deixa possuir. É o fundamento de toda verdade, presente em todo conhecimento, mas transcende a objetivação de qualquer conhecimento. [...] O Mistério divino é o primeiro inteligível na ordem ontológica, e não na ordem lógica. Ele funda toda a lógica, sem poder ser captado totalmente por ela, pela razão humana.” ECNC, 210.
399 ECNC, 348; TdR, 321. This text is literally the same in both books. Cf. n. 380 concerning Christianity (and Christ) as the vantage point of interpreting all of human history.
understood in his light”. He refers to Hebr. 13:8, which stresses that Jesus Christ is the same “yesterday, today, and for ever”.400

This leads Libanio to the conclusion in Chapter 16 in ECNC:

Conclusion.
God’s revelation occurred in history, and he continues to act in history until today. It is in the light of the constitutive Revelation, which has arrived to its fullness in Jesus Christ, that one can discern this action (agir) of God in the present time. And also the future in its most important reality as the victory over death receives definitive light from this revelation.401

Libanio’s system is once more based on the distinction between the ontological and the epistemological. In a scholastic manner, he explains God’s continuous activity in history as “salvation” and the manifestation of this salvation as “revelation”. Revelation “connotes the aspect of the salvific realization (its communication)”, whereas salvation “connotes the revelation which manifests that God saves us and how he does it”.402 He states clearly: “History is the place of this encounter of revealing and saving love.”403

He seeks to explain the distinction between salvation and revelation, between the ontological and epistemological aspects of God’s action, with the Dei Verbum document of the Second Vatican Council and the “words and deeds” (gestis verbisque) expression contained in it: God’s word may come before the deed, simultaneously or afterward.404 More importantly, it is the meaning of “universal salvation” and “particular salvation” that attracts our attention. Libanio says in a Rahnerian manner that every free human act “knits the universal history of salvation”, and “a word of God unfailingly interprets history in the salvific

400 “A pretensão da Revelação em Jesus Cristo é de que já não haverá outro momento fundante da Revelação que leve a uma interpretação radicalmente nova em relação à já dada nele e por ele. Tudo o que virá até a consumação dos tempos, no intervalo da história humana, não poderá superar a Revelação em Jesus Cristo, mas deverá ser entendido à luz dele. ‘Jesus Cristo é o mesmo, ontem e hoje; ele o será para a eternidade’ (Hb 13,8).” ECNC, 348; TdR, 321. This text is literally the same in both books.
401 “Conclusão [título]. A Revelação de Deus se deu na história, e até hoje ele continua agindo nessa história. É à luz da Revelação constitutiva, chegada à plenitude em Jesus Cristo, que se pode ir discernindo esse agir de Deus no presente. E também o futuro em sua realidade mais importante de vitória sobre a morte recebe dessa Revelação luzes definitivas.” ECNC, 349.
402 “Revelação: denota o aspecto de manifestação de Deus, conota o aspecto de realização salvífica (dessa comunicação). Salvação: denota a atuação salvadora de Deus, conota a Revelação que nos manifesta que Deus nos salva e de que forma o faz.” ECNC, 338.
403 “A história é o lugar desse encontro de amor revelador e salvífico.” ECNC, 338.
404 TdR, 386. Libanio also states that the proportion may differ: there can be “much word, or much deed” (ora muita palavra, ora muita obra). The expression “with words and deeds (gestis verbisque)” is used in DV, 4,14.
meaning”. He seems to follow the ideas of Adolf Darlap from the mid-1960’s (“the conciliar years”), according to which general salvation history is ontologically more important than special salvation history. The foundational moment in Christ has the primacy, as we have seen. Paradoxically, the emphasis is now on the “universal” revelation of which Jesus is [only] a particular manifestation:

The theological fundament of the particularity of the Revelation is in the freedom of God’s love. He can (and he is free for that) choose and has in fact chosen some particulars – persons, facts, a people, places, time, etc. – and to those he wanted to reveal himself in a privileged way. His intermediaries were particular, including Jesus. (Seus intermediários foram particulares, inclusive Jesus.) Revelation is universal because it was destined and because it has meaning (significado) for all humanity. The particular ones were chosen for the good and the salvation of this humanity. All revelation by God, in any moment of history, has been universal because of the universal salvific intention of God (2 Tim. 2:4).

Libanio makes the distinction between “universal revelation” and “particular revelation”, whereas Tillich in his Systematic Theology referred to “final revelation” as opposed to the particular revelation. In Libanio’s text, the word “particular” means something else: in referring to Jesus as a “particular” intermediary of God, he wanted to stress his historic and in this sense “categorial” meaning. This is possible because “universal” is the counterpart of not only particular, but also of categorial. He attempted to clarify the point by suggesting that the particularity implied that Jesus (and the other intermediaries) lived in a

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405 “Uma palavra de Deus interpreta sem equivocos a história no sentido salvífico.” ECNC, 341.
406 Darlap (1965, 57) made an idealistic distinction in his famous long article in Mysterium Salutis: “Die allgemeine Heils- und Offenbarungsgeschichte ist ja, qualitativ und ontologisch gesehen, das Entscheidendere, Heilsbegründerndere und Heilsnotwendigere als die besondere Heilsgeschichte, wenn jene auch immer auf diese aufgerichtet ist und nur von dieser her zu sich selbst kommt.” Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz makes some highly critical remarks in his excursus on Darlap. Darlap’s salvation historical thinking is based on the Catholic supernatural existential and the idea that history is the “nature” that grace always comes to complement so that one can speak of a ‘history of grace’, Gnadengeschichte. The core of the problem is the teleological determinism arising from causa finalis thinking: “Eine Geschichte, die realontologisch heilshaft und gnadenhaft durchwirkt und getragen ist, ist zugleich teleologisch festgestellt, insofern als Element des Heils auch Ziel des Prozesses sein muss und damit das Gefüße der Geschichte letztlich determiniert.” Müller-Fahrenholz 1974, 195. Müller-Fahrenholz calls Darlap’s concept of salvation history an “apocalyptic historical gnosis” and a “speculation” based on the traditional theology of grace, existential ontology, and the thoughts of Hegel and Teilhard. Hegelian speculation is beyond all criticism (p. 199): “[...] verständlich wird hier lediglich, dass solche apokalyptische Geschichtsgnosis in einer Spekulation endet, die sich jeder Kritik enthebt.” Vaz (1986, 198) criticized Darlap’s idea that one could somehow use salvation history to “explore” profane history and to “decipher” its signs in a theological way.
407 ECNC, 342; almost identical in TdR, 298.
408 On Tillich’s idea of the final and universal revelation, cf. n. 423.
certain place, and spoke a certain language. However, he appears much more idealistic here than elsewhere in TdR. He argues on the one hand that revelation is “historical and sacramental, by God’s positive action”, and on the other that Jesus Christ is “the substantial word that the Father said”. Here Jesus as “substantial” is contrasted with the “historical”, and the thinking is different from the “every intermediary was particular [=historical]” logic. This begs the question of whether Jesus is historical and particular, or trans-historical and substantial.

The way out of the dialectic is to formally distinguish between **historical Jesus** and **trans-historical Christ**. In TdR, Jesus is portrayed as God’s categorial, historical revelation and as Christ who is spiritually present. Libanio in fact makes a distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of glory: they are the same person but the Christ of glory is a larger concept. The “conditions” for understanding Christ exist in other religions as well. This is an inclusivistic spirit-christology:

3. Conclusion

In the Christian revelation, all the revelation was given, but not all of it was said. The central truth of the New Testament remains the absolute point of reference for the Christian.

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

The Christian revelation, as the thematization guarded and transmitted by Christian churches, does not exhaust this “name given to people”. The Jesus and the glorious Christ were given to us, one and the same person, but not in the same conditions. The historical Jesus spoke, preached and left behind himself the revealing traces (rastos) of the Scripture, which have been conserved by the Christian churches. The Christ of glory continues active in these churches, but also in the other religions and the secular realities. These religions and secular realities also reveal more of the Christ than that which has been thematized and understood by the Christian churches, even if they do not make explicit reference to him. This working of the Christ-Pneuma in the world, in history and in all religions is in charge of the elements of the true revelation, of the absolute truth and the salvific mediation of such realities.

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409 In TdR, 298, Libanio explains the particularity of Jesus and others: “Falavam uma língua, tinham uma cultura, viviam em determinado momento, habitavam certa região. As suas mensagens tinham sempre uma ‘particularidade’ desses condicionamentos pessoais, históricos, culturais.”

410 “O caráter da revelação é histórico, sacramental, pela criação e pela ação positiva de Deus. Jesus Cristo é a Palavra substancial que o Pai diz e pelo qual ele fez toda criação e que o Espírito Santo aprofunda no coração.” TdR, 386. These two clauses are in two subsequent, separate paragraphs. This would give the misconception that God’s “positive action” was not christological, but it is corrected in the next paragraph. However, the words “historical” and “substantial” do not mean the same thing, and this will inevitably lead to a “substantialist” christological logic that is different from the “every intermediary was particular” (p. 342) logic.

411 TdR, 281–282. The “o tematizado e entendido” should, in my view, be “é tematizado e entendido”, otherwise the earthly realities would objectively (and not only historically) reveal more of Christ than the churches. The formulation as it is could cause a misunderstanding. Libanio continues boldly by stating (p. 282) that indigenous religions, Afro-Brazilian cults and the defense of human rights contain “concrete mediations of salvation”.
Libanio makes a point that is reminiscent of the spiritual christology of Leonardo Boff over the years. A couple of years later Leonardo Boff stated in his famous book on ecology that “the Christ and the Spirit are cosmic realities that slowly keep emerging until they are personalized in Jesus of Nazareth and in Mary”. He openly defends a cosmic religion and revelation. Libanio does not advocate a completely spiritualist christology because historical Jesus is the “point of reference”. There is, however, the tension between the idea that “everything was given” in historical revelation [that is, in Jesus, in the Bible], but nevertheless “secular realities reveal more of Christ than that which is thematized and understood by Christian churches”. Libanio’s attempt to separate the “giving” of revelation from “saying” (dada – dita) does not seem satisfactory.

Pope John Paul II pointed out in his encyclical *Redemptoris missio* in 1990 that historical Jesus and the Christ of glory must not be separated. Libanio subsequently took note of this criticism because in *ECNC* he called the idealistic notion that distinguishes between Jesus and Christ a “false distinction” since Jesus is Christ:

There is a theological position that has tried to introduce a distinction between historical Jesus and the Christ. The Christ would really be the plenitude of the revelation and of history, whereas Jesus would be [only] one historical form of this Christ who would have other historical forms [too]. In the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, John Paul II refutes such a position by affirming that

“To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith. [...] One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a ‘Jesus of history’ who would differ from the ‘Christ of faith’.”

This could be taken as Libanio’s self-criticism. The Jesus of kenosis is already the fullness of history, even if his resurrection made it completely

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412 “O Cristo e o Espírito são realidades cósmicas que vão lentamente emergindo até se personalizarem em Jesus de Nazaré e em Maria, como veremos logo a seguir.” L. Boff 1996, 233. L. Boff was advocating “a theology centered on creation” that would “refunctionalize all the religious and ecclesial institutions” because “they need to be in the service of the cosmic revelation (revelação cósmica)”. He mentions Origen, Augustine, Bonaventure and modern eco-theology as examples. “Everything is sacramental, or can be. (Tudo é sacramental ou pode sê-lo.)” Ibid., 233.

413 “Na revelação cristã, foi dada toda a revelação, mas não foi toda dita. [...] Também essas religiões e realidades seculares revelam mais do Cristo que o tematizado e entendido pelas igrejas crisãs, mesmo sem que dele façam referência explícita.” TdR, 281–282; quoted at length in n. 411.

414 Cf. *RM*, 6: “To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith. St. John clearly states that the Word, who ‘was in the beginning with God,’ is the very one who ‘became flesh’ (Jn 1:2, 14). Jesus is the Incarnate Word – a single and indivisible person. One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a ‘Jesus of history’ who would differ from the ‘Christ of faith.’” This criticism was made two years before *TdR*. Libanio referred to it in 2000.

415 *ECNC*, 349.
manifest.\textsuperscript{416} This makes the following of historical Jesus theologically meaningful, and even eschatological.

Many critiques on liberationist christology warn against making Jesus too historical and unilaterally human, too.\textsuperscript{417} However, the fact that the pendulum swings in both directions pinpoints the crucial dichotomy, that of the body and the mind. Liberation theology was criticized for both exaggerating historical Jesus and for overstating the spiritual Christ.

There is a dilemma, too. If “Jesus and Christ” was a false distinction, the juxtaposition of “Jesus or God” in strict terms is a “false dilemma”. Libanio argues:

\begin{quote}
Jesus never puts himself in the place of God, but he affirms that God placed him in the center of his salvation plan for humanity, not as the ultimate aim (\textit{não como o fim último}). He is the way and not the end of all human search for God. He is the universal mediator of God’s saving action for humanity. Christian theology does not put the dilemma: christocentrism or theocentrism. It is theocentric when it is christocentric, and vice versa. Jesus is the sacrament of God’s encounter with humans. Jesus the man belongs to the order of signs and symbols. When God resurrected him, he made him Christ, and it is in him that God’s saving action arrives to the people in various ways. Some know him, others don’t.\textsuperscript{418}
\end{quote}

The reasoning behind these refutations of the “false distinction” and the “false dilemma” is similar. Libanio writes that “Jesus and Christ” is a \textbf{false distinction}\textsuperscript{419} and that ”Jesus or God” is a \textbf{false dilemma}.This is obvious –

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{416} Libanio continues: “Pois nesse caso se negaria a identidade absoluta entre a pessoa de Jesus nazareno com o Cristo ressuscitado, dado intontestável da fé cristã. Para a teologia da libertação é importante reafirmar que o Jesus da \textit{kénosis} já é a plenitude da história, embora tal vá se manifestar na ressureição. Daí o caráter teológico e escatológico do seguimento de sua pessoa. E esse seguimento se concretiza na opção pelos pobres. Tecla que sempre se repete, tal é sua relevância e a dificuldade de assimilação.” \textit{ECNC}, 349.

\textsuperscript{417} The Vatican summed up the criticisms as it warned of temporal messianism that would separate the “Jesus of history” from the “Jesus of faith” in another manner, by emphasizing the historicity of Jesus as a human person. \textit{LN}, VII. On the discussion raised by \textit{LN}, see e.g. Hewitt 1990, 166. On the fierce discussion generated by L. Boff’s \textit{Jesus Cristo Libertador}, see Brandt 1992, 57–63. Brandt makes it clear (p. 53) that Boff’s principles were “derived from the humanity of Jesus” and that “man was the criterion” for Jesus. He thought, however (p. 62–63), that the biggest institutional problems were due to Boff’s critical attitude toward the church institution and not the other contents of his teaching (Marxism, humanism, Protestantism etc.).


\textsuperscript{419} \textit{ECNC}, 349.
\end{footnotesize}
because Jesus is Christ, he is the Son of God. Thus clearing up the false distinction about Jesus’ person also resolves the dilemma about his divinity.

Let us now concentrate on how Libanio understood the idea of *universal revelation* as different from Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, for example. Tillich understood this to mean that God had revealed himself universally, in preparation for the *final revelation*. Today, God’s revelation is interpreted in a hermeneutic circle between the final revelation in Christ and the human existential situation. The final revelation is more important than the universal. Tillich was very aware of the tension within German theology: some said that all revelation was cultural (the liberal theologians), and for others there was only one revelation, that in Jesus Christ (the Barthians). His hermeneutic theory of correlation helped bridge the gap between the two groups.420

However, Tillich considered the distinction between a “universal” and a “final” revelation necessary and meaningful. He goes on to list all manner of misunderstandings concerning the word “universal”: it means “catholic”, not “general”. It is “for everyone” but not generally abstracted “from everyone”; and there is no “natural” revelation, only revelation *through* nature.421 Last but not least, Tillich argues strongly: “The third misunderstanding of the term ‘universal’ is the assumption that revelation is occurring always and everywhere.”422 He divides revelation history into the periods of preparation and reception, suggesting that universal revelation “as such” could not have prepared the final revelation in Christ – obviously because in revelation, God in his free will is at work.

This is why we should understand the “particularity” emphasized by Libanio as an kind of absolute particularity, an *ephapax* [once and for all] kind of particularity. Not only was Jesus particular, the Old Testament prophetic tradition that prepared the way for him was also particular in the sense that there could not have been any other form of (universal) revelation doing the preparation. There can be no separation of the Old from the New Testament, and because the revelation in Christ is final, the “criterion of finality” must also be taken

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421 Tillich 1984, 138–139.
422 Tillich 1984, 139. Yet Tillich continues: “But it is equally impossible to exclude the universal possibility of revelation. This would also deny its existential character […]” We could understand Tillich’s statements in the sense that to presumptuously think that God’s revelation occurs all the time would be nothing but a philosophical *petitio principii*. It would most certainly beg the questions “How do you know that? Who has the power to say so?”, etc.
seriously. In philosophical terms, the word “particular” must therefore mean a “particular universal”.

Using the Origenian idea of creation in Christ, Libanio intended to make the ephapax Christian revelation and the continuing revelation match. This was put very clearly in TdR:

If all the realities were created in, by, and for Christ, it means that they all have a dynamism that will reveal Christ. They are marked by their Christic origin and finality. Because they come from him, they carry his footprints. Because they walk toward him, they keep revealing and drawing the lines of God’s salvific project. They keep making the salvific project of God visible, concrete, and historic. They are revelation, not of a novelty different from the pascal mystery, but of new ways in which the mystery is realized. This fact allows us to reconcile the tension between the nature of the revelation in Christ as one, unique and once and for all (ephapax) and, in turn, the creative historicity of man, which prolongs the revelation. It is the same revelation, because it departs from the creation in and for Christ. It is always new, because it discloses (desvela) or, even more, mediates the newness of the game of freedoms, this protological and eschatological dynamism of the creation in Christ. Creation, revelation, and salvation have a deeply rooted unity. Salvation is the ultimate meaning (o sentido último) not only of the walk of humanity but of the whole cosmos.

Libanio here takes his own correlative thinking in an ontological and metaphysical direction. It is as though he had to postulate an ontological, or at least an “existential-ontological” quality of the creation. It makes God’s project “visible, concrete and historic”. In the light of Ockham’s razor, however, one would have to ask whether we need the ontological presupposition. Is the liberation theological presumption of the fundamental unity of all things necessary after all?

The ontologization of salvation history seems very Teilhardian. Christ is the “center” of God’s revelation. Here one is reminded of the difference between Cullmann’s salvation historical school and Teilhard. For post-Bultmannian dialectical theologians, the word center is Mitte or the “middle” of time, while

423 “There is, however, something unique in the prophets of Israel, from Moses, who is called the greatest of the prophets, to John the Baptist, who is called the greatest in the old eon. The revelation through the prophets is the direct concrete preparation of the final revelation, and it cannot be separated from it. The universal revelation as such is not the immediate preparation for the final revelation; only the universal revelation criticized and transformed by the propheticism of the Old Testament is such preparation. The universal revelation as such could not have prepared the final revelation. Since the latter is concrete, only one concrete development could have been its immediate preparation. And since the final revelation is the criterion of every revelation, the criterion of finality must be envisaged and applied, though fragmentarily and by anticipation. [...] those who separated the New from the Old Testament – from early gnosticism to recent nazism – lost the christological paradox, the center of the New Testament.” Tillich 1984, 142.


425 The Christ-event is the middle point (Mitte). It is both a heuristic and a chronological category. Cullmann nevertheless warns against interpreting it in metaphysical terms as Bultmann.
according to Teilhard’s Thomist evolutionism it is the *centre* by which he means the ontological center.

When Libanio refers to Christ as the “center” of God’s revelation, he does so in predominantly Teilhardian, ontological terms. This modifies the role of theology. Postulating an ontological center makes it possible to use it pluralistically as the key “to qualifying and specifying revelations” and to “making a reading of God’s revealing presence in the different religions”.\(^{426}\) The Christian revelation, and not only Christ, is the hermeneutic key to understanding God’s revelations in other religions. Libanio’s imagery of “springs of water” is a vivid picture of the center of God’s presence, which the revelation helps people to find.\(^{427}\)

The main question is the role of the revelation. Is it still happening, and is theology primarily a hermeneutic of God’s action in history? Or is it a “key” to the springs of water that exist everywhere under the surface of human culture and religion? In this case, is it a mediating “virtual revelation” of a neo-Scholastic kind? This question is dealt with in the next section.

interpreted eschatology. The same criticism could *mutatis mutandis* be applied to the “centre” of Teilhardian thinking. Cullmann 1962, 93.


\(^{427}\) “A revelação cristã é uma chave hermenêutica de interpretação das outras revelações. As terras de todas as religiões estão atravessadas por mananciais de água pura da revelação do único e verdadeiro Deus, que chamou todos os povos à salvação. A revelação fornece o mapa de tais mananciais. Com ele, pode-se descobrir melhor onde correm tais águas, em que direção vão, que empecilhos existem que as impedem de fluir. Com ele, pode-se mais facilmente direcionar as águas da revelação cristã para os mesmos mananciais, fazendo-os mais abundantes.” *TdR*, 274.
3.6. A “maximal revelation”, “in the light of the revelation” – a virtual revelation?

The distinction between a particular and a universal revelation could be taken to support the idea of a virtual revelation. The word “virtual” here means hermeneutically potential, or something of which one can predicate something new. Libanio refers in *TdL* to a “structural, virtual or potential” semantic term that could be contextualized to connote new things on new occasions. In this sense, it is possible to “snatch” (*arrancar*) a word from one sphere of meaning to another. This is what has happened to “liberation”, which was given a theological meaning in liberation theology. More generally, it is a hermeneutic process in which actual liberation is interpreted in the light of God’s revelation and action in history and not “univocally” in its original meaning, socio-political liberation.

Virtual revelation therefore has many modern meanings. In some sense, it means little more than revelational hermeneutics, representing a predominantly metaphysical thinking pattern. It can also mean that there is a *revelatio continua* which is unlocked with the once-and-for-all (*ephapax*) hermeneutic “key” that is given in the special revelation, or the Bible and tradition.

The special revelation as such is the Bible not “as a book” but as God’s living word, which is read in the community. Libanio takes the idea of a “hermeneutic triangle” from the liberation theological Bible groups. It consists of the “pre-text” (the hermeneutic and situational pre-comprehension), the context

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428 “Certos lingüistas distinguem um duplo sentido em relação à semântica de um termo. Um sentido-base ou preponderante, que recolhe elementos significativos presentes nos diferentes sentidos que o termo tem nos mais diversos contextos. Capta o significado estrutural, virtual, potencial, que permite ao termo adquirir conotações diferentes ao contextualizar-se.” *TdL*, 146.

429 “Mas [a teologia] arrancou-o [o termo de “libertação”] de seu contexto sociopolítico e interpretou-o no campo hermenêutico próprio da teologia, isto é, à luz da Revelação, da ação salvífica de Deus na história, da vida de Jesus.” *TdL*, 152. In his early writing, Scannone (1976, 60) says that theology “relativizes, disabsolutizes and dis-univocizes” the sociological terms of their ideological content and “opens their language to the unpredictability of the new situations” (des-univociza sua linguagem, abrindo-a à imprevisibilidade de novas situações). On the “dis-univocizing” function of theology which Libanio also mentions (*TdL*, 152), cf. p. 247. The dictionary explanation for “univocal” is ‘a term having but one meaning’, thus Libanio can speak (*TdL*, 151–152) of the risk of political reductionism as univocity.

430 “Não é a Escritura, enquanto livro, que nos diz onde se encontra Deus, mas enquanto Palavra, interpretada em comunidade.” *TdL*, 106.
(the context of the community and its religious tradition) and the text itself. He had in mind the Bible groups and the way they had fought the purely historical interpretation.

I will first consider Libanio’s use of Andrés Torres Queiruga’s “maximal” logic, which deals with everything from the theological perspective. According to this logic, the Bible is the key to understanding God’s revelatory process today. Yet, the only limits of understanding are our own, anthropological ones:

With the books of the Bible, accepted and acknowledged as inspired and endowed with the charism of truth, one has the hermeneutic key to understanding God’s mode of being and his revelatory process, outside the biblical world and until our day. It is an understanding that could end up extending the revelatory process of God beyond these scriptures and establishing a “maximalist” hermeneutic principle, as Queiruga formulates: “It is an evidence-conviction that God, as pure love always in act, is always revealing himself to man in the maximal measure that is ‘possible’ for man; in such a way that the limits of the historical revelation are not due to a reserve on God’s part but indeed to human incapacity: the constitutive incapacity of man who as a finite being only in an obscure, ambiguous and slow manner can keep taking into account the living word which God is constantly sending to him.”

This maximal understanding of continuous revelation is, in fact, the “virtual” logic of neo-Thomism, which has been cross-bred with modern hermeneutic thinking. Not only could we speak of a “maximal understanding with the Bible as a key”, we could also look at God’s process in the world “in the light of the revelation”. Jesus Christ is the “founding moment” and everything after Jesus is understood “in his light”. This is the way God sent his “constitutive” revelation, but it is used to discern God’s action today “in the light of the revelation”. We are once more faced with the question of whether the Bible is more a “means” than a “source”. To say that everything is understood in Jesus’ light could emphasize

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431 “O significado do texto da Escritura só se torna Palavra de Deus para a comunidade e, portanto, só é assumido teologicamente depois que ele for, ao mesmo tempo, interpretado no contexto sociopolítico dos pobres em busca de libertação (pré-texto) e no interior da comunidade de fé (contexto).” TdL, 168. Cf. n. 228. On the concept of the hermeneutic triangle, see the study on CEBI’s method Schürger 1995, esp. pp. 72–75 (“Das hermeneutische Dreieck und die Auslegung von den vier Seiten”).

432 Carlos Mesters, the founder of the Bible movement, describes historicism and secularism as the ultimate threat to hearing God’s voice today as the idea that “God speaks” is confined to biblical history: “Na Bíblia, Deus aparece como uma presença quase natural e normal, que se manifesta a qualquer momento, falando e intervindo a favor dos homens. [...] Hoje, porém, Deus não aparece.” Mesters 1993, 67.


434 ECNC, 348; TdR, 321; cf. n. 400.

435 ECNC, 349; n. 402. For the formula “in the light of the revelation”, see also ECNC, 455; n. 1018. In earlier works: TdL, 218 (n. 946); IT, 100 (n. 939); IT, 179 (n. 946).

436 The critical juxtaposition comes from Clodovis Boff’s new dogmatics. Cf. C. Boff 1998, 207; quoted in n. 379.
Jesus, but the “in the light of the revelation” could also prompt us to think in terms of virtual revelation, with the emphasis on the pre-theological subject matter. The exact meaning of these “in the light of” formulations is anything but clear.

In 1987, Libanio’s fellow Jesuit Francisco Taborda explained Clodovis Boff’s theological methodology in these terms:

Everything can be reflected in the light of the faith and the revelation, because God is the meaning of the universe, of the world and of the history and nothing is alien to his lordship. As Thomas Aquinas already said: “In sacred doctrine, all things are treated of under the aspect of God (sub ratione Dei): either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end.” In this second category enters everything which he calls “revelabilia”, or – as Y. Congar explains – “everything that is susceptible to being known in the light of the revelation”. It is to say: all the scope of the real.437

Taborda also referred – albeit indirectly – to a more critical view of this kind of theologizing. He mentioned Edward Schillebeeckx’ Offenbarung und Theologie (German version 1965).438 Schillebeeckx’ criticism was that St. Thomas Aquinas never defended a “virtual revelation” which would make theology nothing more than an Aristotelian scientia conclusionum and all its non-discursive aspects mere pre-theological activities.439

The later scholastics were misled by the word “revelabile” in Thomas. It is a word, which to the best of my knowledge has only been used twice. As the concepts “scibile, sensibile, credibile” mean “the object of knowledge” etc., it is also clear that the word “revelabile” means nothing apart from “object of (formal) revelation” and hence not: the virtually revealed.440

E. Schillebeeckx gave a scathing criticism of the leading Thomists of the 1930’s and 1940’s who had not understood the meaning of St. Thomas’s theology: E. Gilson, J. Bonnefoy, L. Charlier, and M. Gagnebet. He suggested that Charlier

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439 Schillebeeckx 1965b, 89–90, for the text, see n. 101.

440 Schillebeeckx 1965b, 90. It is the interest of the first quaestio of the Summa to show how theology as “sacra doctrina” in fact differs from other forms of knowledge: “Man vergaß die besondere Perspektive der ersten Frage in der Summa des heiligen Thomas, [...] die ‘sacra doctrina’ als eigenen Erkenntnistyp den menschlichen natürlichen Wissenschaften gegenüberzustellen, die völlig außerhalb der Offenbarung stehen.” Ibid., 90.
and Bonnefoy had gone as far as to confuse the light of the faith, the *lumen fidei* (*Glaubenslicht*), with the light of theology as such. He was not happy with the interpretations given of *revelabile*\(^{441}\), explaining that theology started from the Holy Scripture as a type of knowledge in itself, *doctrina secundum revelationem divinam praeter philosophicas scientias*.\(^{442}\) In fact, he turns the neo-Thomist approach the other way round: there are formally revealed truths in the Bible and in the sacred doctrine, i.e. truths virtually included in them that will only be found by means of subsequent deduction. It is precisely because of this that theology consists of everything that, immediately or otherwise, belongs to the sphere of the Holy Scripture.\(^{443}\)

The neo-Thomist concept of virtual revelation has been the subject of thorny discussions in the new millenium as well. The case of the Jesuit Roger Haight and his theological model is relevant in this discussion. Haight conducted a thorough analysis of liberation theology in his *An Alternative Vision*. The book shows a profound interest in theological anthropology and modern hermeneutic thinking.\(^{444}\)

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\(^{441}\) "Die vertretenen Interpretationen des Wortes 'revelabilia' erscheinen mir daher alle einseitig.” Schillebeeckx 1965b, 90–91.

\(^{442}\) Schillebeeckx 1965b, 91. Cit. from *S. Th.* I, q. 1, a. 1.

\(^{443}\) "[...] das Ergebnis dieser Analyse im Zusammenhang mit den ‘revelabilia’ ist die folgende Einsicht: Gerade weil es in der Heiligen Schrift oder der ‘sacra doctrina’ um Wahrheiten geht, die formell geöffnet sind, müssen zu der Wissenschaft, die diese Wahrheiten als ihr Studienobjekt betrachtet, all jene Wahrheiten gehören, die auf irgendeine Art (unmittelbar oder beiläufig, als Voraussetzung oder Folge oder sogar rein faktisch-pragmatisch) zur Heiligen Schrift gehören oder mit ihr zusammenhängen. Das ‘revelatum’ oder das formell Geöffnete ist das Prinzip ihrer Einheit, und so ist es klar, dass die ‘doctrina secundum revelationem divinam praeter philosophicas scientias’ einen eigenen Erkenntnistyp bildet, der von den anderen Wissenschaften verschieden ist. Man sieht, dass dabei die Frage nach dem besonderen Licht der Theologie im Gegensatz zu dem des Glaubens nicht einmal gestellt wird; dies zu untersuchen, liegt nicht in der Absicht des Thomas. Seine ganze Erkenntnis stützt sich auf die aristotelische Einsicht: ‘Quantumcumque sint aliqua diversa scibilia secundum suam naturam, dummodo per eadem principia scientur, pertinent ad unam scientiam, quia non erunt iam diversa in quantum sunt scibilia.’” Schillebeeckx 1965b, 91. Cit. from *In Post. analyt.*, c. 28, lect. 41, n. 11. Emphasis added.

\(^{444}\) Haight 1985. Haight attempted to find a solution to the problem of free will and God (*gubernatio*). He agrees with liberation theologians that we can “even speak of God acting in history”, even if God has limited himself (the famous *potentia Dei ordinata*). This is because “God does not specifically determine the future; God does not effect what comes to being in human history”. Haight 1985, 99. Is this Christian “in the last instance” metaphysics? Would it be possible to speak of two agents in history? Libanio wishes to maintain the two agents, saying that the human being “lives in a house of two landlords: himself and God” (mora numa casa de dois donos: ele e Deus). The “present”, the house in itself, is God’s gift [as the first cause]. He also argues that the autonomy of the world is “relative autonomy” by which he refers to God as the first, efficient, exemplary, and final cause: “A autonomia do mundo é relativa. Mantém sua causalidade própria. Mas Deus é, por sua vez, ‘causa das causas’. [...] Como diz santo Tomás, Deus é a causa eficiente, exemplar e final de tudo.” *ECNC*, 147. Libanio refers to *S. Th.* I q. 44 a. 1–4.
In 1999, Haight published *Jesus Symbol of God*.\(^{445}\) According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it “contains serious doctrinal errors regarding certain fundamental truths of faith” and makes use of an “inappropriate theological method”.\(^{446}\)

Haight quotes Adolf Harnack and liberation theologians in his book, which may account for the criticism.\(^{447}\) For him, Jesus is “normative” but not “constitutive”. The Congregation considered his method of “critical correlation” too liberal: it gave no space to the uniqueness of Christ.\(^{448}\) It also condemned his concept of symbolism as too existential and non-realistic.

The notification points out the crucial elements of Haight’s theology in theoretical terms. He succeeds in linking modern theology with classic ideas and appeals to St. Thomas for a distinctly neo-Thomist view of the virtual revelation in the same way as Clodovis Boff did in *Teologia e prática*:

Theology is reflection on the nature of reality from the perspective of the symbols of the Christian faith. This conception is similar to that of Thomas Aquinas’s notion of sacred doctrine, which included considerations on all things in heaven and on earth in the light of the principles of revelation. This expansive notion of theology is inclusive: it includes explicit reflection on God and on the world. It also includes turning back in a critical examination on the symbols of faith themselves, as in the case of christology.\(^{449}\)

It is easy to see that Haight’s “expansive notion of theology” is closely related to Torres Queiruga’s “maximal” revelation. Their expressions and the
frequently used phrase “in the light of the revelation” are based on the same formal logic.

As for Libanio, he also makes the modern process thinking his own. Namely, if the neo-Thomist arguments sought to prove God’s existence in un-historical terms, the processual thought helps to “capture” God’s being and his message in the flow of history. This is the meaning of liberation theology as a historical analogia entis as Vítor G. Feller rightly pointed out – it seeks to combine both classical metaphysics and historical thinking.

Libanio cites Andrés Torres Queiruga’s historical maieutic, or process learning, which combined metaphysical thought with Lessingian “pedagogical” idealism. Employing some Heideggerian terminology, he argues that the human being is not to be seen “in an intimist and idealist” way, but as a “being-with-God-in-this-world-of-people-and-things”\(^\text{450}\). With this combination of idealism and onto-theology, Libanio can agree with Torres Queiruga on a maieutic model, which is not purely Socratic but also ontological. The process will teach the “being” of the things in the people themselves and the world.

God is always being, coming and acting in complete freedom and without any conditioning by human beings. But he provokes the human freedom to reactions. This is the way the revelation is woven. From a technical point of view, “the revelation, which is always active (sempre em ato) on God’s part, is realized in the ‘ontological novum’ of the historical freedom of the human being”.\(^\text{451}\)

In fact, Libanio had used similar terminology before. He sought to overcome the garstige breite Graben of historical revelation and present-day experience in TdL in 1987, referring to an ontological novum that theology seeks to “capture (captar) in the unity of history”. This could also have come from Torres Queiruga’s book and gives credit to its Lessingian emphasis on human history as an educational process. Segundo 1989, 262 n. 12.

\(^\text{450}\) “O ser humano é visto, não como na perspectiva socrática, intimista e idealista, mas como um ser-com-Deus-neste-mundo-de-homens-e-de-coisas. Busca-se assim clara superação do conceito socrático.” TdR, 305. Libanio (p. 303–307) is not the only Latin American theologian to have used the historical maieutic of Queiruga. Juan Luis Segundo’s El dogma que libera expressly mentions Queiruga’s book and gives credit to its Lessingian emphasis on human history as an educational process. Segundo 1989, 262 n. 12.

\(^\text{451}\) TdR, 305. Cit. from Torres Queiruga 1987, 229: “[...] la revelación siempre en acto por parte de Dios se realiza en el ‘novum ontológico’ de la libertad histórica del hombre.” (Italics in original.) Lessingian idealism seems to be strongly linked with Thomism in Torres Queiruga’s concept of the revelation. God as the actus purus is, in modern language, “always active” (siempre en acción, 226). When the Socratian maieutic is “christened”, we receive an ontological i.e. “historical maieutic”. Even if idealism starts with the experience of a subject, through a Maréchalian turn the subject is fundamentally “an essence, insomuch as it is radically and fundamentally determined by God” (pp. 464–465). Torres Queiruga holds a most liberal view that everything, “insofar as it is, is God’s manifestation” (“En la medida en que algo es, está siendo manifestación de Dios.” p. 466).
Queiruga’s book.\textsuperscript{452} A “novum ontologicum” of this sort can only be existentially meaningful if it can be known by itself, i.e. if it is a \textit{per se notum} in Thomist terms.

One could also ask what kind of processual thinking is at work here. God who “provokes” human freedom can be seen as a second-degree agent, or as a Thomist \textit{prima causa} who gives his creatures “the dignity of being causes”.\textsuperscript{453} The core of the matter is this: what does primary causality mean in Libanio’s thinking? How can history be human action and God’s action at the same time – with God “always being, coming and acting”, and yet giving his creatures their own privileged field of action? Does the idea of a process help us in any way, since the basic question of human freedom remains largely unanswered? In other words, we do not know if the historical “process” is meta-historical and meta-physical or simply hermeneutic.\textsuperscript{454}

Libanio also employs the Augustinian language of illumination. A human being is a “crystal” for God’s saving light which the revelation brings:

\begin{quote}
The human being is like a crystal. The lights of his or her daily experience, of encounters with others and of historical events hurt and illuminate him or her. They will not, however, reach many spaces that remain in darkness. The revelation is a stronger light which, by God’s free, historical and new initiative knocks on the crystal. If it does not cover itself before the light, it becomes even more transparent and luminous. The light does not violate its structure. Neither was it inside the crystal. Instead, it came from the outside, not in order
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{452} “A teologia tenta captar na unidade histórica indivisível este ‘novum ontológico, a saber, o dom gratuito de Deus, a Transcendência livre de Deus, chamando os homens à realização do projeto salvífico.” \textit{TdL}, 177. The processual reasoning here is very much like the ideas expressed in \textit{TdR} five years later. They are partly attributed – and the “novum ontológico” completely attributed – to Torres Queiruga. In fact, Torres Queiruga (1987, 13 “Presentación de la edición castellana”) mentions that he had first published the book in the Galician language in 1985. The Spanish edition is from the same year, 1987, as \textit{TdL}. It is possible that Libanio used the ideas from the book without directly quoting from it.

\textsuperscript{453} On the dignity of being [secondary] causes, cf. \textit{ECNC}, 147; Catechism 2000, 81; cited in n. 317.

\textsuperscript{454} The Finnish philosopher Uskali Mäki (1989, 95) has asked critical questions about the Marxist díamant. When it puts historicism and realism together, it ends up with a dilemma: either the process is a “central metaphysical category” and thus a category of the world itself, or it is a distinct “super-category” (Finn.: ylälakategoria), which would only characterize the change in the categories – a Hegelian and idealist solution. In liberation theology there is a great intention to explain history as “God’s action”, which would lead us directly into metaphysical or idealistic thinking. On the other hand, there is an at least as strong intention to say that God “walks in the same rhythm and on the same level” as the historical liberation, which would do away with the metaphysical model. See Feller 1988, esp. 80–84. Feller (p. 81 n. 100) cites the Spaniard J. Casañas who says: “Esta ideia de que Deus caminha no mesmo ritmo e nível, nem mais alto e nem mais baixo, nem mais adiante e nem mais atrás, da marcha da libertação humana histórica é um sentimento intuitivo bastante comum entre os homens e mulheres que lutam com o povo oprimido e por ele, que são esse povo em atitude de rebelião consciente e organizada.” (Casañas 1985, 192, emphasis added.) In other words, the idea of “history as an encounter of freedoms”, or more personally, “history as an encounter of lovers” (Feller 1988, 151–154; 154–156), would be badly in need of further clarification. Jesus as “a human being for others” (p. 156) in Bonhoefferian–Robinsonian terms is one suggestion; Feller (p. 157 n. 141) also suggests Tillich’s theonomy.
This idea is based on a mystical concept of God as part of the historical process. There is a “union” on which the encounter is based:

The starting point to understanding revelation is not to try to find a bridge between God and man: on the contrary, it is a most radical union (união radicalíssima), which is prior to and deeper than everything. [It is] a union of creation and God, who is creating it and sustaining it. The God of the revelation does not need to enter the life of a human being because he is present, sustaining the human being in being, in freedom and in history.456

With these words Libanio seems to infer that the work of creation is not yet finished and that there can be no difference in principle between God’s work in the creation and in the sustaining of it. Naturally, God somehow restricted his power in the world when he created it.457 Libanio makes an anthropological and existential point: The cosmos with the human being is created by an act which is not “resisted”, whereas God creates human history with the help of human liberty as a mediation.458 The human being is God’s helping hand.

If Libanio somehow theologizes history, he also historicizes theology. This is evident in the way he criticizes Barthian dialectical theology. There is no revelation directly from above in the Barthian sense, i.e. no “self-communication

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455 TDR, 305–306. Later, in 2004, Libanio made the same point concerning freedom: “Deus ama criando-nos e chamando-nos a uma comunhão íntima com ele. [...] Em que consiste o amor na criação? Fazer que o outro exista nele mesmo. No caso do ser humano, que ele exista em liberdade. E Deus o sustenta nessa realidade de liberdade, mesmo quando ela se volta contra ele.” QCCA, 102.

456 “O ponto de partida da intelecção da revelação não é a busca de uma ponte entre Deus e o homem, mas, pelo contrário, é a união radicalíssima, anterior a tudo e mais profunda que tudo, da criatura com Deus, que está a criá-la, sustentá-la. O Deus da revelação não tem de entrar na vida do homem, já que ele está aí presente, sustentando o homem no ser, na liberdade, na história.” TDR, 306.

457 Libanio later used a clear potentia Dei ordinata / absoluta argument in referring to the natural laws that restrict God’s power. In fact, “God retreats so the world can exist”. Droughts, tsunamis and snowstorms take place, and not even God could do anything about them after the world had been created. There is no longer an analogia entis here: “O mundo carregou necessariamente uma série de leis, de contingência, de criaturalidade que restringiram o poder de Deus. De maneira imperfeita e analógica, imaginamos um Deus que se retrai, se encolhe para que o mundo exista. Quando chove, chove; e Deus não pode impedir que as águas subam, inundem e matem. Quando o sol arde, seca; e Deus não pode evitar que a seca castigue muitos com seus efeitos. Essas leis agem dentro de determinados limites que nem ele infringe. Já começam a aparecer os pequenos infernos terrestres: terremotos, avalanches, nevascas, temporais, tufões, maremotos, etc.” QCCA, 92.

of God in an exclusive way” and “without any means apart from God”. Mediation is needed.

Libanio not only criticizes dialectical theology, he also makes use of it. It is the “already – not yet” dialectic of Oscar Cullmann that he finds helpful. He adds some dogmatic zest to it by referring to a dialectic of *iam et nondum* in Latin. The *iam* or the “already” here corresponds to the human mediation of God’s absolute transcendence. This is different from the original meaning, since the “already” is a distinctly christological category in Cullmann’s logic, according to which “D-Day” is a definite victory, even though it has not yet become evident. In Libanio’s thinking, it is an idealistic category, which is incomplete (não plena) in itself because the manifestation of the Absolute in the mediation is still imperfect.

Something happened to Cullmann’s *ephapax* emphasis as it was shifted in a more processual and idealistic direction. Cullmann wanted to emphasize Christ’s finished work, or the “already” aspect. Libanio admits that the *iam* means experiencing “a full reality”, but that it has not arrived at its “full manifestation”. This is a deviation from the idea that the manifestation in Christ has been complete, but it has not yet achieved its absolute power. In Cullmann’s *Christus und die Zeit* the event of Christ is the “middle point” (Mitte) of time both as a heuristic and chronological category, which is different from Teilhard’s ontological centre. He expressly warns against interpreting the middle point as a metaphysical category in the way Bultmann interpreted eschatology. What is striking in Libanio’s interpretation is not only the introduction of Latin words (*iam–nondum*) but also the idealistic tone and the fact that he starts from the present day and not the time of Christ. This leads to a change in two respects: the emphasis shifts from the “already” to the “not yet”, and the historical middle point changes to a metaphysical core that reminds us of Teilhard’s center.

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459 “[...] K. Barth insiste sobre a dimensão de transcendência da revelação. Ela é a autocomunicação de Deus de modo exclusivo. Manifestação do Absoluto sem nenhum meio distinto de Deus.” TdR, 301. Libanio argues that Barth refused “any created means” so that “the divine light” would remain immaculate.

460 “Vale para a transcendência da revelação a mesma dialética do ‘jam’ e ‘nondum’ que atravessa a escatologia cullmanniana. Assim como no momento histórico vivemos já (*jam*) uma realidade plena que ainda não (*nondum*) chegou a sua plena manifestação, assim também na revelação está já (*jam*) presente a transcendência absoluta de Deus numa mediação humana, criada, finita que ainda não (*nondum*) é plena manifestação de Deus.” TdR, 302.

461 TdR, 302.

462 Cullmann 1962, 93.
For Cullmann, the D-Day and the V-Day of WWII are metaphors for the Christ-event as a decisive battle. Even if victory has been won, it has not yet been realized. Originally, Gustavo Gutiérrez misrepresented Cullmann’s thought in his *Teología de la liberación* as he placed the “already” (*ya*) in the present and not in the past. The misunderstanding could be due in part to the fact that the Spanish “*ya*” and the Portuguese “*já*” carry both the meaning of ‘already’ and ‘now’. This is especially clear in Juan Alfaro’s “*ya–ahora*” vs. “*todavía–no*”. Likewise, Libanio follows the Gutiérrez line and does not pay much attention to the original Cullmanian idea:

[][…] we already (*jam*) live a full reality, which has not yet (*nondum*) arrived at its complete manifestation, and in the same way in the revelation, God’s transcendence is already (*jam*) present in a human, created, finite mediation, which is not yet (*nondum*) God’s complete manifestation.

The issue of revelation has also shown Libanio’s dependence on a metaphysical pattern. Moreover, it has pointed to a “virtual” structure in which the revelation could be seen as the key to detecting God’s continuous revelation. For the purpose of comparison, Roger Haight’s *Jesus Symbol of God* was mentioned as a neo-scholastic and liberal extreme.

Libanio worked out a hermeneutic theory of liberation of his own. It was based on the *ontological* “virtuality” of the world and the human possibility to detect the divine in the world with the help of the revelation. This is the “maximal revelation” based on Aristotelian-Thomist formal logic. He also refers to the *semantic* possibility of overcoming the strictly one-sided (univocal) use of the word “liberation” in particular. This means that his hermeneutic thinking has both an essentialist and linguistic side to it. This second aspect is addressed later in more detail.

465 “[…] vivemos já (*jam*) uma realidade plena que ainda não (*nondum*) chegou a sua plena manifestação, assim também na Revelação está já (*jam*) presente a transcendência absoluta de Deus numa mediação humana, criada, finita que ainda não (*nondum*) é plena manifestação de Deus.” *ECNC*, 344.
466 Cf. n. 913.
4. Interpreting liberation theology in the 1970’s

4.1. Matching existentialism and political theology

As Libanio states, liberation theology did not fall ready-made from the sky.\textsuperscript{467} It has deep roots in post-war Latin American reality, particularly in Brazil. It was not imported to Brazil from anywhere else. The Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez published his \textit{Teología de la liberación} in 1971, inspired by his trip to Brazil in 1969.\textsuperscript{468} Consciousness of the many challenges involved in the political awakening of Catholics made Libanio critical of the exaggerated form of liberation theology in the “Christians for Socialism” movement of Chile in the early 1970’s. His own theology had strong elements of European existentialism, political theology and the theology of hope. The aim in this section is to shed light on the roots of Libanio’s own political theology.

Latin America existed in a “socio-political and ideological climate of liberation” in the 1960’s.\textsuperscript{469} Thus, it comes as no surprise that Libanio was writing about liberation in his early article “Diálogo com o mundo” from 1970:

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). This love of God, which gave us the actual capacity to love was manifested in Jesus Christ above all. In one word, we have been saved from our egoism and redeemed by Christ. Salvation is, therefore, being liberated to love. And the one by my side, to whom I can show my love, is my brother, are human beings. That is why all salvation includes the social aspect of loving human beings. […] We might thus, with deep theological insight, change the “save your soul” (salva a tua alma) to “love your brother”, “build the Kingdom of God with him”, because it is only by doing so that we can really save, no longer the soul but ourselves and the ones who want to join us in building this kingdom of love, self-giving, justice, peace and truth.\textsuperscript{470}

The language and theology of Libanio’s early articles is quite existential, as shown in the preceding chapter. Yet this existential experience must not remain individualistic and alienated from the social problems of the day. He thus corrects the theological current of the 1960’s in the same way as the new political theology of Johann Baptist Metz and – soon afterward – the liberation theology of Gustavo

\textsuperscript{467} TdL, 79.
\textsuperscript{469} TdL, 79.
\textsuperscript{470} Diálogo com o mundo. \textit{Convergência} 3 n. 23 (1970), 6-12, 9.
Gutiérrez did. In “Dialogo como o mundo”, he reminds theologians of their ethical responsibility:

What good is it to construct a beautiful philosophy or theology that is unintelligible to the human being, that does not solve his problems and does not correspond to the experience that he has and, therefore, does not reach him where he is? [...] There is no point in working out marvellous principles and trying to instill them in the other person if the other is not able to see their meaning and value. The very revelation of God is not an act by which God would wish to reveal himself, taking little interest in whether the human being can capture it existentially, but an eminently salvific reality for the human being.471

Having described this “anthropological–existential dimension”, at the end of the article Libanio turns to the “political–social dimension” of the Christian faith. The individual dimension was not enough, and it was in danger of becoming “a simple theology of this capitalist world”. The world of Biafra and Vietnam was the one in which those who spoke of human rights at the same time “disrespected the same human beings through the imposition of unjust social measures and tyrannical and cruel economic laws”. Wonderful medicines were being developed to prolong people’s lives, but two thirds of the world’s population suffered from hunger. He suggests that the problems of the world are a theological problem:

“In this sense all the philosophical and theological reflection, all the Christian world-view, all the action of the modern human being is forced to seek new ways.”

In his articles “Reflexões teológicas sobre a salvação I–II” from 1974, Libanio gives an existentialist critique of traditional, “primitive” Catholicism, which he contrasts with his own political contextualism and existentialism.472 Under primitive religiosity the human being was “too dependent to give salvation to himself” and lacked autonomy. Both tribal cults and popular Catholicism promoted the idea of salvation from “a force out of this world”.473 When something bad happened, the first person to be consulted was a witch (feiticeiro), a magician (mago), or a priest. These were the people who were supposed to provide a cure through rites and ceremonies. In this sense, salvation took place by the

471 Ibid., 11–12.
472 Libanio’s book on “the problem of salvation in popular Catholicism” PSCP, published in 1977, followed the same lines: popular faith was classified as spiritualist and Barthian (p. 32), Jansenist (p. 44), sexist (machista, 46), and Protestant, based on “sola fides” (p. 60).
“magical–religious means” at the person’s disposal. Witches and priests were respected by primitive people because they could bargain with the supernatural powers.474 People, in turn, remained in fear of breaking a taboo or committing a sin – or having done something without even knowing it. According to Libanio, the main problem with the traditional notion of salvation was its non-personal character and salvific physicalism. Salvation was “like a fluid that flows from a sacred reality”. This was evident in the way holy statues and holy water were venerated: there was no I–Thou relationship in Buberian terms, but the contact with the saving powers was accentuated. The world of the saints was part of the natural world.475

Libanio criticized so-called primitive religion, which he considered superstitious:

In a confused mixture of primitivism and modern consciousness, [the person] turns to witchcraft, fetishes, ritual dances, amulets and macumba rites (despachos) in search of contact with the true reality, in order to give value to the present moment or to invoke a favorable intervention by a superior power. It is a confused consciousness, because in one way it is contradictory. If he could seriously reflect on it, perhaps he could perceive the emptiness of the rite; but he feels that something unconscious, latent and deep leads him there. [...] He feels he is entering into a transaction (transação) with forces more powerful than he is.476

Many of the Catholic rites also reproduce this “primitive, mythical, magical and fetishist” mentality. It is necessary to criticize it, because people are only seeking their own protection from natural catastrophes and evil spirits. Libanio would replace this with existentially interpreted Catholicism that would respect the historicity and subjectivity of the human being since the human being “makes history”, “humanizes the world with his work” and “modifies the reality”. Yet there is something that shows modern man that he cannot give salvation to himself either: it is death as the total personal end. Salvation needs to be the gift of the

474 “Diante de qualquer mal, o primeiro passo é o recurso ao feiticeiro, ao mago, ao sacerdote, para que ele esconjure esse mal através de ritos, cerimônias. [...] O processo de salvação se faz mediante a busca de livrar-se de todos os males por todos os meios mágico-religiosos ao seu alcance. Daí a importância da função do mago, do feiticeiro, do sacerdote. Ele detém o poder de influir nos deuses, de fazer barganha com eles. Por isso, são pessoas temíveis, poderosas para os primitivos.” Ibid., 74.

475 “A salvação é vista quase como uma realidade física, como um fluido que desce de uma realidade sagrada até nós. No mundo cristão, a estátua, os bentinhos, a água benta, os objetos bentos assumiram o lugar dos feitiços dos povos primitivos. A mentalidade subjacente continua a mesma. Nesta perspectiva, o aspecto pessoal de relacionamento, de um Eu para um Tu, fica no olvido para ser acentuado o contato com a força salvadora, como realidade subsistente.” Ibid., 75. Cf. PSCP, 60: “Não distingue o seu mundo natural de agir do mundo dos santos.”

476 Ibid., 73.
Other. This does not make him less personal and autonomous, however – on the contrary, salvation needs to be interpreted in personal terms:

But the human being, conscious of himself or herself, changemaker of the world, creator of history, anxious in his subjectivity and autonomy, can only understand his relationships along the line of intersubjectivity. If he retains the rite, the ceremony, it is no more as an autonomous and subsisting reality, as a divine “in itself” (um “em-si” divino) but as a means (meio) and expression of his corporeity to manifest a personal relationship, of a “metanoia” or conversion of life, or of a real desire to be cleansed and freed from sins.477

Libanio dedicated the latter part of this first article on salvation to the “dualist mentality” of the middle ages that saw it as a change in the soul (alma).478 He criticized this model as well because the strict dualism of spirit and matter, soul and body, meaning and reason or passion and freedom was no longer tenable.479 He also criticized the idea of losing or saving one’s soul in the afterlife as too dualistic.480

It is in the second article that he worked out a liberation-theological model that is very close to the existential interpretation. Anyone who feels the terrible Heideggerian sentiment of “being thrown into the world” may indeed feel that salvation could help to dispel this sentiment. However, again this would be too mythical for modern man. God’s action must be understood as part of the human existential reality:

Salvation is rather understood as a process that happens within this situation. God’s action, postulated by faith, is not understood as something that precedes human action, in a separable sense, so that we could say: God’s action is here, human action is there. Only one action exists. The human being constructs his or her salvation in the situated existence. It is there that God’s action, penetrating human action, takes place. God’s saving action is not categorial, intra-human, concurrent, or even in opposition to human action: it is transcendent and immanent. It is so transcendent that it is not exhausted in human action. It is so immanent that it is not separable from it as an “in itself” (“em si”) entity.481

It is this philosophy of situated existence (existência-situada) that Libanio expounds from other viewpoints, those of “existence as possibility” and the “existence relationship”. He then turns to salvation in the age of historization and

477 Ibid., 78.
478 Ibid., 81–93.
479 Ibid., 82.
480 Ibid., 84; on the criticism, see esp. p. 88 on which Libanio criticizes the idea of the separated soul as “not corresponding to the consciousness of the scientific person of today”. He had explained in an earlier article that the immortality of the soul did not mean the existence of two “beings” (seres) in the human being. The soul was the “personal unity of man”, and there was an “ontic spiritual and material principle” involved. (Mistério da resurreição dos mortos. Atualização 2 n. 4(1970), 11-20, 19–20.) In EC, he goes the furthest toward proclaiming a mind–body holism and a “mutual ordination of spirit and matter”, for matter is a “moment” of the human spirit and always part of human freedom. EC, 209.
politization. Taking his cue from the 1960’s theological discussions on the relevance of politics in a completely technocratic world, he suggests that politics still has “a factual precedence over technology”.\footnote{Ibid., 75.} In rather Habermasian / Freirean terms he refers to the “reflexive action” of people that creates a community of consciousness, which in turn is transformed into a praxis. In this communitarian context it is no longer meaningful to speak of individual salvation or the last grace (última graça) on one’s death-bed: one could namely receive this grace even if one had led a life of “misery and crime”.\footnote{Ibid., 76.} He argues that faith needs to be understood in a political context:

Salvation is, no doubt, a divine action. Its beginning is in God. But it occurred in the human situation and today this situation is expanded because of the process of politization. Salvation is therefore realized when a human being, inserted in the powers that lead the world, expresses his faith in action. The faith that saves him only exists inside the historical–political commitment.\footnote{Ibid., 77.}

Thus, this political commitment orients people’s decisions. For people who are faithful to their life-situation, salvation takes place. The opposite of this carpe diem would mean that faith turns “abstract, and into a rigid dogma”. It is a continuous challenge to assume contextual political attitudes, and also to keep the faith, because faith is never a “superstructure imposed on the context”: there is no concrete Christian form of commitment. In a “praxis-based” way Libanio argues that faith is dialectically born out of the decision, even if it also precedes it. The situational character of the option is due to the fact that it was not seen or understood as a Christian challenge in the first place. The Christian quality comes from the fact that the person who takes the decision is a Christian in communion with a church tradition.\footnote{Ibid., 77. Libanio refers here to Jürgen Moltmann’s books \textit{Theology of Hope} and \textit{The Crucified God}. One can see the more general pattern: it was important to Libanio to defend faith against the Marxist accusation of “superstructure”, which he answers by pointing out the nature of Christian contextual politics as both Christian and born out of the context. If this were Libanio’s consistent opinion, however, the later critique in Taborda 1981 would have been unfounded.}

There is, naturally, a resemblance here to the liberation theology coined by Gustavo Gutiérrez. In the very first article explicitly on liberation theology, “Hacia una teología de la liberación” (1968), Gutiérrez states that one first has to lead a Christian life, and it is only afterward that one can make theology out of it. Theology always remains the “second act”. The human person is “the agent of
history”, as Hegel intimated.\textsuperscript{486} Libanio was not of quite the same opinion: theology was both the first and second act in the dialectical interaction of faith and context.

The idea of theology as the second act after praxis is one of the main features of liberation theology. The other is the question of the “one, Christo-finalized history”.\textsuperscript{487} Gutiérrez refers to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in suggesting that humanity has become conscious of the historical process. It is no more “a question of drifting, but of piloting” the course of history. World history has a “motor”, by which he means the absolute Spirit, God.\textsuperscript{488} He states in the same article that “faith energizes and activates within history, since there is no way of encountering God outside history”.\textsuperscript{489} This historical consciousness could be considered part of all modern theology – but it is not always as strongly present as Gutiérrez would have it: he adopted the dual character of revolutionary Hegelianism, according to which both human agency and God’s action in history were accentuated.\textsuperscript{490}

We need to ask what the distinctive feature of liberation theology is. Libanio recalled in his book \textit{Vida religiosa e testemunho público} from 1971 that Latin American theologians had begun increasingly to speak of “liberation” instead of the former 1960’s emphasis on “development”. However, he did not think their

\footnote{\textsuperscript{486} The first article written by Gustavo Gutiérrez on “liberation theology” \textit{expressis verbis} puts emphasis on the existential nature of the faith. This was expanded to the existential nature of theology, not only of faith: “Consequently, when we speak about theology, we are not talking about an abstract and timeless truth, but rather about an existential stance, which tries to understand and to see this commitment in the light of revelation.” See Gutiérrez 1990a, 63. (Translation of Gutiérrez’s presentation in Chimbote, Peru, July 1968, “Hacia una teología de la liberación”.) The anthropocentric and optimistic understanding of history is clearly promoted here: “A key figure for understanding our era is certainly Hegel, who takes up the affirmation of subjectivity and brings it one step further: \textbf{the human person is the agent of history}, but, even more, history is nothing else than the process of human liberation. Since it is a history of human emancipation, the human being creates history by self-liberation. To emancipate oneself is to create history. This idea will be taken up by Karl Marx within an economic framework.” Ibid., 67–68. Emphasis added.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{487} Gutiérrez denies the duality and affirms the unity in \textit{Teología de la liberación}: “[...] no hay dos historias [...] hay una sola historia. Una historia cristofinalizada.” Gutiérrez, TL, 199–200; cf. n. 72.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{488} “Father Teilhard de Chardin provides a very beautiful image to describe this process. He sees the history of humanity more or less in the following way. In an early stage, people were in the hold of the ship, but they did not know they were in a ship. What did they do there? They quarreled among themselves until one day someone climbed the stairs, went to the bridge, and discovered that \textbf{they were in a machine that moved, that had a motor}. It was at that moment that human beings became aware of an active role in history. From that moment on, they said, it was not a question of drifting, but of piloting. That is, human beings had learned that it was necessary to pilot the ship, not to drift in history but to direct it.” Gutiérrez 1990a, 68. Emphasis added.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{489} “If we are correct, faith energizes and activates within history, since there is no way of encountering God outside history.”Gutiérrez 1990a, 75.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{490} On this, see Rendtorff’s criticism on the “double aspect” of koinonia ethics, n. 665.}
arguments were completely logical or “coherent”. He mentions the article “Notes for a Theology of Liberation” by Gutiérrez, which was published in Theological Studies in 1970. It introduces the main thesis of the subsequent Teología de la liberación: Latin America needed to be liberated from its slavery by means of social revolution and social change. Gutiérrez accepted the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, and conceived of human history as a process of emancipation.

Recalling his earlier work of 1971 three decades later, Libanio adopts a post hoc positive, or at least a neutral tone. This is a change from his former standpoint, since in VRTP he did not consider liberation theology [Gutiérrez primarily] “always very coherent”. In sum, one could say that Libanio shared the existential interest in political theology but was not ready to “start with the praxis” in quite the same way as the liberation theologians did. In other words, he was a person who was very much interested in the new political theology but who was not personally part of the liberation theology movement in the first few years of the 1970’s.

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491 “Nos documentos da Igreja na A. Latina, de diferentes origens e autorias, tem-se notado, nestes últimos anos, uma mudança significativa, ainda que nem sempre coerente, do tema de desenvolvimento para o da libertação.” VRTP, 86 n. 102. Emphasis added.

492 “Once we call the poor countries oppressed and dominated, the word ‘liberation’ is appropriate. But there is also another, much more global and profound view of humanity’s historical advance. Man begins to see himself as a creative subject; he seizes more and more the reins of his own destiny, directing it toward a society where he will be free from every kind of slavery. Looking on history as the process of man’s emancipation places the question of development in a broader context, a deeper and more radical one. This approach expresses better the aspiration of the poor peoples, who consider themselves primarily as oppressed. Thus the term ‘development’ seems rather antiseptic, inaccurately applying to a tragic, tense reality. What is at stake, then, is a dynamic and historical concept of man as looking toward his future, doing things today to shape his tomorrow.” Gutiérrez 1970, 247. Gutiérrez argues (p. 247 n. 4) that “This is the profound meaning of Hegel’s dialectic Master-Slave.”

493 Libanio said that he was first and foremost interested in political theology and the theology of hope in 1971. Yet he “accompagned (freqüentava) the beginnings of liberation theology” and “e.g., cited a text by G. Gutiérrez in which the term liberation theology already appeared, even before the book by that name was published in the same year”. He does not mention his own criticism of the “not always coherent” nature of liberation theology in those days, however (cf. n. 491). For these memories, see Libanio’s article Trinta anos de teologia. In: Luiz Carlos Susin (org.), O mar se abriu: trinta anos de teologia na América Latina. São Paulo: SOTER & Loyola, 2000, 139–147, 140.
4.2. Criticism of the most radical liberation theology

Thus, Libanio’s own theology brought him very close to liberation theological thinking because he also put emphasis on human subjectivity and historical freedom. Yet, he was clearly critical of the most radical liberation theology of the early 1970’s, particularly in Chile. Of course, there could not be much radical theology in Brazil after the military regime had promulgated the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) in 1968, which even allowed the arbitrary arrest of suspected revolutionaries. The Church reacted to this situation and was radicalized even more. Hence, the much-discussed political transformation of the Catholic Church in Brazil was a result of a number of factors. Libanio has referred to the negative change he perceived when he returned to Brazil in the late 1960’s after ten years in Europe. It was obviously important to advocate human rights and the public testimony of the church, but it was also necessary to visibly detach oneself from the revolutionary priests.

In this politicized situation the clergy of the Brazilian church fell into three different groups. According to the social studies conducted, there were the conservatives, the liberationists, and the moderates. The distinction between the liberationists, i.e. liberation theologians, and the moderate center is noteworthy: not all social-minded Catholics were liberation theologians even if they felt they could and should support the social critique. The liberationists were the most radical group. Not only were they critical of abuses such as torture, they attacked the whole developmental paradigm. The system had to be changed.

494 On the events leading to the AI-5, the role of the left wing of the Church, and the reaction to human-rights violations, see Bruneau 1974, 177–216. The title of study is The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church.
495 Libanio had left Brazil at the peak of Juscelino Kubitschek’s optimistic industrial era and came back during the military regime: “Após a defesa da tese em finais de 1968, volto ao Brasil depois de 10 anos de ausência. Saíra com Juscelino na Presidência e voltava depois do AI-5.” QP, 124.
496 M. A. Vásquez (1998, 101–102 n. 1) quotes a study conducted by the periodical Veja in 1991, in which Brazilian bishops were classified into three groups: progressives (31%), moderates (53%), and conservatives (16%). Vásquez nevertheless stresses the tendency toward conservatism: the election in 1995 of Lucas Moreira Neves as president of the CNBB was a result of the systematic conservative nomination policy of Pope John Paul II, for example (p. 101).
497 This is how Berryman (1981, 56) distinguished between the policies of the conservatives, the liberationists and the center in the early 1980’s. According to him, the center supported the hierarchy but, in agreement with the liberationists, “it sees the need to defend human rights, at least in extreme situations.” Yet “[l]ts view of social change is (implicitly at least) more reformist than revolutionary, e.g., promoting development projects.”
What the center wanted first of all was to maintain the unity of the Catholic Church, but they spoke out against the human-rights abuses when it was most necessary. The conservatives did not even do this, either for ideological reasons or because they were too afraid.

Libanio made a similar distinction between church activities in his first book after his dissertation, *Vida religiosa e testemunho público*, published in 1971. The Lutheran Church IECLB had commented strongly on the human-rights situation in the country in its synod in October 1970. Libanio mentions “The Curitiba Document” of the Lutherans, which followed the manifest issued by the Catholic bishops in the spring of the same year. According to the document, it was not possible to adapt “public testimony” (*testemunho público*) to suit each ideology in power and to detach it from the “inner” testimony (*testemunho “interno”*) of the church.498 Thus it was, in fact, a Lutheran document that lent its formulation to the title of Libanio’s first book.

However, the defense of human rights and the public testimony of the church is not the same thing as liberation theology. The Lutheran Church IECLB had been reluctant to admit the reality of torture before the Curitiba Document appeared.499 However, we cannot infer that it immediately became “liberationist” or leftist in the fall of 1970: this would have been impossible. Furthermore, what characterized the official line of the greater Roman Catholic Church, especially in Latin America, according to Libanio, was the fact that it “supports publicly critical

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498 *VRTP*, 51. Libanio quotes the article Manifestação da Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana [IECLB] no Brasil. In: *Igreja em nossos dias*, nov.–dez. 1970, 14–17. According to the IECLB, “the message of the church is always directed to the whole human being and not only to his or her soul”. On the importance of “The Curitiba Document”, see Altmann 1987, 44–45. According to Altmann, The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) had reacted very strongly as the Lutheran World Federation decided to transfer its fifth General Assembly, planned for Porto Alegre, to Évian in France. The IECLB understood this “as an affront to itself, and to the country, and ended up denying the reality of torture”. Yet after the Curitiba meeting later in the same year 1970, IECLB issued The Curitiba Document, which gave a critical analysis of the church–state relationship and the new ideological situation. It also criticized the violations of human rights. According to Altmann, the document “became the starting point of a process of change in the official statements of the IECLB with regard to economic, political, and social matters”.

499 It was due to the Lutherans’ lack of interest in human rights that the Lutheran World Federation shifted the General Assembly from Porto Alegre to Évian, France, in July. Mikko Juva of Finland was responsible for the decision to transfer the meeting. See Juva 1994, 224. The anti-communist stance of the IECLB was considered a nuisance abroad as only communists were being tortured. The Finnish delegation threatened to boycott the assembly unless it was transferred. See Schürmann 1992, 88. As an example (pp. 74–75) of the IECLB attitude toward local revolutionary movements, it did not have any relationship with the ecumenical and social ISAL group, and had boycotted the Church and Society meeting in Geneva in 1966.
attitudes of concrete and socio-political situations that affect people, in defense of
the very human being”. Libanio believed that the liberationists held the “ortho-praxis” in high
esteem, which leads to a corresponding lack of concern with orthodoxy. He
mentions how an interest in orthopraxis may arise “as though spontaneously”, the
way it did when both Catholics and Protestants were persecuted in Nazi Germany.
Some people in Latin America believed that a similar kind of limit situation and
pre-revolution (pré-revolução) had been reached. In a situation of institutionalized
violence, ecumenical doctrinal discussion about faith or doctrine would thus make
little sense. The old kind of ecumenism was like a “marriage between old people”:
it was sterile and bore no fruit. The WCC Assembly in Addis Ababa in January
1971 had given a great sum of money to organizations supporting the victims of
racism. Many of these were liberation movements that controlled “liberated areas”
and had chosen the road of armed conflict. The Catholic bishops of the
Netherlands also gave money for the same purpose.

Libanio argued that the various political views inside the Catholic Church
were divisive. The Church as a sign of salvation should have been uniting people,
but the ecumenical groups worked against unity. Even if they were united amongst
themselves, they worked mostly “at the margin” of their own churches. He shared
the viewpoint of the Frenchman A. Manaranche that church affiliation could not be

500 “A posição que cada vez mais a Igreja oficial tem adotado ultimamente, de modo nítido na
América Latina, é de assumir publicamente atitudes críticas de situações concretas, sócio-políticas,
que afetam os homens, em defesa do próprio homem.” VRTP, 49. Libanio refers to the Council
documents, especially Gaudium et spes, and to recent social encyclicals such as Octogesima
adveniens.
501 VRTP, 51.
502 VRTP, 52. Libanio refers to Gutiérrez’s article Notes for a theology of development. In: In
these practical ecumenists was to “get united in action” (unir-se no agir) and in ortho-praxis. This
is another example of Libanio’s initial reservation about Gutiérrez in 1971.
503 On the Program to Combat Racism of the WCC, see Hudson 1977, 106–128, e.g. p. 117, where
he mentions WCC support for a Zambian school for education about South African racism. This
supported liberation groups working outside Zambia. He also mentions support given to the
FRELIMO in Mozambique for the purchase of seeds and tools and for printing schoolbooks. The
WCC also supported the work on the refugee camps of the Namibian SWAPO in Zambia and
Botswana and the “bush schools” in Namibia. The German Lutheran church did not want to
support guerrilla groups, but the Bundespresident made a personal donation. Richard Shaull and
Jürgen Moltmann had generated a lively discussion on the kind of counter-violence that could be
accepted, a debate that “still goes on within the churches” (p. 118). The non-white theologians
understood violence to be present in the unjust social order of racist societies.
504 Juliana, Queen of the Netherlands (Hudson 1977, 115–116), also gave an immense amount of
money, but Libanio only mentions the Dutch bishops.
based merely on family ties, political views or economic life. Even Catholic Action had been found wanting. Libanio appeared to belong to the center of the Church, given his criticism of groups that concentrated on “Christian praxis”:

The model of Catholic Action also shows its deficiency, especially today, as some Christians believe that they must form committed groups, as groups of Christian praxis, making an extreme political commitment. Naturally these kinds of groups cannot mean the Church as the sign of salvation.505

Libanio was calling for an attitude that was neither reactionary nor “fanatic-revolutionary”. The promise of the Lord was the only “stable and unchanging” thing, and the revolutionaries were only too anxious to realize all their hopes in another concretization. This in turn would have to be criticized in the name of the Gospel. The form that the revolutionaries were fighting for was no less contingent than the forms they were combating. Only the Kingdom of God would bring that which they aspired to.506

There was a lot of Christian revolutionary activity in early-1970's Latin America. In the very same year, 1971, in which Gutiérrez’s Teología de la liberación came out, priests who had come to Allende’s Chile made the Declaration of the “Eighty” (Declaración de los ’ochenta”). Gustavo Gutiérrez himself was one of these 80 clergymen and one of the main ideologues, together with Giulio Girardi and Hugo Assmann.507 The revolutionaries of Chile had an

505 “O modelo de Ação Católica também apresenta suas limitações, sobretudo hoje, de modo que outros cristãos crêem dever constituir-se em grupos engajados, como tais, grupos de práxis cristã, entregando-se a extremos de engajamento político. Naturalmente tais grupos não podem significar Igreja, como sinal de salvação.” VRTP, 53. Emphasis added.

506 In words that are reminiscent of Paul Tillich’s “Protestant protest” and of the theology of hope of Jürgen Moltmann, Libanio states: “Também a vida religiosa não condiz com atitude imutacionista, pois, o religioso é todo ele protesto contra qualquer fixação. Para ele, o único estável e imutável é a promessa do Senhor, que lhe fala da contingência de todas as manifestações do único necessário: DEUS. Ora o reacionarismo é desconhecimento dessa dimensão fundamental da fé cristã, vivida de modo tão visível e testemunhante pelo religioso. Uma atitude fanático-revolucionária, ainda que, na sua ânsia de mudança, pudesse responder à força inovadora e revolucionária do evangelho, da fé cristã, da vida religiosa, peca contra esta mesma fé e esperança cristãs, ao querer concretizar todas as suas esperanças numa forma revolucionária concreta, ela mesma sujeita a toda a crítica da fé, do evangelho, da vida religiosa. Esta forma, por que ele luta, também é contingente, provisória e, portanto, não pode ser obtida por meios, que parecem torná-la absoluta. É esperar de uma forma concreta, aquilo que só será possível com a vinda final do Reino de Deus.” VRTP, 74. He goes on to point in the opposite direction (p. 75) as well: the “chiliastic sects” end up escaping from the reality “in an Essenic, Qumranic way”. He is obviously referring to the Pentecostal groups. His criticism is quite severe: “São movimentos estéreis, sem realismo, sem enraizamento no concreto da vida.” He does not acknowledge their great success: can millions of Brazilians be wrong?

507 “Ochenta sacerdotes, chilenos y extranjeros, dieron origen a este movimiento marxista en abril de 1971. Entre ellos estaba el peruano Gustavo Gutiérrez, que por entonces editaba en Lima su libro célebre, Teología de la liberación.” Cierva 1986, 110. Sigmund (1990, 48) quotes the Jesuit Roger Vekemans’s heavy criticism of Gutiérrez’s “godfather” (padrino) role in the Christians for
example in the Argentinian "Priests for the Third World" (Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo) movement, which the Argentinian bishops had criticized as early as August 1970. The Colombian Golconda group was established in 1969. It was linked to the aspirations of the guerrilla priest Camilo Torres, who was killed in 1966. Generally speaking, Chilean priests were predominantly foreigners and could be considered a “Noah’s Ark”.

As for Chile, in his book Evangelização e libertação (EL, 1975) Libanio describes the “Christians for Socialism” (Cristianos por el socialismo) movement as very radical and based on revolutionary praxis. Christian faith did not bring anything “prior to the revolutionary praxis” and it was rather “in the course of the revolutionary experience that faith revealed new contributions”. These contributions would have been impossible to find outside of the revolutionary process. In other words, faith did not give any ready-made answers before political commitment. Libanio was referring to the final document of the first meeting of the Christians for Socialism at the end of April, 1972.

Socialism movement. Hugo Assmann’s research organization “served as secretariat and publicity center for the Chilean group”. Trujillo (1975, 69) mentions the three priests, Girardi, Gutiérrez and Assmann as the spearhead of the Chilean movement. According to the periodicals Mensaje and Víspera, Gutiérrez was among the ideologues who devised the “Declaration of the Eighty”. Libanio describes the “Christians for Socialism” (Cristianos por el socialismo) movement as very radical and based on revolutionary praxis. Christian faith did not bring anything “prior to the revolutionary praxis” and it was rather “in the course of the revolutionary experience that faith revealed new contributions”. These contributions would have been impossible to find outside of the revolutionary process. In other words, faith did not give any ready-made answers before political commitment. Libanio was referring to the final document of the first meeting of the Christians for Socialism at the end of April, 1972.
It is obvious that the Christians for Socialism movement was a direct continuation of the group of the Eighty, which had helped to organize its first congress in 1972. Libanio’s *EL* is a commentary on the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome, and among the most important of his 1970’s production. It does not label him – at least not in 1975 – a liberation theologian. In the Third World, liberation from colonial and social oppression was needed, but:

In the Second World it is about liberation of communism, which oppresses people in the spiritual, ideological, religious, and moral realm.

Libanio criticized the application of the term “praxis” in theology, which was very obviously a criticism of Hugo Assmann’s liberation theology in his article of 1974. He refers to Assmann and the “praxiological groups” he supported, which wanted to go further than the merely “analytical” theology of the Medellin bishops’ conference. Many of these groups were “organized in functions of efficient praxis and did not start from a faith community”. In Maoist rhetoric, they intended to make a true “cultural revolution”.

It was important to liberate the Christians from the “intra-systemic captivity” that blocked them from...
understanding the concrete demands of faith in the class struggle. Libanio refers to the existence in the early 1970’s of other underground forms of Christian activity in the world, which were most visible in the United States, France and Germany. The Latin American groups were precisely the praxiological groups that wanted to shatter the status quo, however.\footnote{Elaboração do conceito de Igreja particular. In: Hortal, J. (org.), Igreja particular: VI semana de reflexão teológica. Col. Teologia, 4. São Paulo: Loyola, 1974, 17-59, 51–56.}

It was the very concept of praxis that was the problem:

The great limit of this is the imprecision of the concept of “praxis”. All of contemporary theology is impregnated by “action”. And even if the meanings that this has in Catholic thought are not identical with “praxis”, they are easily alternated and they make twists and turns in their vocabulary that seem to amount to a shift in the very meaning of action and praxis. This leads us to the greatest and the most extraordinary ambiguities and confusions. \textit{For if action is absorbed by praxis as a concept, then the Catholic thinking that affirms the transcendence may fall into a historical immanenticism.} If the idea of praxis remains confused, people are exposed to a pragmatism that becomes a home-made mixture of epistemology and ethics. This has serious consequences for the idea of revelation and for the Church relationship.\footnote{“O grande limite de tal momento é a imprecisão do conceito ‘práxis’. Toda a teologia contemporânea está impregnada pela ‘ação’ (agir). E ainda que os sentidos que esta tem no pensamento católico não seja idêntico [sic! pro sejam idênticos] ao da ‘práxis’, comunicam-se com grande facilidade e fazem trânsitos em seu vocabulário, que, por momentos, parece ser um trânsito na idéia mesma de ação e práxis. Isto nos coloca nas maiores e mais extraordinárias ambigüidades e desconcertos. \textit{Pois se a ação é absorvida pela práxis, enquanto conceito, então o deslocamento do pensamento católico que afirma a transcendência pode recair num imanentismo histórico.} Deixar a ideia de práxis confusa, expõe-se a um pragmatismo que se transforma numa salada de epistemologia, ética e fabricação. Isto tem grandes consequências para a ideia de revelação ou em relação à Igreja.” (Ibid., 56. Emphasis added.) On the Vatican criticism of “historical immanenticism”, see LN, III.}

Libanio was apparently quite distant from the radical Christian groups of the mid-1970’s. The “praxiological groups” were just the kind of revolutionary groups Assmann had helped to start. The “Christians for Socialism” movement also attracted strong criticism from Libanio as representing the extreme left of the Catholic community. He mentioned the movement in the same article as a warning example. They “did not deduce the socialist and revolutionary option from the faith” but on the contrary started with the revolutionary commitment.\footnote{Ibid., 50–51.} He also later gave Christians for Socialism as a historical example of the radical line of the church.\footnote{In the article Evolução do termo evangelização [Convergência 8 n. 85 (1975), 406-418] Libanio mentions the “reactionary forces” of the church (p. 415) that are spiritualist and consciously or unconsciously ideological, and are against the philosophies of praxis of the “Marxist and atheist kind”. He balances this with a statement given by Paul VI in Rome in the 1974 synod according to which human liberation is part of the Christian love of one’s neighbor (p. 416). He points to the Christians for Socialism movement as “a certain more radical movement” (p. 416), although he...}
revolutionary socialist option, which he parallels with the vices of the so-called “real socialism” that was based on “violence, terror and the excesses of exaggerated groups”.520

The Christian socialists in Chile claimed that the political activity of the Christians “is not derived from the faith but it rises from the practice of the proletariat as it fights the oppressive bourgeoisie”. It was important for them to “generalize” this practice.521 To construct socialism meant to analyze the mechanisms that really moved society, or to give a scientific analysis of surplus value, class struggle, and ideology. In this, the examples of Cuba and Allende’s Chile were models for returning to the undogmatic sources of Marxism, as they put it.522 There was a strong critique of “oppressive legality” and “discriminatory legality”. Because the bourgeoisie kept misusing the laws for their own benefit, it had become necessary to create a new social order “from the roots up”. The capitalists used all propagandistic and political means (dictatorship if need be) to maintain the present unjust order. This would be overcome by revolutionizing the present rule of law.523 The Christian socialists opposed every kind of individualist

refers to the liberation theological “critical theory in the light of the faith” and “praxis” in neutral, even positive terms (p. 415).

520 TdL, 277.
521 “Esta não se deduz da fé, mas surge da prática do proletariado em sua luta contra a burguesia exploradora e se baseia na generalização desta praxe.” (Cristãos para o socialismo 1972, 619.) The talk about a “generalization” here means the acceptance of a Leninist and Althusserian philosophical method: the singular sense observations are “generalized”. In this sense, theory can only come a posteriori from the praxis. In fact, the term “generalidade” is common in Clodovis Boff’s methodology, which takes its cue from Althusser. Boff condenses the idea of the three generalities (G I, G II, G III) at the end of his dissertation: “Segundo L. Althusser, a prática teórica consiste em um processo de transformação de uma matéria-prima dada (G I) num produto determinado (G III) através de meios de produção definidos (G II) – o todo se passando no nível do pensamento (§ 2).” C. Boff, TP, 381.
522 “A construção do socialismo não se faz com vagas denúncias ou chamados à boa vontade, mas supõe uma análise que permita revelar os mecanismos que movem realmente a sociedade.” [...] Da análise científica e do compromisso revolucionário com a luta dos explorados surgem necessariamente os elementos reais da situação: relações de produção, apropriação capitalista da maior valia, luta de classes, luta ideológica etc. Neste sentido, a revolução cubana e o processo em direção ao socialismo no Chile estabelecem um retorno às fontes do marxismo e uma crítica ao dogmatismo marxista tradicional.” Cristãos para o socialismo 1972, 625–627. Emphasis added. According to the sources used by Sigmund (1990, 48), the initial document of the Christian socialists was written by Hugo Assmann. Marxism was an “anti-dogma” for Harnecker; in the chapter “El marxismo: un antidogma” she refers to her primary interest in helping the students toward a critical position. See Harnecker 1987, 21. This language game explains why the Christian socialists of Santiago also spoke of an “undogmatic Marxism”.
523 “As estruturas de nossa sociedade devem ser transformados desde a raiz. Hoje, mais do que nunca, urge fazê-lo porque os que usufruem da ordem injusta em que vivemos defendem agressivamente seus interesses de classe e se valem de todos os meios – propaganda, sutis formas de dominação da consciência popular, defesa de uma legalidade discriminatória, ditadura se for necessário, repressão muitas vezes [...]” Cristãos para o socialismo 1972, 624.
and “spiritualist” anthropology based only on the ideas and morals of the individual. In its place, they offered a scientific interpretation of the economic and social mechanisms that would demonstrate the primacy of economic factors.524

As for Assmann’s praxiological philosophy, he tells us in his book where it comes from. Praxiology, the “science of efficient action”, is based on the book of the same name written by the Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński.525 Assmann’s main aim is to find a language that would verbalize action because the theistic language belongs to the past. Thus, the theology that strips people of history is substituted by critical reflection. Practice as the starting point of liberation theology means that “Any logic that is not practical logic is done away with.” Adopting quite a 1960’s tone he claims that the crisis in “theistic” language is due to the fact that it “de-historicizes God and man” and “empties history of any ultimate concern”. Thus human activity is “de-politicized and de-historicised; it is no longer a historical process”. Theology must be based on the experience that Christians have of the struggle for liberation, on “critical reflection on action”, and on “praxiology” – just as Kotarbiński refers to “the general theory of efficient action”.526

In the book cited by Assmann, Kotarbiński lists several types of efficient action: DDT is an excellent insecticide, and “a well-functioning guillotine as a means of action has the property of complete sureness”.527 However, taking this

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524 Unlike Paulo Freire, for example, who had also been influenced by personalist thought, Christians for Socialism opposed humanism and personalism. They did not want to “negate” the human person, but they nevertheless made a scathing criticism of individual freedom, free enterprise and systemic oppression. It was precisely the system that was the problem: it generated the problems but prohibited anyone from changing it: “A cultura dominante impõe uma concepção individualista do homem, um homem com capacidades, tarefas e destinos exclusivamente individuais. Esta cultura se apresenta em suas várias formas de liberalismo, humanismo e personalismo, como a defensora da liberdade da pessoa, da liberdade individual, da propriedade privada, da livre competição, do amor reduzido ao interpessoal, etc. Com isto encobre os aspectos estruturais das relações sociais e das contradições que o sistema engendra. A cultura do sistema impõe uma idéia ‘espiritualista’ do homem explicando seu comportamento e sua história como se estivessem fundadas principalmente nas idéias e nas atitudes morais; como se os males do mundo se fundassem somente em desvios tipo puramente individual.” (Cristãos para o socialismo 1972, 630, part II of the final protocol, “Cristianismo e luta ideológica”, 2.6–2.7, emphasis added). One needs to ask: Is Marxist economic analysis more primary than personal morals? Can social and personal morality be contrasted?

525 See the title Praxiology: an introduction to the sciences of efficient action of Kotarbiński 1965.

526 Assmann 1975, 74–76.

527 “We shall speak of the sureness of measures taken in general. Such an evaluation is often resorted to in advertisements, when a preparation is advertised as an ‘unfailing’ cure for baldness, or DDT as an excellent (that is: quite sure) insecticide. That complete sureness is probability in the first degree – that is complete probability which consists in that under given circumstances the ration of \( m \) cases of achieving a given goal to \( n \) cases of using a given means – that is, the quantity
kind of Marxist and Aristotelian praxiology to the domain of theology leaves no
room for theological theory as a starting point: it can only sprout up from the
praxis. Hugo Assmann’s praxiology amounts to a Marxist activist philosophy.

What, then, might have been Libanio’s own idea of the base communities in
the early years of the 1970’s? Is this what he meant when he referred to the
“praxiological groups” and to the “groups of Christian praxis” in a very critical
tone? Probably not, since he started to help them, together with his cousin Frei
Betto and the Boff brothers, in the mid-1970’s. 528

Speaking as a commentator on the synod of bishops in Rome, Libanio was
certainly rather restricted when it came to the issue of liberation theology and
socialism. Nevertheless, he follows a loose formulation of Gutiérrez’s liberation
theology in EL:

Evangelization will thus have been unfolded to the full degree when it implies the totality of
an action incarnated in history, where the grace of Christ and the human liberation do not
walk in parallel but interlaced in a concrete unity, even though distinguishable. 529

Libanio’s book A consciência crítica do religioso (CCR) carries a distinctly
Freirean530 title, and the overall tone is rather positive toward political
consciousness-raising or “conscientization” (conscientização). He observes how

expressed by the fraction m/n – tends to unity as the number of cases of using such means in
striving for such a goal increases indefinitely. [...] For instance, it has never happened that cutting off
a person’s head did not result in his death, and this cannot happen; consequently, the blow of a
well-functioning guillotine as a means of action has the property of complete sureness. With the
same certainty we can say that water heated by a burner will, under ordinary circumstances, boil
within 15 minutes." Kotarbiński 1965, 87. Kotarbiński’s praxiology is very strongly characterized
by a natural scientific and Aristotelian thought. He argues (p. 18): “Every impulse is directional and
intentional; it is an impulse aimed at something; yet we, of course, are always agents not only of
what we intended, but, in so many instances, of precisely what we did not intend. [...] If in a wood
we shoot at a bird, the effect is not only the death of the bird, but there also occur a great number of
various kinds of damage – breakings, piercings, scratches, etc. – to trunks, branches and leaves
from the shots which missed the bird.” Niiniluoto (1989, 63) regards Kotarbiński praxiology as
an “attempt of a systematic theory of the human action, which has influenced the new American
philosophy of technology (Henryk Skolimowski)”. 532

Libanio mentions his cousin Betto precisely in connection with the issue of the base
communities in 1982, as he himself assisted them as a peritus (perito). See QP, 98. Frei Betto
(Carlos Alberto Libânio Cristo) started base community work after he was released from a four-
year prison term. He was a JEC leader in the early 1960’s. 528
EL, 33. Gutiérrez’s notion of the Kingdom of God that is realized partly but never to the full in
temporal liberations is similar but perhaps more processual and dialectical than Maritainism. See
esp. Gutiérrez, TI, 239: “El crecimiento del reino es un proceso que se da históricamente en la
liberación, en tanto que ésta significa una mayor realización del hombre, la condición de una
sociedad nueva, pero no se agota en ella [...] No estamos ante una identificación. [...] el hecho
histórico, político, liberador es crecimiento del reino, es acontecer salvífico, pero no es la llegada
461.
530 See e.g., Freire 1974 (Education for Critical Consciousness), which gives a good idea of his
notion of conscientização in the 1960’s.
liberation theology was starting to have an effect on people in the religious orders. Their consciousness was opening up to history and historical change. After all, consciousness-raising is part and parcel of Freirean pedagogy. It was the task of liberation theology to raise the consciousness of those who lived in ”active and passive exploitation”, and also to reflect critically on the action of those who had already made a commitment to the new praxis. They were being helped by the light of the faith. Libanio was now admitting that “elements of this theology are disseminated and they already belong, in some way, to the theological language-game of today”. Following the CELAM II Conference in Medellin in 1968, people in the religious orders were being awakened to liberation theology, although the process was “rather diversified”.531

The original background of liberation theology was, above all, ideological and characterized by the Cold War. Churches and societies had been in the crossfire between opposing endeavors. The United States and the Alliance for Progress initiated by president Kennedy aimed to propagate progress and development in the 1960’s. On the other hand, the socialist government of Cuba kept advocating “change” wherever the leftists wanted to curb the reformist line.532 In a predominantly Catholic continent, the Church had to formulate a more and more consistent social view. For the theologians who were in charge of expressing the relationship between religion and the social context this was an extremely challenging situation. Liberation theology was bound to be absorbed by the tidal wave of political and cultural change. The following subchapter shows how Libanio played his part as a positive commentator, even an interpreter, of Brazilian liberation theology in the late 1970’s.

531 “[…] Criou-se na Igreja e na VR [vida religiosa] nova situação, em que nasceu uma teologia sensível a categorias históricas, numa linha de transformação da realidade. Tal teologia, por sua vez, vai lentamente despertando a consciência dos religiosos para tais perspectivas. Naturalmente, não acontece tal fenômeno igualmente em todas as partes. Assistimos a um processo assaz diversificado.” CCR, 49–50.
532 On the activities of underground foquista groups in 1960’s Brazil and their training in Cuba, see Rollemberg 2001.
In 1977 Libanio started to publish works in which he presented his theology in terms that were very much in line with liberation theology. Of particular note are the tripartite work *Formação de consciência crítica* I–III and the *Discernimento e política* (1977), which was published in English as *Spiritual Discernment and Politics* in 1982. *Discernimento espiritual* also came out in 1977.

It is in these books that he employs the late-1970’s liberationist discourse in an expressly positive tone. From a criticism of praxis as a revolutionary political stance in 1974, he had come to emphasize the positive importance of praxis. It is an ethical instance that verifies the genuineness of Christian love. I will begin by showing the meaning of praxis as the starting point of the critical hermeneutic process.

The year 1977 was crucial to the social opening up of the Brazilian church. The government ceased to block the work of the base ecclesial communities, and the Bishops’ Conference CNBB was more strongly dedicated to social activity. The powers of the church had been actively trying to curb the military regime since the mid-1970’s. The political high tide continued until the mid-1980’s when democracy was restored in the *Abertura* (‘opening’) in 1985.

I will start by exposing Libanio’s thoughts on the dependence of theology on emancipatory interests. At the beginning of *Spiritual Discernment and Politics* (*SDP*) he stated that the discernment was based on “a change in reality”. This...

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533 The introduction of John Burdick’s book gives a very good up-to-date history of liberation theology in Brazil. “The years 1977–1982 were a whirlwind of base-community activity to bring about improvement in urban areas in the areas of transportation, health, education, sanitation, and water. Adopting clearly progressive rhetoric, the National Brazilian Bishops’ Conference (CNBB) in 1977 endorsed all such organizing initiatives [...] In the context of the military regime’s policy after 1977 to refrain from intervening in Church-based grassroots initiatives, thousands of base communities across the nation were soon calling meetings, leading marches, and collecting petitions.” Burdick 2004, 4. However, the work of the Church commissions for work among the indigenous people (CIMI) and the landless (CPT) was dangerous (p. 4–5), obviously because the powers that be in society were fiercely opposed to it.

534 Burdick (2004, 3) suggests the torture and murder of the Jewish left-wing journalist Vladimir Herzog (which was commemorated at São Paulo Cathedral by Cardinal Arns) was the climax (or anti-climax?) of the crescendo of the political commitment of the Brazilian Catholic church: “By 1970 Brazil’s national bishops’ conference was making public statements against state repression; by 1973 it was engaged in a national campaign for human rights; and by 1975, after the murder of journalist Vladimir Herzog, the bishops rallied to the cause of return to civilian rule.”
means that he was committed to the same emancipative interests as [other]
liberation theologians. It was the liberating change, or emancipation, that mattered.
Emancipatory consciousness implied that the social status quo was counterevangelical, i.e. contrary to the Gospel. Discernment was nevertheless in place since no reality was perceived automatically: emancipatory interests start within the person who interprets reality. As he remarks, the social commitment of someone must be based on “an option for the interests of the poor”. He wrote in Habermasian terms of the way in which social sciences were necessarily linked to emancipatory praxis. For Habermas, this emancipatory praxis was not something that would “directly” guide the sciences. Instead, the aim in critical theory was a detachment from an objectivistic self-understanding of the sciences in general. In other words, when Habermas declared the emancipatory and practical interest of knowledge of the social sciences, he meant to emphasize their independence of both the natural sciences that “explain” the world and the human or hermeneutic sciences that “understand” the world. This would amount to a triad of explanation–understanding–change, corresponding to the three different sciences, empirical, hermeneutic, and critical social science – and their three kinds of praxis, instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory.

Libanio appeared to accept another tripartite distinction, too. This was the triad “see–judge–act” of Catholic Action, and it was strikingly similar to way Habermas’s division of the sciences. The distinctions sound the same but they

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535 “The basic thing is not discernment, not some new perception of reality, but a change in that reality, such that our new consciousness is ‘veri-fied’ – ‘made true’ – in concrete reality, and this is what is expressed in our consciousness. The basic interest is to transform a situation that, interpreted in the light of divine revelation, is shown to be counterevangelical.” SDP, 3.
536 “Another question presents itself: What level of the social praxis of liberation is indispensable in order to adopt a position conducive to spiritual discernment? Above all, there must be a basic attitude of generosity that knows no limits. To the extent that we feel called to an ever greater commitment, to this extent it will be a prerequisite for discernment. At any rate, the minimum requirement is an option for the interests of the poor as the social position of our choice.” SDP, 25. Emphasis added.
537 “Gegen das objektivistische Selbstverständnis der Wissenschaften, das sich naiv auf Tatsachen bezieht, lässt sich für theoretisches Wissen ein indirekter Handlungsbezug nachweisen, aber nicht etwa eine direkte Herleitung aus Imperativen der Lebenspraxis (die ich auch nie behauptet habe).” Habermas 1972, 26.
538 On the three kinds of praxis in Habermas’s thought (instrumental, communicative, and critical or emancipative) see Schillebeeckx 1974, 106–109.
539 According to Libanio, the method “see–judge–act” was used largely in the Bible groups (círculos bíblicos). See TdL, 77. A similar triad of “three S’s” was encouraged in Finland: “sisältö–sanoma–sovellus” (content–message–application), with one major difference, though: in the Brazilian Bible groups the meeting starts with reflection on everyday experience. See e.g., Leitura orante 1990, 38, on the starting of a group: “Partir da realidade de hoje: Estudar e aprofundar
mean two quite different things. The widely distributed Leonardo Boff article (from a Boff brothers book published in 1979) explains the meaning of “see–judge–act” in liberation theology. “Socio-analytic mediation” (MSA), or the social sciences and their results are taken as the first step.\textsuperscript{540} Leonardo Boff adopted a very Althusserian tone in referring to social science as “dialectical structuralism”.\textsuperscript{541} The next step, or the judging, is then “hermeneutic mediation” (MH)\textsuperscript{542}, which “discerns the historical-salvific value of the situation” and also “makes a critical-liberating reading of the tradition of the faith itself”.\textsuperscript{543} It does even more as it “makes a theological reading of all human praxis”.\textsuperscript{544} The third step is “practical-pastoral mediation” (MP), or the action.\textsuperscript{545}

aquelles aspectos da nossa realidade que devem ser especialmente iluminados pela Palavra de Deus que iremos ler.” Here, the idea is to find first the “aspects of our reality” that are then illuminated by the Word of God. On the history of the see–judge–act method in Catholic Action, see Brighenti 1994, 214–217, esp. 214: “Hay una diferencia entre la ‘pedagogía’ y la ‘epistemología’ de la AC [Acción Católica], así como se distingue la ‘epistemología’ del ‘método’ en la TL. En la AC, el método ‘ver–juzgar–atuar’ es el corazón de la pedagogía cardijniana que comporta, entre otras cosas, las técnicas de reclutamiento de los militantes [...] los tipos de servicio prestados, las formas de planificación [...] la postura del movimiento en relación a la Iglesia y a la sociedad, etc.” In addition, Brighenti (p. 229) claims that “seeing”, or the social dimension, was only introduced into Catholic Action in the 1940’s. Before that, the “a truth of the faith” (una verdad de fé) and “a truth of the facts” (una verdad de los hechos) were in reverse order. According to Andrade (1991, 43), the “ver–juzgar–agir” method was adopted in Brazil during the meeting week of the ACB in 1948. Westhelle (1995, 40) argues that this method and its excessive optimism were the background to “the crisis of hope” experienced in liberation theology. According to him, the “to see, to judge, to act” method had been used since the 1920’s but he was obviously wrong.\textsuperscript{546} L. Boff 1985, 18–22. I have used the Spanish translation Libertad y liberación, which is quite accurate. There is also an English translation entitled Salvation and Liberation (1984). The abbreviations MSA and MH were made known through Clodovis Boff’s dissertation. “A TdP [teología do político] se constrói graças a duas mediações teóricas fundamentais: a MSA [mediação sócio-analítica] e a MH [mediação hermenêutica].” C. Boff, \emph{TP}, 377. On MSA, see I Section (pp. 35–129); on MH, see II Section (pp. 131–271). I have used Leonardo Boff’s exposition of the book for reasons of clarity and brevity. After all, Clodovis Boff felt obliged to his brother (TP, 19) as well as to Adolphe Gesché, Jean Ladrière, and François Houtart.\textsuperscript{547} L. Boff 1985, 21.\textsuperscript{548} L. Boff 1985, 22–25.\textsuperscript{549} “En resumen, creemos que la tarea de la teología se realiza frente a la realidad social, en tres niveles. \textit{Primero:} discerniendo el valor histórico-salvífico de la situación; a la luz de las categorías de fe como reino de Dios, salvación, perdición, gracia, pecado, justicia, injusticia, caridad, etc., se juzga si este tipo de sociedad se orienta o no al designio de Dios. Es el momento crítico de la teología. \textit{Segundo:} haciendo una lectura histórico-liberadora de la propia tradición de la fe [...].” L. Boff 1985, 23.\textsuperscript{550} “\textit{Tercero:} haciendo una lectura teológica de toda la praxis humana, bien sea obra de cristianos o bien de no cristianos.” L. Boff 1985, 24.\textsuperscript{551} L. Boff 1985, 25–27. The emphasis is on the objective, determined nature of action as L. Boff tries to explain how “we generally do not do what we want to but what the objective conditions of reality permit us to do”: “Generalmente no hacemos lo que queremos, sino lo que nos permiten las condiciones objetivas de la realidad.” Cf. N. Bukharin’s idea of historical determinism and freedom: “Wenn die Marxisten die kommunistische Partei organisieren und in den Kampf führen, so ist dies ebenfalls ein Ausdruck der historischen Notwendigkeit, die sich eben durch den Willen und die Handlungen der Menschen ausdrückt.” Bukharin 1922, 47.
The aim in this action is Marxist and revolutionary: “the church will have to join the other forces that also search for a qualitative change”.\textsuperscript{546} The similarity with Habermas strikes one at first, then the difference. Whereas Habermas distinguishes three different kinds of scientific discourse (empirical, hermeneutic, and emancipatory), Leonardo Boff considered it feasible to include all the three dimensions in one single methodological procedure that was liberation theology.\textsuperscript{547} In this, he was following the methodology exposited in Clodovis Boff’s dissertation in Louvain.

Another liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, became famous for his version of the hermeneutic circle. It was primarily critical of the prevailing ideology.\textsuperscript{548} Even if the text in \textit{The Liberation of Theology} demonstrates dependence on Althusserian terminology, there was space left for ideological change as “not only possible but also decisive”.\textsuperscript{549} The presence of more humanistic brands of Marxism is also visible, since the change is due to the proletarian class becoming “consciously aware”\textsuperscript{550} and to the “human criteria” that lead to conscious political commitment.\textsuperscript{551}

The publication of Libanio’s \textit{Discernimento e política} was preceded by a reflection on theological methodology in the meeting of the Conference of the Brazilian Religious (CRB) in 1977. He explains how Catholic Action and the “see–judge–act” methodology were accepted as a means of understanding and changing reality in the violence-ridden country:

The methods of Catholic Action, with their threefold program – see, judge, act – are the kind of help needed in such circumstances. Eyes sharpened to see by constant judging are trained to discover the real alternatives for action. And action is in turn reinforced by seeing and by judging.\textsuperscript{552}

\textsuperscript{546} “Además, la iglesia tendrá que articularse con otras fuerzas sociales que también buscan un cambio cualitativo [...]” L. Boff 1985, 26.

\textsuperscript{547} The two brothers later declared a four-step methodology that not only ended with action but also started with it. See the explanation in Boff & Boff 1987, 41: “Step zero. Participation: being involved in the specific problem concerning land in the area, working in rural base communities, being active in trade unions, taking part in harvests and other field tasks, participating in the struggles of rural workers, and so forth.” The following steps one–two–three continue to be “seeing–judging–acting”. This change may be due to the over-theoretical emphasis of the earlier method, or to the way Gustavo Gutierrez later emphasized the beginning of liberation theology in true, lived experience.

\textsuperscript{548} For an early assessment of Segundo’s hermeneutic circle, see Hennelly 1976, 716–718.

\textsuperscript{549} Segundo 1988, 14.

\textsuperscript{550} Segundo 1988, 14–15.

\textsuperscript{551} Segundo 1988, 13.

\textsuperscript{552} SDP, 60. Libanio’s work on spiritual discernment (=DE) was interrupted because the CRB XI Assembly needed materials on how to relate to the social reality. See DE, 10, in which Libanio
There is an emphasis in *Spiritual Discernment and Politics* that “we live in a real, factual world”. This does not seem to fit critical social theory and its notion of the emancipatory character of the social sciences. Yet the idea that “the only truth is that which can be verified” is presented in the sense of “making true”. We could interpret this in the Habermasian and not neo-positivist sense, but it is curiously very difficult to fit Libanio’s thought in SDP into any easy pattern. In claiming that we work out the truth in the factual world and that we thus verify it, was he emphasizing truth as “our (ethical, social, political) truth” in the subjective sense, or the truth of the factual world in the objective sense? What are the “mediations” adopted in the process all about?

We now run into a second kind of paradox. There is a truth about the factual world that can be verified, but the mediation is concerned with God, who is beyond the world as the Absolute. It is not our truth, after all, that needs to be put into practice, but the will of God. Libanio goes even further. He does not hesitate to apply a completely metaphysical terminology of different worlds, planes, and levels. Yet there is “only one reality”:

We use the term ‘spiritual’ here to refer to the world of grace, the order of salvation, the supernatural plane. There is no dualism here, but two distinct levels at which the one reality is interpreted. There is only one reality: grace and sin, the salvific will of God and the sinful opposition of antagonistic forces. This one reality can be interpreted by various tools of analysis. The one we are using here is that offered by theology. And our purpose is to accurately define where salvation is taking place and where an action is sin, so that we may adopt salvific mediations and not those that lead to condemnation.

mentions that the “third part” of the planned series (=DP) was published first. Yet, there was obviously no “second part”, only the first and the third, or DE and DP. Libanio mentions DP in DE, 10 n. 5. There is slight ambiguity about the theme of the XI Assembly: in DP, 79, it is called “Realidade do Brasil” (cf. SDP, 57), but in DE, 10, “Vida religiosa e realidade sócio-política”. The main thing was, however, obviously the challenges caused by the emerging political opening of the country in 1977. Libanio represents the verification thesis in this way: “Mediations have to be adopted in the concrete and with commitment. We live in a real, factual world. The only truth is that which can be verified (verum + facere = to make true). The adoption of mediations presupposes on our part an effective commitment of ourselves, in the development of a project, a cause, a movement.” SDP, 68. Emphasis added. Cf. the earlier quotation from the same book: “[...] our new consciousness is ‘veri-fied’ – ‘made true’ – in concrete reality [...]” (SDP, 3). On the “verum + facere”, see art. Evolução do termo evangelização (1975), 415.

“Every act of discernment seeks to perceive how, within a universal intentionality, to put the will of God above all else, so that his will becomes incarnated in the concrete. On the other hand it assumes an interior motive of generosity, unlimited in scope and with no ‘bargaining’ involved, toward God the absolute. In his presence, nothing avails except an attitude of profound readiness.” SDP, 31. Emphasis added.

SDP, 94.
He emphasizes the same unity elsewhere in SDP, too. There is “no dualism” but “two distinct levels at which the one reality is interpreted”. However, in this passage he refers to the reality in theological terms as “grace and sin, the salvific will of God, and the sinful opposition of antagonistic forces”. Even this [already] theologically interpreted reality could be “interpreted by various tools of analysis”. One is left with a thorny question. Given that a sociologist speaking of “the reality” is not speaking of grace or sin, is it possible to combine this theological reading and the sociological reading as easily as the liberationists would like?

Libanio follows the Maritainian route, distinguishing and uniting at the same time. It is a one and only reality “interpreted by various tools of analysis”, just as scholasticism sought to illuminate an object with different lights. Libanio supports the dichotomy between the ontological and the epistemological way of considering things. The idea of an ontological and epistemological “level” also found support within Marxism, which was likewise opposed to Kantian subjectivism.

Libanio makes a clear distinction between the ontological and the epistemological, referring to one ontological reality, the “unified view of history” in Gutiérrezian terms. Human beings and God’s salvation interact in this one history, and they can be epistemologically interpreted as distinct. This was what Libanio meant by the historical schema: “Human history and salvation are one reality.”

There are at least two different interpretations of human history: the political and economic interpretation is concerned with the human aspect, and the theological with the theological aspect. These are two different hermeneutic keys.

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556 SDP, 93–94.
557 One might think of Teodor Oizerman in particular. Following Oizerman, Kääriäinen (1989, 43) says of Soviet philosophy: “The basic question of philosophy is said to include two aspects: ontological and epistemological. The former is connected with the essence of the world, the latter with its recognizability.” Kääriäinen makes a critique of T. I. Oizerman’s The Main Trends in Philosophy. Oizerman’s rationale is indeed scholastic as he seeks to maintain objective knowability against all kinds of misrepresented forms of (neo)Kantian idealism. He ends up presenting “The two sides of the basic philosophical question” (Oizerman 1988, 54–137) as a duality of “the ontological aspect” (pp. 54–87) and “the epistemological aspect” (87–137).
558 “História dos homens e história da salvação são uma realidade.” DP, 51. The English translation is (SDP, 35) “Human history and salvation history are one and the same thing.” I find this translation difficult. Libanio says that they cannot be separated – they are “one” (uma). Yet they are distinguished and thus cannot be called the “same” In this sense, the translation introduces too much monism into Libanio’s thinking.
One key perceives only human actions, but the other key is given by revelation. Libanio argues:

Revelation is not the locus where the plan of God is described; it is the key for interpreting the plan of God that is happening in history, which in fact is history. [...] One key of interpretation might perceive only the causality of human actions in the interaction of political, economic, and other interests. But the same reality can be read in the light of revelation, giving it theological meaning, as a way of calling into question our concrete actions. This undertaking is the quest for the will of God.559

In this passage, Libanio it attempting to bring together an objectivist understanding of human history that could be “read” in the light of revelation. However, the very “reading” could also be understood a something profoundly subjective. Is this passage, then, an example of a scientific or hermeneutic tone, or both? Libanio claims that the human and historical interpretation is not subjective but objective.560 Yet the theological interpretation sounds very subjective:

Faith does not create reality; it only provides meaning. The reality of history lies in front of us in its incomprehensibility, in its absurdity, or in its theological meaning. This meaning is given to us, and we appropriate it, by a faith interpretation. Seeking the will of God is thus a faith-interpretation of a history that has already been read with the analytical instrumentation of the human sciences.561

In this sense, the theological reading implies a hermeneutic reading of historical data. In one sense, it comes as the second step “after” the scientific reading, but in the other sense it could be considered a complementary reading (“other reading”, “outra leitura”) of the same reality that the human sciences also aim to explore. The liberation theological method in *Spiritual Discernment and Politics* is therefore portrayed in two ways:

559 SDP, 35.
560 “This schema for understanding thus requires two basic initiatives. The first is the scientific reading of history to understand its structure. The second will be to read this structure in the light of revelation. In this sense, seeking the will of God in everything will thus imply the need for an attitude of scientific veracity and theological fidelity. One without the other is insufficient. It is of no use to seek the will of God if one neglects a scientific reading of history and is content with an unsophisticated interpretation offered by the dominant ideologies. Where this reading is falsified and ideologized, there is no way that the will of God can be read correctly. The historical schema is therefore profoundly exacting. It will not settle for subjective intentions; it imposes conditions of objectivity,” SDP, 35–36. The Portuguese (DP, 52) version is better: they are two different “moments” (momentos) of the same procedure, not two “initiatives”. 561 SDP, 35–36. Emphasis added. The sentence in bold is slightly different in the original Portuguese (DP, 52): “A fé não faz a realidade, mas o sentido.” This would be a less striking idea: the reality is there, but different and complementary interpretations exist side by side (sociological, atheistic, theistic...). In its English form once more, the reader is faced with a rather provocative statement.
1. as a **succession** of the objective (scientific) and the subjective (theological) readings, and

2. as the **co-existence** of two, complementary readings of the same reality, one of which is scientific and the other theological.

Sometimes the two models overlap, as is the case in the following chapter. One “confronts history” (objectively) in order to “perceive” its theological meaning (subjectively). However, it is the same reality, with a different “reading”:

> We do not picture ourselves confronting an eternal plan of God of which we are ignorant and which we wish to discover, but confronting a history whose theological meaning we wish to perceive. The will of God for our lives is revealed through the theological meaning of history. We are not dealing with a reality apart from history, but with another interpretation of history. (literally: ‘reading’. Não é outra realidade que a história. É outra leitura.).

This complementary understanding, or model (2) seems to differ from the liberation theological method in which the theological reading comes as a second step: it uses theological sources to subjectively interpret that which is objectively known – the historical reality. Yet, from the Bergerian sociological perspective, there can be no scientific and totally objective vantage point for an interpretation of human reality. That which is objective in the social reality is always an interpretation given by a human being. The Freirean pedagogy with its emphasis on consciousness-raising and the Frankfurt School also stressed the human element in interpreting the reality.

Formulating the relationship between the poles of the hermeneutical problem is not central, however. It is necessary to realize that Libanio later advocated a consistently contextual hermeneutics, which was critical of the most political-minded interpretation of the Scripture. The “essentially political” exegesis was heavily criticized in the Vatican *Instruction*, and Libanio seemed to accept the criticism. However, he was not completely satisfied with Ratzinger’s anti-

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562 SDP, 35. Cf. a more extensive quotation from the original DP, 51: “Encontramo-nos não diante de um plano eterno de Deus que desconhecemos e queremos conhecer, mas diante de uma história, cujo sentido teológico queremos perceber. A vontade de Deus sobre nossa vida revela-se através do sentido teológico da história. Não é outra realidade que a história. É outra leitura. Buscar a vontade de Deus não significa para nós entrar em relação com uma realidade transcendente à história, mas defrontar-nos com a história, iluminados pela fé. A Revelação não é o lugar onde está o Plano de Deus descrito. É a chave de leitura para o Plano de Deus acontecendo na história, sendo história.”

563 Referring to the *Instruction* (*LN*, X:5), Libanio implies that the criticism of the “extremely political” *leituras* is at least partly justified, yet calling this interpretation “radical” in his usual manner: “Há uma menção especial na primeira *Instrução* sobre a TdL a respeito da releitura
hermeneutic stance. The Congregation was combating “Bultmannian” liberation theology, but in fact waging a battle against modern hermeneutics in general.564

A genuine and truly “circular” hermeneutic circle is needed. On the one hand, liberation theology wishes to interpret its context in a theological manner, but on the other, the understanding of God is also modified by the impact of the context. Libanio argues that contextual theology “reads the context theologically, and the theology contextually”.565 Libanio’s hermeneutic theory is profoundly dialectical and based on the classic Hegelian ideas: it is always about dialectically overcoming the prior phase, and never about putting something in its stead, whether it be a radically political message or some old, dogmatic tradition.566 There is no fusion of horizons to the detriment of the other dialectical pole. As Libanio states that “by affirming the social aspect of sin, conversion, grace and faith, one is by no means negating its personal aspects”.567 In its core, liberation theology is an heir of modern hermeneutic thinking which does not compete with traditions but assumes them in a new synthesis. Libanio’s via media approach to liberation theology is considered in detail in Chapter 5. The next section deals with his social dialectics, which also has a circular character.

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564 This is evident in his evaluation of an interview of Ratzinger: “[…] o cardeal Ratzinger se deteve longamente sobre as vinculações da TdL com a hermenêutica bultmanniana, ao descrever-lhe a estrutura gnosiológica fundamental. Não se trata, no caso, da questão cristológica da ruptura entre o Cristo da fé e o Jesus da história de modo cortante, mas da estrutura hermenêutica. Mesmo que a TdL rompa com a ‘hermenêutica da hermenêutica” [allusion to European theology that only refers to the believing subject, TdL, 160–162], estabelecendo uma ‘hermenêutica da práxis’, situa-se, porém, no horizonte da hermenêutica. E é contra tal horizonte que se insurgem as críticas do cardeal Ratzinger em sua entrevista.” TdL, 247.

565 “A TdL estabelece com al contexto um ‘círculo hermenêutico’. De um lado, quer ler teologicamente tal contexto. Isso significa que procura ver nele o atuar de Deus e também as forces opostas a Deus. Mas de outro lado, a sua própria compreensão de Deus também se modifica pelo impacto desse contexto. Isso é o que significa uma ‘teologia contextualizada’: o contexto é lido teologicamente e a teologia contextualizada.” TdL, 175.

566 This is clearly reflected in the way Libanio calls the dialectical negation an “overcoming” (superação, supressão) in the Hegelian sense of Aufhebung. See TdL, 221, 276.

567 Libanio’s hermeneutics is a shining example of his dialectical thought: “As respostas procuram situar a TdL em relação dialética com as anteriores, de modo que o aspecto social não seja a negação simples e categorial dos aspectos pessoais, mas sua supressão, sua superação dialética. Em palavras mais simples, ao afirmar o aspecto social do pecado, da conversão, da graça, da fé, não se negam de modo algum os aspectos pessoais. Esses são retidos em sua positividade insuperável, indestrutível. […] A hermenêutica bíblica e dos dogmas também obedece a essa perspectiva dialética, em que as estruturas significativas até então dadas na Tradição da Igreja não são rejeitadas, nem descartadas, nem deixadas de lado, mas assumidas numa nova e mais completa síntese. Enfim, a TdL situa-se no horizonte moderno da hermenêutica. Tenta corrigir-lhe o excesso de subjetivismo individualista, abrindo-o ao social […]” TdL, 276.
4.4. Social dialectics: critical thinking, ideological criticism or a philosophy of history?

Libanio’s philosophical foundations are evident in *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*, and also in the trilogy *Formação da consciência crítica I-III* of 1978–1979. The main question concerns the feasibility of objective social science. In other words, can there be a scientific vantage point from which to build the basis for a subsequent interpretation of human history? Can this scientific data be used to criticize “subjective” ideologies, such as religious and cultural traditions? Is this critical thinking or scientism, pure and simple? Then, if the ideological criticism in Marxist terms is accepted, what happens to the Hegelian metaphysics of history?

In fact, *SDP* starts with a modern and Kantian idea, reminiscent of Habermas and Berger. An individual cannot be “simply standing in front of reality, as if in a position ‘outside’ reality, whence a judgment be made”. This would naturally be a “God’s-eye view” or a Kantian *Ding an sich*. Libanio uses slightly different words, stating that “this is the emplacement proper to God”. He keeps reminding his readers of the subjective side of all social interpretation, particularly in the three similar prefaces to *FCC I–III*. He repeats that only information as interpreted is truly human information.

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568 On the question of a “God’s-eye view” as an expression of metaphysical realism and as the opposite of Hilary Putnam’s so-called internal realism, see e.g. the articles in Clark & Hale 1994.

569 Libanio gives an account of this kind of objectivist fallacy: “Individuals perceive themselves as confronting that reality, armed with a rule that is predetermined and preestablished, according to which they are to orientate their activity. Such an understanding of discernment makes a number of false assumptions. Foremost among these is that the individual is simply standing in front of reality, as if in a position ‘outside’ reality, whence a judgment be made. But this is the emplacement proper to God, who is immanent and transcendent in time and space. And this is the great temptation of human beings wanting to be like God (Gen. 3:5), to be in that nongeographical locus from which they can unmask all reality to the point of full illumination and clarity, thus enjoying total clairvoyance in decision-making.” *SDP*, 9–10.

570 At the beginning of all his books in the *Formação de consciência crítica* trilogy is a passage that betrays a hermeneutic yet realistic epistemological theory. Libanio justifies realism and the possibility (albeit only a theoretical possibility for humanity) of perfect knowledge by the fact that the Creator has perfect knowledge of everything: “[...cabe refletir-nos sobre a própria estrutura hermenêutica do nosso conhecimento da realidade. A realidade é um dado, mas que só existe para nós, enquanto conhecida, interpretada. A realidade como dado absolutamente burto, sem interpretação, não é realidade humana. Numa palavra, não existe para nós. Por outro lado, a nossa interpretação não é decodificação perfeita, completa, idêntica à realidade. É uma interpretação, uma aproximação da realidade. É mediação que nos possibilita aceder à realidade, possui-la cognitivamente. Somente o conhecimento de Deus, porque é criativo, penetra totalmente a realidade. Nele, ser e conhecer adquirem a mais plena adequação.” *FCC I*, 11; *FCC II*, 11; *FCC III*, 11.
The trilogy FCC I–III is, as stated above, very Bergerian in outlook. Libanio refers to “the three moments of interiorization” (externalization, objectivation and internalization)571, thereby reproducing the core of the sociological theory in The Social Construction of Reality by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. He makes particular use of Peter Berger’s sociology of knowledge in FCC II.572

Naturally, Peter Berger’s sociology is founded on principles that are very different from an essentialist and objectivistic standpoint. In other words, if there is “objectivity” in the world, it is always man-made objectivity. Calling human reality objective would amount to Bergerian “reification” or Verdinglichung in Marx’s terms. Nothing, at least nothing social and human, would be just “out there” in the world as a Ding an sich, or an absolute, scholastic quiddity. The question of objectivity vs. subjectivity could also be called philosophical externalism and internalism, or realism and idealism.573

In spite of the objectivist and scientistic traits in SDP, Libanio also argued that social science was not neutral:

Scientists do not have simply an ‘epistemological interest’ to know reality objectively. Their analytical instrumentation has its origin in an predetermined place. It is not neutral. It is freighted with interests. Confronting a particular social reality as a system of dominant interests, its place of origin may be the dominant ideology or some divergent ideology. An analytical instrumentation deriving from the interests of the dominant ideology will have its scientific prowess oriented in the direction of detecting malfunction in the system with a view to perfecting that system, and not along the lines of a radical questioning or of uncovering the system’s contradictions and irreconcilable conflicts.574

571 FCC II, 69–75. The terminology is distinctly Bergerian (pp. 69–71): “A auto-identidade constitui-se, pois, através de três momentos: exteriorização, objetivação e internalização. Não são três momentos sucessivos. Mantêm entre si uma relação dialética. [...] Neste embate continuo com o dado objetivo, o grupo interioriza, internaliza, cria sua autoconsciência de identidade. Assimila por meio do processo de subjetivação os elementos objetivos, fazendo-os seus, internos a si. É o terceiro momento da interiorização, internalização.” This is a direct echo of Berger & Luckmann’s classic of 1966: “It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. [...] The institutional world is objectivated human activity [...] it is important to emphasize that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. [...] Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process.” Berger & Luckmann 1991, 78. Libanio mentions at the end of the passage (FCC, 116) not only The Social Construction of Reality but three other Berger books as well (A Rumor of Angels etc.) that had inspired him.

572 Libanio makes this clear in the second chapter of FCC II (pp. 61–116): “Esses subsídios colocam-se na linha de uma sociologia do conhecimento, inspirados fundamentalmente em P. Berger [...]” FCC II, 64. He quotes several books written by Berger in addition to The Social Construction of Reality (FCC II, 116).

573 In his article on Wittgenstein and Putnam, Michael Dummett (1994, 57) argues that the distinction between “realism and idealism” may well coincide with the distinction between “externalism and internalism”.

574 SDP, 48.
Thus Libanio made a jump from critical thinking to passing a value-judgement on sociology: some of it was perfectly in line with liberation, some was not. He makes the classical liberation theological distinction between “the functionalist tendency” and “the dialectical tendency”, which is exactly the kind of distinction made by Clodovis Boff in his dissertation, and used later by Leonardo Boff. The way out of the object–subject dilemma for liberation theologians was to choose science on ethical principles. This meant choosing dialectical i.e. Marxist sociology. This division between ethics and science was heavily criticized later. Liberation theologians, however, thought that any mainline sociology would run the risk of being ideologically contaminated.

When the “right science” was chosen, only the question of what to do with the scientific results remained. At the peak of his Marxist sociology, Libanio engages in explicit ideological criticism along Althusserian lines in *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*. However, this seems philosophical rather than scientific:

We define ideology here as a coherent set of ideas and values that perform the function of regulatory or normative principles for action or political praxis. In a given society there is always a complex of social symbols that take on the form of political, juridical, aesthetic, moral, philosophical, and religious concepts. [...] This is not a scientific, objective, matter-of-fact (sic! true, verdadeiro) universe. Nevertheless, it does not exclude truth. What is important is its pragmatic nature [...].

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575 *SDP*, 49–50; *DP*, 69–70.
577 Jung Mo Sung criticizes the very idea of selecting a sociology on ethical principles. In Sung’s view, this was fuelled by Althusserian positivism in Clodovis Boff’s *Teologia e prática*. Althusser was, after all, “the most influential theoretician of his dissertation” (Sung 1995, 130; cf. Rosales’ idea on p. 137). According to Sung, both Leonardo and Clodovis Boff made the ethical decision “external to science” (ibid., p. 129). Science was thus separated from the field of values and the “ultimate meaning” that belongs to ethics, philosophy, and theology.
578 “The seemingly obvious concepts run the risk of having no other content than what has been assigned to them by the prevailing (Port: *existente*) or dominant ideology.” *SDP*, 11; *DP*, 22. Cit. from Althusser & Balibar 1971a, 22: “On fait en réalité intervenir comme solution un concept qui [...] comme tous les concepts ‘évidents’ risque bien de n’avoir pour tout contenu théorique que la fonction que lui assigne l’idéologie existante ou dominante.” The translation “prevailing or dominant” it tautological and wrong; the Portuguese text closely follows the French.
579 *SDP*, 55; *DP*, 77. On Althusser’s list of ISA’s, see n. 210. The third last sentence in Portuguese is stronger: “Não se trata de um universo científico, objetivo, verdadeiro.” The word “verdadeiro” should be translated as “true”. However, the literal translation would lead to another problem, that of inconsistency. How can it be maintained that “it is not about a [...] true universe”, but that “it doesn’t exclude truth either”.
Althusser with his eight ISA’s (including the “family ISA”) went further, and this six-part list is from a 1960’s Althusser text. In fact, it is the same list as Marta Harnecker mentioned in her Los conceptos elementales manual. Libanio does not mention Harnecker’s political manual by name, but there is only a difference in order: “religious concepts” comes last, whereas it is fourth on Harnecker’s own list. The list was not originally hers, however. She adopted the “political, juridical, moral, religious, esthetic, and philosophical” ideas directly from Althusser’s 1966 text on cultural revolution. This was an early form of Althusser’s thinking on ideological state apparatuses.

Libanio refers to ideology as a social fact, the aim of which is to conceal (ocultar) the real contradictions in society. This is inevitably Marxist, but it sounds Feuerbachian and Freudian as well. The emphasis is on the ideological nature of religion, which would lead to a largely objectivist critique of it as false consciousness. Science is objective, but religion and the other “ideologies” are subjective and therefore less true. Libanio later took a much more critical view of the possibility of ideological criticism as such: an ideology can only be criticized

580 For Harnecker, religion was a means of making people bear hardship: “Los sistemas de ideas-representaciones sociales abarcan las ideas políticas, jurídicas, morales, religiosas, estéticas y filosóficas de los hombres de una sociedad determinada. Estas ideas se dan bajo la forma de diversas representaciones del mundo y del papel del hombre dentro de él. Las ideologías no son representaciones objetivas, científicas del mundo, sino representaciones llenas de elementos imaginarios; más que describir una realidad, expresan deseos, esperanzas, nostalgias. Las ideologías pueden contener elementos de conocimiento, pero en ellas predominan los elementos que tienen una función de adaptación a la realidad. Los hombres viven sus relaciones con el mundo dentro de la ideología. Es ella la que transforma su consciencia y sus actitudes y conductas para adecuarlas a sus tareas y a sus condiciones de existencia. Por ejemplo: la ideología religiosa que habla del sentido de sufrimiento y de la muerte procura a los explotados representaciones que les permitan soportar mejor sus condiciones de existencia.” (Harnecker 1975, 97–98, emphasis added.) Harnecker (see p. 97 n. 2) based the subchapter on L. Althusser’s article, Sur la révolution culturelle. Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes (1966:16), 5–16. The article was unsigned and Harnecker does not mention the writer. It is included in the Althusser bibliography in Majumdar 1995, 227.

581 “A ideologia é um fato social. [...] Tem por função, diferentemente da ciência, ocultar as contradições reais, reconstruir, num plano imaginário, um discurso relativamente coerente, que serve de horizonte ao vivo dos agentes, modelando-lhes representações sobre as relações reais e inserindo-os na unidade das relações de uma sociedade. Numa palavra, é uma teoria pragmática que visa a inserção dos membros de uma sociedade nas suas atividades práticas, a fim de que o corpo social funcione bem. É importante que a máquina social se desempenhe bem. Para isso, faz-se mister que todos se convençam de que ela existe para seu bem e quanto melhor ela funcionar, tanto mais felizes serão. Tal teoria pragmática pode conter verdades, mas não intenciona tais verdades e sim o funcionamento do sistema.” DP, 78; SDP, 56. The word “real” (reais) in the Portuguese original shows the Marxist critical edge. Ideologies cloak, or conceal, the real discrepancies in society in their false consciousness (SDP, 58). It is therefore necessary to abandon “the dominant interests” in favor of the poor: “The first level involves a choice of the social interests of the poor and oppressed.” SDP, 23; DP, 38.
in the light of another ideology. There is no objective science that would provide the starting point of ideological criticism.582

There is another emphasis in Libanio’s production, too. From the politically delicate area of sociology, ideological criticism, and open quotations from Marx and Althusser, he moves back to the philosophy of history. This is conveyed in the idea of reality as “God’s plan and design”, which also leaves room for human autonomy. He cites an anonymous Jesuit thought from the 17th century: *Non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est.* (‘Not to be limited by the greatest, and yet to be contained in the tiniest, is divine.’)583 God is unlimited and universal, but the realizations of his working in the world, the “mediations”, are always in the midst of the real world. If it was not for these mediations, the universal reality of God would be lost in the numinous sphere.584

This expression might help us to understand the “double aspect” of Latin American liberation theology, that of emphasizing God’s action and man’s responsibility at the same time. The Jesuit maxim is maximally ambiguous when it comes to the “nature” of Jesuit thinking as such, however. Do we have a “*finitum capax infiniti*”, or preferably a “*finitum non capax infiniti*” way of thinking? It seems that we have both, since God both can and cannot be contained in the creation.

Libanio discusses what is meant by the Ignatian idea of indifference. This has “nothing whatsoever to do with a lack of commitment”, but is a powerful sensation of God’s power above all things that will encourage us to a deeper commitment:

It is a sword that cuts deep to expose the inner core of reality, its reference to the Creator. Ignatian indifference is aware of the fact that our way will become vague and indefinite if transcendence does not imbue a concrete mediation. A tension exists between the transcendent and a “here and now” that could be different.585

582 “[…] não se pode criticar uma ideologia a não ser a partir de outra.” *ECNC*, 115.
584 “Without the universal, the minimum would be lost in its significance [sic! pro insignificance, Port. pequenez]. Without that minimum, the universal would be lost in infinity.” *SDP*, 43; Cf. the longer passage in *DP*, 62: “A intenção geral corresponde ao ‘non coerceri a maximo’ – não deixar-se coatar pelas grandes coisas do axioma espiritual com que se queria retratar o perfil espiritual de Inácio. E a mediação concreta corresponde à segunda parte do axioma ‘contineri tamen a minimo’ – deixar-se caber na menor coisa. Sem o universal, o mínimo perde-se na sua pequenez. Sem o mínimo, o universal esvazia-se no indefinido.”
585 *SDP*, 69.
The Jesuit mentality is also encapsulated in a thought put forward by Jerónimo Nadal: *contemplativus in actione*, or ‘contemplative in the midst of action’.\(^{586}\) This depicts Christian life as a process of ‘seeking God in all things’, *buscar a Dios en todas las cosas*.\(^{587}\) Libanio stresses both the immanent quality of contemplation and God’s transcendence in a dialectical unity. He expounds his own philosophy of history:

> History [...] is not a heuristic factor. It is merely a stage for human activity. The light that is shed on the course of history comes from outside, from the eternal plan of God, which one seeks through the spiritual discipline of discernment.\(^{588}\)

The gap between scientific “data” and the “key” supplied by revelation is bridged and one ends up with one single reality:

> We shall be dealing here with theological criteria. This means that discernment is to be interpreted with the key of faith. This is the key that is given to us by revelation; we accept it as a gift from the Lord, as truth, as holiness. Data deriving from our common sense and from the human sciences are reviewed (*são relidos*) at a secondary level through spiritual eyes. We use the term ‘spiritual’ here to refer to the world of grace, the order of salvation, the supernatural plane (*plano sobrenatural*).\(^{589}\)

Libanio stated sixty pages earlier in the same book that God’s reality was not “apart” from history. Using an ontological language, he now speaks of God’s “supernatural plane”. The apparently contradictory formulae of “one reality” and its “two distinct levels” must be understood as expressions of Libanio’s hermeneutic thinking where the theological meaning is transcendent to the reality. Libanio argues that the “levels” point to the traditional theological concepts of nature and grace, not to mere hermeneutics. But if grace and nature are somehow first distinguished, the notion of “one reality” by de Lubac and Gutiérrez would seem inappropriate.

There is a paradox in this respect. Theology is secondary in the epistemological sequence, because the reality is first perceived through common sense and science, and only secondly is it interpreted theologically or in the light of some other hermeneutics. Ontologically, however, faith seems to be the “higher

\(^{586}\) According to Libanio, in Benedict’s formula *ora et labora* “the accent falls on the *ora*, whereas manual labor, *labora*, is a kind of interruption of community prayer”. St. Dominic developed this in his *contemplata alitis tradere*, but it was not until Ignatius that there was a break from a spirituality that saw “prayer” as the essence of the religious life: “He takes as his ideal of contemplation ‘seeing God in everything’, being *contemplativus in actione.*” *SDP*, 33. In this dense text he gives both Ignatius’ and Nadal’s phrases, both of which point to a similar type of practical spirituality.

\(^{587}\) *SDP*, 33.

\(^{588}\) *SDP*, 35.

\(^{589}\) *SDP*, 93; *DP*, 126.
level” (nível superior) rather than the “lower level” (nível inferior) of politics.\textsuperscript{590} This thought is expressed in the passage in which Libanio interprets “the nonreductive dialectico-existential involvement relationship” of the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez in positive terms. Yet he goes on to suggest that the higher level exists only where the lower levels have been worked out.\textsuperscript{591} This, in turn, would be a functionalist solution to the ontological dichotomy.

Libanio did not wish to accept historical determinism. He mentions two ways of misinterpreting the flow of history: voluntarism and determinism. The former is based on the idea that everything depends on human good will, and the latter on the idea that history is governed by rigid laws that make human beings nothing but puppets on a string. Here he adopts embellished Harneckerian terminology:\textsuperscript{592} only a genuine “dialectical consciousness” will help us to discern social reality and to see that everything is based on human activity. He also makes use of Bergerian humanistic societal criticism:

There is no suprahuman power forging (Pt: que crie) human and social realities. All are the work of human beings. On the other hand, as humankind externalizes and objectifies its creations and structures and interpersonal relationships, they begin to leave their mark on the persons they contact, they begin to determine and condition them.\textsuperscript{593}

This kind of passage is an example of Libanio’s sociological thinking, which was profoundly dialectical: everything is made by human beings, and everything

\textsuperscript{590} “The Nonreductive Dialectico-Existential Involvement Relationship [title].” This is the view worked out by the theology of liberation, especially by Gustavo Gutiérrez, to explain the relationship between faith and politics, because none of the above approaches [Substitution Relationship, Synthesis R., Subordination R., Coexistence R., 85–88] are considered satisfactory. Faith, as a higher level, has a many-sided influence on the lower level of politics. It is the foundation of politics, its source of significance and dynamism working toward full realization, an enlivening and criticizing principle.” SDP, 88; DP, 119–120. Libanio still used this four-fold distinction in ECNC, 443–450.

\textsuperscript{591} Libanio continues: “The level of politics, however, is that critical locus where faith is verified. Faith does not exist except in the realization of lower levels, in this case politics, and the existence of this lower level is already a partial, provisional realization (yet quite necessary) of a reality that transcends its own boundaries (Port: the supra as limites).” SDP, 88; DP, 119–120

\textsuperscript{592} “There are two extremes [...] that a person makes history to such an extent that history depends on his or her goodwill, on his or her intentions, on his or her goodheartedness; or that history is so deterministically regulated that the human role is reduced to that of a mere puppet.” SDP, 10. Cf. DP, 21. I think this passage is an example of the hidden influence of Marta Harnecker’s political philosophy. Harnecker was especially concerned with the Scylla and Charybdis of “economism” and “voluntarism.” See Harnecker 1975, 237–247.

\textsuperscript{593} SDP, 10; DP, 21: “Tudo que existe na sociedade, todas as relações sociais existentes são criações dos homens. Não há nenhuma força supra-humana que crie as realidades humanas e sociais. Todas são obras do homem. Mas, doutro lado, desde que o homem exterioriza e objetiva suas criações, estruturas, relações humanas, estas começam a marcá-lo, determiná-lo, condicioná-lo. E toda mudança passará pela mediação desta realidade existente. Será o homem assim determinado que impingirá novas mudanças.”
in turn affects them in their daily lives. A human being always lives a life that is an uninterrupted dialectical process.

The sociological statement is found in the same book as the Thomist statement, however. The idea of “no suprahuman power forging”, or “creating” anything in history seems to be the exact opposite of what is said later in the book, that everything must be interpreted just as “the world of grace, the order of salvation, the supernatural plane”. The problem is not whether the sociological statement and the theological statement are “true” within their own language games, it is a question of their mutual relationship. In one, society and history are human, while in other they are the place in which God’s action can be detected. Which interpretation is to be adopted?

The ambiguity of the expressions in SDP make them difficult to read. It seems that Libanio wanted to engage in a double discourse that made it possible to engage in Marxist ideological criticism and at the same time to promote a Hegelian type of philosophy of history. The beginnings of the book also reveal Libanio’s knowledge of critical theory. All in all, Spiritual Discernment and Politics is Libanio’s most political book. The next subchapter focuses on how he criticized the Marxist notion of class struggle.

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594 Concerning Libanio’s dialectical view on society, see n. 570.
595 Libanio portrays Berger’s thinking as “circular”: exteriorization and interiorization are in constant dialectical interaction: “Uma vez exteriorizados, objetivam-se e se transformam em dados aptos a serem de novo interiorizados. Assim corre o processo numa dialeticidade ininterrupta.” FCC II, 71.
596 SDP, 93.
4.5. The question of class struggle

Libanio’s book *Spiritual Discernment and Politics* is not only very political, but is also critical of the major abuses of power in Marxist politics. He discusses the notion of class struggle, which is at the heart of Althusser’s and Harnecker’s Marxism – but does so in a critical tone. He goes briefly into details in terms of how “ubiquitous and unavoidable” the class struggle is, and then makes the remark that there must be no hatred of the dominant class, only love:

The major challenge to our discernment is to see the process of conflict between class interests through the eyes of charity, of transformative love, not allowing ourselves to adopt the ideology that in taking our position on the side of the oppressed we are expressing “hatred” for oppressors. [...] We have to be on the side of the oppressed in the sense of seeking to improve their condition.597

Libanio also considered the Marxist theory of class struggle in his book *Pastoral numa sociedade de conflitos* of 1982. He criticized the statement in Marx’s *Communist Manifest* that “the history of all societies until today has been the history of class struggle”.598 This kind of simplistic theory could not be used to interpret history, since it reduced everything to class struggle and excluded all the other factors that shaped history. Who was able, or allowed, to define which part of society belonged to the base and which part to the superstructure? Besides, there was necessarily a lot of “superstructure” information needed to run the productive apparatus of the “base”.599 Furthermore, Libanio’s philosophy did not allow a “total” comprehension of the reality, although he allowed the possibility of a “global” understanding (*quadro global*).600

This aspect of his thinking is very different from the general line of liberation theology. Take, for example, the idea of class struggle in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *Teología de la liberación*: “Today, in the context of class struggle,

597 SDP, 81.
599 PSC, 229.
600 “Não se trata de uma compreensão total da realidade. A diversificação das ciências mostra-nos como ilusória toda análise totalizante. Corre-se o enorme perigo de superficialismo crasso.” FCC II, 122. In contrast, “quadro global” or global understanding may help less sociologically initiated people to dare to analyze their lives by way of “small analyses” (p. 122–123).
loving your enemies means to recognize and to accept that there are class enemies and that they have to be combated (hay que combatirlos). The idea of “combat” arose from the fact that Christian love needed to take two forms. It was necessary to love both the oppressed by “liberating them from their misery” and the oppressors by “liberating them from their sin” and “combating them”, as the Italian Marxist priest Giulio Girardi wrote.

Libanio nevertheless considered class struggle a “datum of reality”.

There is an ecclesiastical reticence toward everything that involves conflict and class struggle. This is partly because of a mistaken understanding. It is often thought that class struggle is a tactic used to induce change, that it does not yet exist and that one tries to create it for the purpose of changing the socio-politico-economic situation. Rather, class struggle is a datum of reality (Port: um dado da realidade), interpreted by a dialectical sociology.

Libanio’s emphasis on the objectivity of class struggle is in line with Gutiérrez’s liberation theology. For both, it was a fact, or a datum. As such, it was “quite independent of our own emotional and volitional stance” because its existence “does not depend on us”. Yet, Harnecker’s manual portrayed it not as a mere sociological fact but as a line of action. It was clearly something that the communist party decided on behalf of the militants. In this sense, neither

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601 “Hoy en el contexto de la lucha de clases, amar a los enemigos supone reconocer y aceptar que se tienen enemigos de clase y que hay que combatirlos.” Gutiérrez, TL, 358.
602 “Hay que amar a todos, pero no es posible amarlos del mismo modo: se ama a los oprimidos liberándolos, se ama a los opresores combatándolos. Se ama a unos liberándolos de su miseria, y a otros de su pecado.” Gutiérrez, TL, 357 n. 56. Cit. from J. [sic! pro Giulio] Girardi, Cristianismo, pastoral y lucha de clases. In: La vertiente política de la pastoral. Quito, 1970, 98. According to the strong man of the CELAM at the time, Alfonso López Trujillo, the main ideologues of the Christians for Socialism conference in Santiago de Chile in 1972 were Hugo Assmann and Giulio Girardi. See Trujillo 1975, 69.
603 SDP, 80–81; DP, 110.
604 “El que habla de lucha de clases no la ‘propugna’ [...] La lucha de clases es un hecho y la neutralidad en esta materia no es posible [...]” Gutiérrez, TL, 355–356.
605 “To speak of class struggle is to try to understand social reality by observing the position that social classes occupy in the system of social production. This is quite independent of our own emotional and volitional status. Whether or not this struggle exists does not depend on us, but whether it is to continue, or to be aggravated, or to be overcome does depend on us.” SDP, 81.
606 “El partido debe determinar en cada momento cuál es la forma de lucha [de clases] que debe ocupar el papel principal [...].” Harnecker 1975, 209. Harnecker refers to the three different forms of class struggle: economic, ideological, and political (see p. 207). Religion is obviously included in the “lucha ideológica”, as is evident in the title of Richard & Torres 1975. Thus we are no longer dealing with Marx’s idea of a “natural” disappearance of religion, but an active fight against it, which was obvious in the Stalinist brand of Marxism in Allende’s Chile. Harnecker (1975, 202) cites Engels concerning this: “Fue precisamente Marx el primero que descubrió la gran ley que rige la marcha de la historia, la ley según la cual todas las luchas históricas, ya se desarrollen en el terreno político, en el religioso, en el filosófico o en otro terreno ideológico cualquiera, no son, en ralidad (sic), más que la expresión más o menos clara de luchas entre clases sociales [...]” Cit.
Gutiérrez nor Libanio followed the idea to its inevitable, partisan conclusion. The closest to partisan thinking was Hugo Assmann, who maintained that it was inevitable that one should end up with a new ideologization if one insisted on the scientific objectivity of theology.\textsuperscript{607} It was clear to him that one had to make an ideological choice. Curiously enough, both the “scientific” and the “ideological” stance found support in Althusser and Harnecker, or generally speaking in Latin American Marxism.

Libanio attempted to hold the balance between the “empirical” social science and Christian ethics in \textit{SDP}, and to bridge the no-man’s land with the concept of utopia: it was a driving force, a dream, and a motivator. However, “dogmatic and ideological” temptations had to be curbed because they were dangerous.\textsuperscript{608} He wanted to defend the dynamic, critical, and even eschatological concept of justice, and strongly criticized both the “totalitarian states of the communist type” and the Latin American states that had adopted the doctrine of National Security.\textsuperscript{609} The fact that his criticism did not stop at the latter set him far apart from the 1970’s liberation theologians. Consider a remark by the Cuban pastor Adolfo Ham, for example. Juan Luis Segundo quoted it, not as a comment made to Ham by other Cubans, but as a firm opinion: “Liberation is already a fact in the socialist countries.”\textsuperscript{610}

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\textsuperscript{607} “[…] when it [theology] tries to avoid this, perhaps in the name of a scientific objectivity devoid of ideological content, it fails, since the very process of avoidance takes on a de-politicizing ideological function. This in itself is an eminently political function, definitely connected with practice, but in this case in defence of the \textit{status quo}.” Assmann 1975, 58. On Assmann’s links in Chile, see n. 182.

\textsuperscript{608} “The general intention as a basic element in the structure of the act of discernment is a kind of utopian plan: even if it does not attain realization, there is an attempt to realize it, and this becomes a driving force for mobilization. It becomes like a dream of the future, which, in its function as a motivator of our action in seeking concrete mediations, takes on a critical function with respect to them, denouncing the present order (or disorder) and proclaiming what does not yet exist but which will be the new society. […] We are in serious danger when this intention takes on a dogmatic or ideological nature and loses its utopian aspect.” \textit{SDP}, 38; \textit{DP}, 55.

\textsuperscript{609} “Paradoxically, the static concept of justice is characteristic both of totalitarian states of the communist type and of authoritarian states whose primary preoccupation is ‘national security’. […] If ‘justice’ is the exact application of the law, if it is the guardian of rights that the law grants to the citizens, then how can we avoid the arbitrary positivism that we presently experience.” \textit{SDP}, 39; \textit{DP}, 57.

\textsuperscript{610} “Consider capitalism and socialism, for example. One cannot choose between them in terms of old and new. Both systems have their own history in different countries. Socialism can be ‘old’, as is evident from the remarks of a theological journal in Prague about Latin American liberation theology. After acknowledging the merits of our theology, it goes on to complain that liberation theology has not pointed out clearly that liberation is already a fact in the socialist countries (que la liberación ya es una realidad en los países socialistas).” Segundo 1988, 148–149; Segundo 1975,
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Libanio sought a balance that would make it possible to distinguish and unite nature and grace, politics and faith. He argued that he was not driving theology into any kind of new dualism, most certainly not to Platonic dualism. It was not about “parallel coexistence” either. Instead, reality was understood as the “one and only salvation history in which both human and divine freedoms are at play”. The church was understood as the “people of God” (“Povo de Deus”), and Libanio made his point strongly: “Without freedom, the persons involved cannot constitute a people. Without a people there is no church.” The problem, according to him, is that the human masses retain their present status and are not allowed to grow into a people. This could be perceived as an “anti-people, anti-Church” situation.

It was for this reason that the church was more and more concerned with the defense of human rights, which the Synods of 1971 and 1974 acknowledged. Conservative politicians and the media had undoubtedly misrepresented the church’s concerns, but according to Libanio there could be no avoiding the challenge: “Just because others may abuse a correct response does not mean that it should not be made.” He directed mild criticism toward the leftist groups, too. It was sometimes “contrary to the church’s wishes” that they used many of its political attitudes, by which he meant the issues of human rights and freedom. It is worth noting that liberation theologians also later emphasized the aspect of

170. Cit. from Ham 1973, 120. The article Segundo quoted was written by the Cuban Reformed pastor Adolfo Ham. Quoting his ideas could hardly be considered “remarks of a theological journal in Prague”. Ham pointed to the people’s reservations about the new theology. In its entirety, the sentence is this: “Some have objected in Cuba that the theology of liberation is ‘pre-revolutionary’, that here only a ‘theology of socialism’ makes sense since we are already living in a liberated country.”

611 “Não há uma coexistência paralela, pois não se aceita um dualismo, em última análise de raiz platônica. Entende-se a realidade como uma única história de salvação, em que estão em jogo as libertades humana e divina.” DP, 120 (my translation). Cf. SDP, 89: “Rather, reality is understood as a unique salvation history in which human and divine freedoms interact.” Cf. the positive evaluation of liberation theology in Tamayo-Acosta 1990, 60: “[...] la TL supera airosamente la clásica dicotomía entre historia de la salvación e historia del mundo y redescubre la fuerza de transformación histórica inherente a la revelación y a la salvación cristiana.”

612 SDP, 89.

613 SDP, 89; DP, 121.

614 These Synods took place in Rome. Libanio refers in EL to the 1974 Synod.

615 SDP, 90. Cf. DP, 122: “A Igreja não compreende hoje sua missão a não ser em relação a este novo tipo de ação que implica atitudes políticas. Estas [as atitudes políticas], aliás, podem ser a seu contragosto ser usadas até por movimentos, que se opõem a muitos de seus ideais. Isto não impede que ela assuma estas atitudes. Não é porque outros possam abusar de uma contestação justa, que esta não deva ser feita.”
justice and not only political choice for a certain social class as the content of class struggle and the option for the poor.616

This section has shown how Libanio walked the thin line between social Catholicism and Marxism, trying to make the most of both worlds. It was never an easy task, given the fact that the concepts were not just concepts but they corresponded to a socially and politically polarized reality. It was possible for him to maintain a critical and self-critical tone within liberation theology. As to the question of ethics in politics and also in “class struggle”, he was among the first theologians to seriously engage in asking what the ethical implications of the Marxist notion really were. This observation leads us to a deeper consideration of the discussion in which Libanio participated, which is the subject of the next chapter.

616 In 1987, Clodovis Boff (1987, 17) remarked: “[...] las exigencias de la justicia se imponen también a los pobres y a aquellos que se optan por ellos. De este modo, será imposible legitimar una OP [opción por los pobres] que se identifique simplemente con una moral de lucha de clase, donde se considera bueno y justo todo lo que favorece exclusivamente los intereses de una clase, en este caso la clase de los pobres. La idea de la justicia abre la comprensión de la OP, como la ética a la política.” He stated that faith and humanist or Marxist ethics and politics have the same ontological root but they are “dialectically” different in the concrete situation (p. 15).
5. The discussion on liberation theology 1977–1987

5.1. Mediation and immediacy: spiritual discernment in a historical context

The discussion on liberation theology naturally started as soon as Gustavo Gutiérrez published his book *Teología de la liberación* in 1971, and it has continued ever since. It was at its liveliest, however, in the early 1980’s when it was both opposed by the Vatican and also most actively used as a means of political motivation. I have chosen 1977 and 1987 as the beginning and end of the most intense discussion period. It reflects the history of Libanio’s production, which took a distinctly liberationist turn in the “political year” of 1977, whereas 1987 was the year in which *Teologia da libertação* was published.

I will begin this chapter with what was perhaps Libanio’s most spiritual book *Discernimento espiritual* from 1977. It reveals the personalist and spiritualist side of his thinking, which is in contrast with his own liberationist remarks in the same book and in an article published in 1982, which I consider in more detail in Section 5.2. Sections 5.3–5.5. cover Libanio’s criticism of liberation theology by way of synthesis.

In his study on the theology of revelation in liberation theology, which was published in 1988, Vítor Galdino Feller criticized Libanio’s concept of spiritual discernment. He pointed to certain problems that were evident in the section on spiritual experience in *Discernimento espiritual* (1977), beginning with the three theses Libanio put forward:

1. spiritual experience is possible as such
2. spiritual experience in fact takes place
3. spiritual experience can be recognized.617

He points to the fact that Libanio started with anthropology: the human being is “spirit in matter” (*espírito em matéria*). Liberation theology interprets this in a collectivist manner, so that “the possibility of experiencing the Spirit is not given

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only individually but on the level of the community”.

The reality of the experience is worked out on the communitarian level. Libanio was critical of the Catholic charismatic renewal, which he considered suspicious. He acknowledged the fact that the Pentecostal movement was growing nine times more rapidly than any other Christian denomination. The expansion had taken a charismatic form: there were no longer just Pentecostal denominations, but also charismatic groups within the established churches.

This growth had made it an “internal problem” of the Catholic Church because there was a Catholic charismatic renewal. This was “at least true of the USA”. According to Libanio, the charismatic renewal needed to be critically scrutinized because it could distract Christians from serious social problems. Yet one “may not question the theological fact that the Holy Spirit is active in the hearts of the believers”.

Feller contrasts Libanio’s view of charismatics with a more recent study on the movement by F. Cartuxo Rolim, conducted in 1985. He suggests in a footnote that it would be possible to interpret the Marxist categories as supporting Pentecostalism and the charismatic renewal, not only as criticizing them. In fact, Pentecostalism could be seen not only as a “source of alienation”, but also as “perfectly inculturated (inserido) in Brazilian society”.

One could also point to Leonardo Boff’s more positive evaluation of charismatics a year earlier: in his view, the movement carried a “special relevance for the whole church”.

Feller quotes Libanio’s concept of discernment as dialectical. On the one hand, the working of the Holy Spirit is transcendent and cannot be categorized as the action of an “agent or cause”. There cannot be any evidence (evidência) of

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618 Feller 1988, 252.
619 DE, 100–101.
620 After pointing to Libanio’s text in DE (pp. 100–101), Feller quotes the study written by F. Cartuxo Rolim (Pentecostais no Brasil: uma interpretação sócio-religiosa. Petrópolis, RJ, 1985). “[...] Rolim [...] critica e ultrapassa o determinismo presente no uso de conceitos de Marx nas análises da religião, para mostrar como, ao contrário, estes mesmos conceitos, ao esclarecer vários problemas comumente impostos de maneira arbitrária, permitem ver o pentecostalismo não como fonte de alienação, mas como fenômeno plenamente inserido na sociedade brasileira.” Feller 1988, 253 n. 45. The criticism of Libanio as “arbitrary” is rather severe. In fact, he may have been pointing to the fact that Brazilian Pentecostalism was moving toward an ever stronger theology of prosperity, which could become a problematic “spiritualist movement” (DE, 253).
621 L. Boff 1977, 238. Boff said that “the Spirit blows where he wills” and that charismatics could be known by the good fruits of their lives. However, baptism in the Holy Spirit should not be excessively emphasized (pp. 239–240).
622 “De um lado, temos que afirmar que o Espírito Santo é transcendente. Não pode ser classificado como um agente, uma causa no nosso plano categorial de agente ou causa. O Espírito Santo não
the action of the Holy Spirit. This is parallel to the decree of the Council of Trident on justification: no one can know with absolute certainty that he or she is in a state of grace.623

The dialectical paradox is this: although we cannot perceive the Spirit objectively, we can discern him “in the limitation of our psychic structures”. There are “more negative than positive criteria” for discernment, Libanio states. Given Libanio’s criticism of charismatic spirituality and his approval of social Catholicism, Feller concludes that the Holy Spirit’s action is to be discerned in the work of the church “in the world” and “through the liberating mission of the church”, which liberationists consider sacramental.624

This is, however, not a correct interpretation of Libanio’s concept of discernment. He was critical of the ideologization of Christianity:

[A] Christian does not accept any ideology as the global and definitive explanation of the reality. There is no irreversible historical phenomenon in the sense that it should be changed to the definitive form of society. There is for him or her no earthly eschatology that should not explode into the eternity of God’s love. The Christian is profoundly critical of the temptation of absolutizing the earthly realities.625

Here Libanio is working out an eschatological reserve and seems to verge on the famous “Protestant principle” of Paul Tillich.626 He gives a short exposition of the dialectic according to which only God is absolute and all the rest is “relative, fading, open to critique and subject to being overcome”. On the other hand, the Christian is conscious of the fact that his or her commitment can only be lived out in the concrete and fleeting reality, otherwise he or she would run headlong into “the most horrible alienation”. The discernment needs to take place within this

623 On this point too, Leonardo Boff proves more ecumenical: he mentions the studies by Fidélis Vering and Juan Alfaro (Alfaro 1972) in which the strict Tridentian denial of the certainty of faith is re-interpreted. It is possible to have a certainty based on hope. Boff follows Alfaro’s logic. L. Boff 1977, 163–164.
624 Feller 1988, 254. Feller does not seem to take into account what Libanio states on p. 103: some people invoke the Spirit to support their “spiritual and charismatic enterprises (empresas)”, and others in order to justify “their decisions, their mission and their Christian calling”. This could be considered Libanio’s implicit criticism of the liberationists’ mission – the Holy Spirit does not “choose” any of the charismatic/progressive sides in objective terms. For a fluent exposition of the medieval, Tridentian and Lutheran concepts of the spiritual experience, see Järveläinen 2000, 95–104.
625 DE, 109.
dialectic of the absolute and the relative. Libanio states his maxim: “Everything but God is relative. We can, however, only reach God in the relative reality. Which reality?”

At first this appears to be a functional interpretation: earthly realities are at the service of the transcendental experience. This experience, albeit transcendental and over-categorical, is still categorial on our experimental level. This is a modern application of the Thomist “empirism”, according to which the experiences of the human subject are transformed into sense-perceptions in order to be captured by the subject, in a process called *conversio ad phantasmata*.

Yet, even the most transcendental of the transcendental Thomists, Karl Rahner, found space in his thinking for a certain mystical experience that is not mediated by some object but grows out of the direct contact between the human spirit and God. This idea of “unobjective” spiritual experience appears in Rahner’s very profound article on spiritual discernment from 1956. In this sense, he was not limited by his own Thomist terminology in terms of seeing the direct workings of the Holy Spirit, which he did not consider as unhealthy spiritualism in the first place.

In *DE*, Libanio comments on this direct knowledge of God, which is depicted in the “election of the second time” of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In this, the retreatant makes the choice based on the different motions of the spirits in his or her soul. Ignatius refers to the “consolation without cause” that can only come directly from God, without any secondary causes. Libanio makes the logical

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627 “[O cristão] É profundamente crítico diante da tentação de absolutizar as realidades terrestres. É consciente de que só Deus é absoluto e tudo o mais é relativo, caduco, criticável, superável. Por outro lado, é consciente de que não pode viver seu compromisso com Deus a não ser no concreto, no caduco, porque do contrário não se compromete com ninguém e vive a mais horível das alienações. É dentro dessa dialética de absoluto e relativo, que vai acontecer seu discernimento. Tudo é relativo menos Deus. Deus, porém, só se atinge no relativo. Qual?” *DE*, 109.

628 Rahner 1956. Hilberath (1995, 114–115) mentions Rahner’s article as one, perhaps the only, example of transcendence that becomes thematical without categorial mediation: “Rahner scheint auch eine thematisch werdende Transzendenz ohne kategoriale Vermittlung zu kennen.” Exactly the same theme was dealt with by Scannone in his article. He emphasized that spiritual experience was not something “irrational” for St. Ignatius, but a “completely spiritual and intellectual activity”: Scannone 1978, 181. This article was published a year after Libanio’s book, but he does not mention *DE* at all. Could this be an *argumentum e silentio* that he disagreed with Libanio’s text? Be that as it may, Scannone deals with the same religious philosophical themes as Libanio, but in a slightly different manner. His main point is that Rahner’s real symbolism (Realsymbol) does not set the mediation and the immediacy against each other: “[...] la teoría rahneriana del simbolo, en la cual Rahner aborda una mediación (simbólico-real) que no se opone a la inmediatez.” Ibid., 190. Rahner’s “open” dialectic differs from the Hegelian “absolute” dialectic. Ibid., 191–192, n. 27.
criticism that today one can too easily succumb to saying that something is directly affected by God because one cannot find the cause. In his view, Rahner actually reacted to the challenge posed by the psychology of depth in an adequate manner.

The core of Rahner’s thinking, according to Libanio, is the following: the mystical experience or “consolation without cause” is an essentially different experience from consolation with a certain cause. It is an experience of “God as distinct from every singular object, insofar as He is absolute Transcendence, properly and purely divine”. It is “a presence of God as He is, and nothing more”. The original nature of the mystical experience is its “unique and unmistakable structure in which God is experienced in the pure openness of self, with a deep spiritual enjoyment”.

Libanio makes the point, however, that the two ways of understanding the mystical experience – the critical and the positive – are not sufficient. The third one corresponds to the true process of discernment in questioning what the spiritual experience really means in today’s world. Even the prolongation of consolation without cause may be negative in itself. Each consoling experience must be interpreted in its context. Does it lead to “courage, power, good things and happiness” and does it act “softly as the water that goes through the sponge”? Or will it break up the inner harmony and make the person sad, as the evil spirit does? Libanio argues:

We could conclude that this interpretation makes a distinction between the criterion and the interpretative key. The criterion is given empirically. It is recognizable and practical. The person who participates in the exercises can observe it in his or her own experience. The interpretative key is a value judgment. It is not empirical nor immediately recognizable. It is an instrument of interpretation, which Ignatius offers to the person doing the exercises for

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629 “Da ausência absoluta de consciência da causalidade segunda não se segue que, de fato, não haja tal causa; não se pode argumentar em favor do caráter divino da ‘consolação sem causa’.” DE, 159. This must be understood in the light of the whole paragraph in which Libanio stresses the “non-perception” and “lack of consciousness” of the psychological causes as insufficient “proof” of God’s workings. It is not a Feuerbach-type of psychological criticism of the existence of the genuine religious experience as such, which is further shown by the way he treats Rahner’s article (pp. 160–161).

630 “Trata-se de Deus enquanto se distingue de todo objeto singular, enquanto é Transcendência absoluta, própria e puramente divina. Não há percepção de nenhum objeto que precede à tomada de posição existencial de toda pessoa diante de Deus.” DE, 160.


632 “Mas já parece que ficou clara a sua natureza original. Sua estrutura única, inconfundível, onde Deus é experimentado presente na pura disponibilidade, com um profundo gozo espiritual.” DE, 161.

633 DE, 162–163.
understanding the theological meaning of the motions that he or she had learnt to distinguish in experience.\textsuperscript{634}

Thus, accepting the reality of people’s mystical experiences is not enough to account for their actual significance. One does learn to distinguish between the workings of the Spirit of God and those of the evil spirits by using the ethical key that Ignatius offered. It is ethical even if it appears to be psychological, because it makes a value judgment (\textit{juízo de valor}) of what is good and what is bad in the person’s mind (peace vs. chaos, etc.). It is necessary to pray in order to discover which of the alternatives is the one that one “feels” one should follow.\textsuperscript{635} Even this is not enough, however. One’s personal faith-life is immersed in a world in which a value judgment will inevitably be made. In other words, the hermeneutics of faith will necessarily lead us back to the realm of ethics as a kind of “feed-back” of the mystical experience.

This is why Libanio chose to use the Ignatian term of discernment. It is not only about hermeneutics as an interpretation of the sacred. It is also about the personal spiritual experience and the hermeneutics of this experience, and its ethical significance and application. No spiritual or “charismatic” experience will excuse people from making their own ethical choices. Yet, on the other hand, a spiritual experience can be of great help in determining which of the life-alternatives feels right and is worth committing oneself to.

Is Libanio involved in a circular argument here? After criticizing both charismatics and Lutheranism for subjective spirituality, is he not making a spiritual “feeling” the crucial factor? Consider the way he interprets the Tridentian criticism of Lutherans: the Council of Trident “[d]enies every empirical experience of grace that would be valid in itself and that would measure its value by the

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\item \textsuperscript{634} “Concluindo, essa interpretação distingue entre critério e chave de leitura. O critério é dado empiricamente, é reconhecível, prático. O exercitante o observa na própria experiência. A chave de leitura é um juízo de valor, não-empírico, nem imediatamente constatável. É um instrumental de interpretação que Inácio oferece ao exercitante para compreender o significado teológico das moções, o que aprendera a distinguir na própria experiência.” \textit{DE}, 163.
\item \textsuperscript{635} “[...] Inácio sugere o exercício das propostas alternadas. Consiste em rezar sobre as alternativas a fim de perceber sobre qual delas sentimos a consolação divina. Pede-se na oração que o Senhor nos faça sentir sua presença e sua vontade em relação às propostas vistas de modo alternativo oposto.” \textit{DE}, 164. Emphasis added.
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intensity of the spiritual experience”.636 This is the “agnitio experimentalis” of the Protestants, Libanio says, a “direct criterion” of justification.

In fact, Libanio clarifies his position as partly in contrast to that of Tridentinum. There can be no unquestionable “experience of having reached grace as a state”.637 Yet there can and must still be “immediacy” in our experience of God which, however immediate, is always mediated and does not exclude the co-existence of creatures.638 Yet God becomes transparent in our experience of the created world. In this, Libanio follows the transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner, for example. For both, the human experience of God is always a “mediated immediacy” (vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit), and allows the “co-experienced” nature of the religious experience.639 One could say that the key word in Portuguese of Libanio’s Vermittlungstheologie is “mediada” (‘mediated’) which is not “mediata” (‘mediate’): being imediata, it can still be mediada.640

The question of “mediated immediacy” lies at the very core of Libanio’s philosophy and theology. This section illustrates his critical attitude toward a charismatic feeling of grace because grace and the Holy Spirit cannot be felt with certainty. In this, he closely follows the Council of Trident, which nevertheless leads him to obvious difficulty as he tries to evaluate the normative character of the spiritual experience. We could conclude that what he denies in Tridentian terms he needs to admit in Ignatian terms: the Spirit can be discerned, and this spiritual discernment must be ethically judged. In this sense, the spiritual experience is sui generis, even if it happens at a certain time and place, and is always mediated and in this sense contextual.

637 “Esta dialética [de Trento] cria a impossibilidade da certeza de ter alcançado a graça, como um estado, mas não impede que se perceba a dinâmica do caminhar e a certeza dos chamados de Deus.” DE, 148.
638 “É uma certeza imediata. [...] Por outro lado, esta imediatez não é totalmente ‘imediata’. Pois a imediatez é sempre relativa porque não exclui a coexistência de pensamentos, sentimentos ou imagens [...] A transcendência de Deus, que é a condição de possibilidade de nosso conhecer e escolher, deve revelar-se à nossa consciência e em nossa experiência, tornando-se transparente nas e além das criaturas.” DE, 149.
639 On Rahner’s concept of immediacy, cf. n. 348. E. Schillebeeckx (1993, 70–71, 80) also refers to mediated immediacy and explains it in terms of the “dark light” parable of Jan Ruysbroeck. See especially p. 70: “Therefore in my view the whole problem of mysticism can be summed up in the term ‘mediated immediacy’ (though if mystics express their experiences of ‘immediacy’, analysis reveals that the immediacy is mediated, above all with John of the Cross and even with Eckhart).”
640 On “imediatez mediada” in Libanio, see also A vida religiosa no pós-concilio (1987), quoted in n. 338.
5.2. The liberation theological influence: God’s action and political analysis

Libanio’s book on spiritual discernment (DE, 1977) emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual experience that is sui generis. Yet, there is a 15-page part at the very end that shows how well he also knew liberation theological argumentation. The sixth section of the last chapter (pp. 173–187) is entitled “The objective space of election”, which refers to the objective, political context of personal ethics and spirituality. This could be considered alongside his article on the “discernment of pastoral practice” from 1982, which is as political as the final passage of DE.

Libanio mentions that the two books DP (=SDP) and DE were written at a politically volatile time in 1977. The Brazilian Conference of the Religious (CRB) asked him to write a book for their XI general meeting, which was to take place in July 1977. He was part of the theological reflection team of the CRB, together with Leonardo Boff and other influential theologians, and had meant the book on spiritual discernment (DE) to be the first of a trilogy on personal, communitarian and political discernment. However, the “reasons of the season” led to the publication of DP first.

It is clear that Libanio had prepared Discernimento espiritual long before DP because it is well structured and more consistent. Yet, it is precisely the inner logic of DE that reveals how the liberation theological passage differs from the rest of the work.

The political passage in DE points to the need to have some “objective” criteria for discernment in addition to the “subjective” criteria given by the inner motion of the human spirit. This would be the natural dialectical need because in each activity there is a subjective and an objective element. Libanio once again starts with a Bergerian sociological comment. More importantly, discernment

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641 A articulação da fé e o compromisso social: discernimento da prática pastoral. PerTeol 14 n. 32 (1982), 7-50. It was also published as part of Fé e política (FP, 71-116). The text in FP is used because it contains Libanio’s self-critical footnote (pp. 71–72, note marked with an asterisk *).
642 On the importance of 1977 for the political opening of the Catholic church in Brazil, see n. 534.
643 “Como vemos, os critérios são antes de natureza subjetiva: experiência de evidência, análise interpretativa das moções, razões iluminadas pela fé. Entretanto, o exercitante realiza tal discernimento dentro de um espaço objetivo, fora do qual todo o processo fica falseado. A própria percepção dos critérios subjetivos supõe um quadro objetivo que dialeticamente interage com eles.” DE, 173.
ceases to be a personal choice and becomes instead “a situational context in which the experience of the subject is determined within an objective space simultaneously as it is constituted by the subject”.644

The objective side of discernment is shown in its three different aspects: historical–existential, theological, and ecclesial. The existential aspect starts with the Thomist maxim *gratia supponit naturam*: the process of discernment is grace, but it needs to take the human limits into account. That which transcends one’s existential possibilities cannot be God’s will. The human being has his or her limitations that are also bio–genetic in nature. Moreover, if one is unconscious of one’s unconscious powers, one risks being caught by sudden outbursts of their impulses.645 In making this Freudian comment, Libanio was going back to the psychological territory he left in the earlier body text.646

In dealing with the theological aspect of the objectivity of discernment, he goes back to a neo-scholastic (or neo-Kantian) type of reasoning. Faith gives the “significance of the divine action” (*o significado do agir divino*) that is sovereign in itself. God’s action is very free, yet it can be captured by faith in a sacramental manner. We can get to the “thing” (*res*) of God’s action, to the “real datum” because God’s action belongs to the concrete reality (*realidade concreta*).647 We could similarly understand the meaning of Jesus’s life as we make a “dialectical game of the existence of Jesus and our opening in trust”.648 We should transpose the meaning of his action to the socio-political context of our time in order to

644 “Discernimento é um contexto eventual em que a experiência do sujeito se determina dentro do espaço objetivo ao mesmo tempo que o constitui.” *DE*, 173.


646 Twenty pages earlier (*DE*, 159–162) Libanio warned against psychologism: a mental motion is not always caused by the unconscious, it sometimes comes from the Spirit. Yet, in modern times, the interference of the unconscious must be taken into account. Cf. n. 629.


648 “Somente no jogo dialético da existência de Jesus, recuperada historicamente de dentro do contexto concreto de seu tempo, e da abertura fiducial de nossa parte, pode surgir o quadro objetivo, critério decisivo no nosso discernimento.” *DE*, 181.
capture its true interpretation, otherwise we would negate the historical meaning of Jesus.649

The “ecclesial aspect of liberating praxis” has the two elements of a discourse on praxis and traditional soteriology. Libanio refers to a “Church of Charity” in which the dogma is a secondary instance: “Christianity is praxis”, and the action is the first instance because “salvation is made not by knowledge but by love”.650 He gives a pragmatic interpretation of the Thomist *fides caritate formata* principle:

Therefore, the truths in Christianity are not salvific as truths only, but as lived out in charity – [the truths serve] as a means of understanding them. This is not about some modern notion. St. Thomas already distinguished very well between a faith that was informed by charity and another faith that was not. Even demons can have faith without charity. Therefore, it does not save. Only charity saves, and faith that has to do with the knowledge of truths participates in the life of charity and its power that transforms the reality.651

For charity to be really helpful to the suffering, it is necessary to make use of analytical instruments that show how human relations may be modified (*modificadas*). This social change (*mudança*) is demanded by the Gospel on the one hand, and on the other, the demand for change precedes our reading of the Gospel.652 In this sense, the Gospel becomes a motivating factor in the social process. However, its role is functional: every discernment must fit into the pattern of liberating change, as Libanio states categorically:

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649 “Qualquer alternativa que não traduzir em nosso contexto sócio-político o significado do agir de Jesus no seu tempo, e por isso, for uma negação do sentido histórico de Jesus, está excluída ‘a limine’ do quadro objetivo do discernimento. Não se trata de um juízo fácil, porque não estamos diante de um copismo material, mas de verdadeira interpretação.” DE, 181–182. Libanio acknowledges the impossibility of Leben-Jesu-Forschung and the individualistic limitations of the Bultmannian school, but nevertheless believes in the possibility of getting to the core of Jesus’s message as he “confronted the powers and classes” of his time (p. 181). In this, he shares the same concern as Leonardo Boff in his historical and existential interpretation of Jesus. See especially Jesus Cristo Libertador, L. Boff 1988b, 222–231.


651 “Por isso, as verdades no Cristianismo não são salvíficas, enquanto verdades, mas enquanto vividas na caridade, como momento de sua inteligência. Não se trata de nenhuma percepção moderna. Santo Tomás já distinguiu muito bem uma fé que era informada pela caridade e outra que não era. A fé sem a caridade até os demófícos podem ter. Portanto, não é salvífica. Só a caridade salva. E a fé, que se coloca na linha do conhecimento de verdades, participa da vida da caridade, de sua força transformadora de realidade.” DE, 183.

652 “De um lado, o evangelho é exigência de tal mudança, que de certo modo antecede a minha leitura do evangelho, é força inspiradora, dinamizadora e acionadora dela. Dentro da mudança se interpreta o evangelho e o evangelho interpreta a mudança.” DE, 186.
Another type of ecclesial stance does not incarnate the true demands of charity and therefore becomes misleading. Outside this stance, every discernment is compromised in its roots. [...] Concretely, this liberating praxis exists in the church that opted for the poor and oppressed. It is an option that is necessarily translated into an optic of interests and values.  

It is possible to evaluate these three political “moments” at the end of Libanio’s DE in the light of what he wrote on the first 172 pages. The strictly political language game does not seem to match the overall idea of discernment as a choice of “alternatives”. If it is categorically true that only the liberating praxis and opting for the poor were demanded by the gospel, there would obviously be no space left for another socio-political alternative. One would be dealing with a political situation that, in Lutheran terms, is a *status confessionis* in which the church cannot waver.

The ethical and moral character of this political decision is more problematic. Libanio’s liberation theological passage implies that a certain political option, the classical “option for the poor”, is necessarily the ethical one as it is translated into interests and values. What is lacking is precisely the discernment: how does one arrive at this? According to Libanio, the core of spiritual discernment is open to an ethical interpretation. Ignatius gave the personal criteria for discernment, but there can and must also be some communitarian criteria because discernment itself is an ethical option. However, to say that charity as an ethical principle “necessarily” implies a certain action leads us toward social determinism. This would be an ethical use of objective social analysis, which once more begs the Habermasian question: can sociology ever be free of an emancipatory interest?

In his article on discernment of pastoral practice in 1982, Libanio refers to a “theological constant” according to which there is a “transcendent meaning in history”. God can manifest himself “through human, historical and mundane realities and the human being can discern these manifestations”. He goes on to mention “God’s revelation that is made in and by history”. Exegetical terms


654 On choosing between alternatives in discernment, see n. 635.

655 Cf. the interpretative “key” of St. Ignatius, n. 634.

656 “No fundo, estamos diante de uma constante teologal que sempre reaparece em diferentes contextos, com diversos enfoques, mas que reflete uma dupla certeza. Há um sentido transcendent
help us to understand the ethical power of God’s revelation: it is from an “indicative of God” that people will arrive at God’s “imperative”.

Libanio also points to Oscar Cullmann’s book Heil als Geschichte to find support for the concept of continuous revelation. For Cullmann, however, continuous revelation belonged to the formative period of the Old and New Testament and did not extend to the present day.

Libanio refers to the two structural elements of discernment: “the will of God” and the “natural” reality that reveals him. God’s will is a Transcendent Datum, of which the natural, created reality is a mediation. He admits that several interpretations of God’s will are possible and that discernment is therefore needed. The “criteria” that he gives are no longer merely personal as in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, they are also communitarian.

He points to transcendence in Tillichian terms as the “ground of being” and our “last point of reference” will help in articulating the link between the historical reality and “the great salvation history”. Referring to the whole of Gaudium et spes of Vatican II, Libanio argues that the dualism between the natural and the supernatural has been overcome: everything in the world has become the stage of both salvation and perdition.

He then gives a political interpretation of discernment, which in fact contradicts the Ignatian “indifference” of personal discernment. He consciously

na história, existe uma real vontade de Deus de um lado, e, doutro, o homem não pode ficar indiferente a essa realidade. Essa experiência básica está na raiz do ‘Discernimento’: Deus pode manifestar-se através de realidades humanas, históricas, de mundo, e o homem pode discernir essas manifestações. E essa realidade não é sem relevância para ele. Não se trata de mero exercício de piedade de alguma escola de espiritualidade. Algo absolutamente facultativo ou mesmo de esmero espiritual. Estamos diante de estrutura fundamental do cristianismo, da Revelação de Deus, que se faz na e pela história.” FP, 73.

657 “Se estamos diante de uma realidade interna à estrutura da existência cristã, certamente ela sempre existiu [...] É uma contínua passagem do ‘indicativo de Deus’, que se revela, que se expõe ao homem nos acontecimentos, para o ‘imperativo’ de suas exigências para dentro da vida do homem.” FP, 73.

658 Libanio refers to Cullmann’s Heil als Geschichte in FP, 73 n. 4. In fact, Cullmann (1967, 59) stresses that there is “not an identity” between salvation and history. The idea of continuity is reserved for the Old and New Testament relation, and the question of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith in the apostles’ time. The other work mentioned in the footnote is Latourelle’s Teologia da revelação, which is also problematic. According to Latourelle (1972, 466), one must stress that the “scandal of particularism of the revelation is inseparable from its historization” (o escândalo do particularísmo da revelação é inseparável de sua historização). Not all history is God’s revelation, even if revelation is historical. The modernist crisis in the late 19th century (pp. 314–345) conversely illustrated the problem of speaking of a continual revelation.

659 FP, 83–84. The emphasis has shifted: the communitarian dialogue is now the “privileged place” for discerning God’s will in human mediations (p. 84).

660 FP, 85–86. Cf. H. C. de Lima Vaz’s interpretation of human history as the place in which one works out either one’s salvation or condemnation (Vaz 1968, 265, cited in n. 380).
interprets indifference as “exemption” (isenção) and neutrality, and neutrality does not correspond to the revelation. It is necessary to opt for the objective interests of the popular classes. One can only be indifferent and exempt on the side that God has chosen. Indifference is possible only as a “passion” for the poor ones that God loves and for whom Christ came to proclaim the good news.

Libanio defends the use of “Marxist analysis” in the article. It is not a theoretical question like the Marxist–Christian dialogue in Salzburg or Marienbad. One could understand without any scientific analysis that the social situation in Brazil was “monstrously unjust” and humanly impossible for the unprivileged classes. Yet, common-sense arguments are not possible, which is why there is discernment as one “reads the social reality analytically and as seriously and scientifically as possible”, and links this reading with the word of God that lives in the church. This sociological reading helps the pastoral agent of the community to realize how God has been acting in the world throughout history (ao longo da história).661

In this sense, sociological analysis and theological interpretation can be brought together. The datum of faith needs to be confronted with a social mediation that transforms the reality.662 One needs the light of the social sciences and the ethical awareness of faith, for this is “directly the place of praxis and its dialectical relationship with faith”. With this comment, Libanio comes close to the emancipatory ethic of Habermas’ social theory. In fact, Marxist analysis is not important only because it is analytical and scientific. It shares the transforming interest and the ethical consciousness that Christians also have. This is an example

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661 “Como vimos, a estrutura do discernimento consiste na articulação da realidade social, lida analiticamente de modo sério e científico enquanto possível e a Palavra de Deus viva na Igreja. Depois que o agente comprometido com as classes emergentes populares se fez uma compreensão mais clara dos mecanismos sociais em ação no nosso contexto histórico, volta-se, então, para a Revelação de Deus continuada na comunidade eclesial, em que está atuando. Esse ver recebe uma leitura teológica em confronto com o agir de Deus no mundo, codificado no Antigo Testamento e levado à sua expressão mais perfeita em Jesus Cristo, como nos relata o Novo Testamento. Essa Tradição vem sendo enriquecida com a longa prática eclesial de fé, que interpreta essa ação de Deus ao longo da história.” FP, 95–96.

662 “Trata-se de confrontar com o dado da fé a mediação social que transforma a realidade, analisada na primeira articulação, sob a dupla luz das Ciências do Social e da fé. Estamos diretamente no campo da práxis e sua relação dialética com a fé.” DE, 98.
of a humanist interpretation of Marxist sociology. Christians and Marxists share in the same *humanum*.663

On the question of God’s action in the world, this God-talk is diametrically opposed to the thoughts Libanio had expressed before. When he wrote in *DE* that “the Holy Spirit is transcendent”, he meant that the Holy Spirit could not be considered “an agent or cause” of our categorial world.664 In other words, we cannot receive any objective knowledge of the Spirit, and discernment as a spiritual and ethical procedure is necessarily personal. However, this is different in the political part of the book and in his article on discernment in pastoral practice from 1982, in which he suggests that “there is transcendent meaning in history”, and that one can indeed receive objective information concerning God’s will and God’s action as a “res”. These positions are mutually exclusive: either God is an “agent” and “acts” in the world, or he does not.

An analysis of this evident contradiction is to be found in Trutz Rendtorff’s early (1968) analysis of the Latin American theology of revolution. According to Rendtorff, the concept of *koinonia* in this theology was based on **two kinds of action**: that of the Christian community, which moves and is steadily renewed, and “God’s action in history” in which the community participates.665 Rendtorff was critical of this theological characteristic in that it started as a criticism of the current Christianity and society but then purported to transcend to the superior level (*Obersatz*) of God’s action. This theological idea was free from the *status quo*, but it went beyond all reflective critique: it was itself the critical instance of everything.666 In *TdL*, Libanio did dismiss the theology of revolution as a “typical

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663 “Naquilo que a ideologia tem de autenticamente humano, nisso ela comunga com a fé cristã. E quando a fé, em expressões históricas, nega esse ‘humanum’, pode ser com justeza criticada por esse ‘humanum’ da ideologia.” *FP*, 63.
664 *DE*, 101; cited in n. 622.
product of the rich countries.” 667 However, this must be considered a church-political manoeuver because it was born on Latin American soil as was liberation theology. 668 As Rendtorff states, the Latin Americans and their representative in the Geneva conference, Richard Shaull, were “exemplary” theologians of revolution. 669

In his self-criticism of his article on discernment in pastoral practice, Libanio points to the fact that it was written soon after Puebla. As noted by the commentators, the Puebla meeting was a disappointment to many progressives. Later on, the Polish Pope John Paul II came to realize many fears of a “return to a great discipline”. It could be assumed that Libanio’s own political period was linked to the time around Puebla, which inspired a stronger commitment. He mentions the letter written by the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe in December 1980, “On Marxist Analysis”, as a reason behind his own self-criticism. 670 Because the Vatican instruction Libertatis nuntius came out in 1984, one could conclude that he grew more critical of liberation theology after then. This 1985 self-criticism was meant to prove his return to a less political line.

It is against this background of Libanio’s own political theological statements that one could consider what he later said about liberation theology. The obvious source is the book of the same name, Teologia da libertação (1987), which is the main reference in the next few sections.

667 After further criticizing Hugo Assmann as “the theologian closest to the theology of revolution”, he goes on to say that Assmann “decidedly marks his distance from it” and “does not accept the filiation” [i.e. that LT should be a child of the theology of revolution]. Libanio’s conclusion is this: “Portanto, a teologia da revolução é típico produto de país rico e não responde de modo nenhum à problemática latino-americana.” TdL, 39–42.

668 “Denn die einzige, in einem gewissen Sinne als präzise anzusprechende Argumentation findet sich in der Ökumene in den Beiträgen der Südamerikaner, die gerade dadurch als eine geschlossene Gruppe auffielen, dass sie (und wie sie) die Revolution theologisch, politisch und soziologisch thematisierten und dieses Thema anderen aufzunötigen verstanden.” Rendtorff 1968, 42–43.


670 See FP, 71–72 note marked “**”. What Libanio does not explain is the fact that the article was published in the Perspectiva Teológica of the Jesuits after Arrupe’s letter. He soon reacted to Arrupe’s letter in 1982. See PSC, 122–132, 222–233 (“Conflito de classes”, “Luta de classes’”). He mentions this in FP.
5.3. The concept of liberation theology in Teologia da libertação (1987)

Libanio’s book on liberation theology, Teologia da libertação, gives extensive information on its history, and especially its content and methodology. It is important to know what the term “liberation theology” as such means. According to Libanio, theologians took the term “liberation” and used it in a different, theological context. It was detached from its economic and political soil, and helped Christians to arrive at a new historical consciousness. The oppression–liberation binomen was the hermeneutic key (chave hermenêutica) to interpreting the flow of history, past, present and future. Libanio refers to the way social scientists spoke of oppression and liberation in the early half of the 1960’s, and in the latter half of the decade the language spread among many Christians as well.

G. W. F. Hegel argued in his speculative philosophy that world history was a history of growing freedom, led by the absolute Spirit. In this sense, there was nothing original in speaking of world history as “liberation”. Further, Hegelianism acknowledged the possibility of understanding the workings of Providence in history. Hegel said:

Christians, then, are initiated into the mysteries of God, and this also supplies us with the key to world history. For we have here a definite knowledge of providence and its plan. It is one of the central doctrines of Christianity that providence has ruled and continues to rule the world, and that everything that happens in the world is determined by and commensurate with the divine government.

The Absolute Spirit is free and wants to realize its substance as each individual is liberated. In terms of its content, liberation theology is therefore profoundly Hegelian. Manuel A. Vaszuez’s study on base communities sheds light on the many ways in which liberation theology feeds on the modern project of

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671 TdL, 147–148.
673 Hegel 1975, 41. Hegel (p. 30) confronted those who said that “this approach to history is an a priori procedure, and intrinsically wrong” with these words: “Admittedly, philosophy does follow an a priori method in so far as it presupposes the Idea. But the Idea is undoubtedly there, and reason is fully convinced of its presence.”
674 Hegel 1975, 55.
rational understanding, practical reason, and change. The most progressive theologians helped the social Catholics to develop a historical consciousness in the early 1960’s. The most influential of them was the Jesuit philosopher Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, whose thinking had strong Hegelian and Platonic roots.

Libanio did not see a problem in speaking of liberation in theological terms. Since the early days of human history, theology had adopted terminology from various sciences, and everyday thinking and experiences. He mentioned drama, sports and military language as examples of non-religious material that had undergone a creative “semantic transformation” in theology. This is the way in which St. Thomas Aquinas used Aristotelian physics and cosmology, and Anselm of Canterbury cited Germanic law. The Bible itself features many figures of speech as it refers to human life. Libanio argued that there was a lot of theological potential in these other languages as people sought to avoid “the equivocity that causes misunderstanding and the impoverishing univocity”, in other words the excesses of personalism and politicization.

Liberation theology “snatched” liberation from the strictly political arena and took it into a specifically theological camp. This is what the formula “in the light of the revelation” means. Human experience is always interpreted in the light of Jesus’ life and God’s saving action in history. There is a supra-historical level of liberation as well. Events of human liberation are true mediations of God’s salvation, even though they are imperfect.

Liberation theology was built on the unity of secular history and salvation history, which in turn mirrors the unity of creation and redemption: the Creator and the Redeemer are one. Libanio followed the line of the Second Vatican Council, but went even further. Salvation history assumes all of human history in

675 Vásquez 1998, 19–45; see Vásquez’s comment on the “quasi-teleological reading of history” (p. 27) and the way that “liberation theology sacralizes and cosmicizes the Hegelian–Marxist reading of social conflict” (p. 43).
676 Bruneau (1974, 95) mentions Vaz as the first of the “very progressive clergy”. Libanio (TdL, 71–72) mentions Vaz’s interpretation of historical consciousness that “transcends the world precisely as it transforms and humanizes it” and helps Christians to be part of the “ultimate signification of the world”. Libanio lived in the same Jesuit institution as Vaz for more than 30 years, and Vaz was Libanio’s early teacher of philosophy – as well as the mentor of a whole generation of theologians and cariocas of Catholic Action.
677 “Epistemologicamente supera-se tal jogo de transposição apelando para a analogia, que capta precisamente nos conceitos de diversas ciências aquilo que os une entre si, distanciando-se de uma equivocidade provocadora de enganos e uma univocidade empobrecedora.” TdL, 149.
678 TdL, 151–152.
679 TdL, 152.
its unity. This leads to the realization that “human realities become revealing (reveladoras) of God’s salvific plan”. The reality is a sacramental reality in which there is God’s acting presence. God’s saving plan (designio) is revealed. Libanio argues that the sociological theory of dependence can also reveal God because it is part of these human realities. He states that this principle is based on the logos spermatikos of the Christian Stoic philosophers: all human knowledge has these “seeds of the Word”, which the “theologian may pick up in his or her theology in the form of theoretical content”.

Libanio was critical of the theory of dependence. He lists ten reasons why it was, in fact, outdated, although he had also praised it fifty pages before as “a salvific instrument that reveals God and can thus be theologized”. The theologizable quality of sociological theory arises from the unity of creation and salvation. Salvation history comprises all of human history which is sacramental. In this idea Libanio follows the magnum sacramentum rationale presented by Edward Schillebeeckx, for example.

According to Libanio, “every human reality is theologizable” and the hermeneutic frame of reference will determine in the last instance what is theological and what is not. This means hermeneutic mediation will make something theological even if it was not so in the first place:

680 “O Deus criador e redentor é o mesmo. A unidade da história da salvação assume para dentro de si toda a história humana, de modo que as realidades humanas se tornam reveladoras do designio salvífico de Deus. Ora, a ‘teoria da dependência’, também ela, faz parte dessa história humana, sacramental, que serve para revelar-nos a presença atuante de Deus. É instrumento revelante salvífico de Deus e pode então ser teologizado. Em outras palavras, todo o saber humano político, social, econômico, histórico está semeado de ‘germens de Verbo’, de modo que o teólogo pode recolher em sua teologia tais sementes em forma de conteúdos teóricos.” TdL, 150.

681 After listing the eight characteristics of the theory, Libanio lists his ten principal objections to it. Of these, the fourth (“d. O Brasil tem-se aprofundado na dependência, mas mesmo assim tem tido resultados expressivos na linha do desenvolvimento. Já a oitava economia do mundo [...]” TdL, 202) caught Sung’s (1995, 53) attention. It concerns the fact that the dependence of Brazil did not hinder its development as the theoreticians had predicted. In the future, too, Libanio envisages for Brazil a remarkable globalized development “tipo Canadá”. Thus, it is surprising that on the same page Sung should put the words Libanio used to describe the theory (TdL, 202, “f. [...] Numa palavra, sem libertação dessa situação estrutural de dependência não há desenvolvimento possível.”) into his own mouth. It was not Libanio’s “conclusion” (Sung: conclui) but clearly part of his objective presentation of the theory. Because it is followed by a strong criticism, we must regard Sung’s interpretation as incorrect.

682 Cf. n. 680.

683 Libanio refers to Schillebeeckx’s concept of Christ as primal sacrament (Ursakrament) in Estrutura sacramental da salvação III. Atualização 4 n. 27 (1972), 105-120, 112. Cf. the original “Ursakrament” in Schillebeeckx 1965a, 23–49. On Leonardo Boff’s idea of sacramentality, see Nordstokke’s comment in n. 893.
Another conclusion of this general hermeneutic reflection is that it is the theological hermeneutic mediations that in the last instance (*em última instância*) define the theological quality of the discourse, and not the reality that is interpreted. This may or may not already be theological. All human reality is theologizable. The non-theological quality of a discourse must be measured, not with respect to what is being talked about, but in the light of what it is being reflected on and talked about.684

Libanio also employs a “real life” argument. He criticizes Central European theologians for only taking liberation as a theme for which they then seek “an essential truth and a fundamental concept”, while for Latin Americans it is about “a historical process and a historical fact”.685 He stresses the reality of this fact by saying that they, unlike “the Central Europeans”, seek it not in documents but in the midst of real life and communitarian activity. After this, the revelation that opens up the horizon as the last point of reference is encountered.686 However, it remains ambiguous what in the revelation actually corresponds to social liberation. All in all, liberation theology came into existence as the concrete practices of liberation needed to be interpreted in theoretical terms.

There was an obvious anti-Hegelian element in Libanio’s concept of liberation theology. He refers to the *kenosis* of Christ in *TdL* and in *SDP*, by which he means that Jesus’s life was first and foremost an emptying. God was not recognized in glory but in abasement, “in contradiction to the real misery that has come about”, in rupture and *sub specie contrarii*, not in continuity with the reality.687 He represents the clear *imitatio Christi* ideal: the liberation theological

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684 “Outra conclusão dessa reflexão hermenêutica geral se impõe no sentido de que são as mediações hermenêuticas teológicas que definem em última instância a qualidade teológica de um discurso, e não a realidade que é interpretada. Esta pode ser já teológica ou não. Toda realidade humana é teologizável. A qualidade não-teológica de um discurso deve ser medida, não a respeito do que se fala, sobre que se reflete, mas à luz do que se reflete e se fala.” *TdL*, 217. In particular, he mentions that theologizability is a quality that pertains to historical events: “É possível teologizar sobre os eventos históricos.” *TdL*, 223. Cf. “Tudo é teologizável.” C. Boff, *TP*, 85. See n. 131.

685 Uskali Mäki (1989, 95) questioned whether the “process” was part of the world or a super-category beyond the world. Only an understanding of “process” as categorial would allow it to be considered a “fact” as Libanio does – but what would happen to the theological interpretation? See also n. 454.

686 “A fonte semântica primeira não são os documentos (perspective centro-européia), mas a vida, as práticas sociais. E depois sim, como ultimo ponto de referência, contra o qual se bate o conceito de libertação nascido da prática, numa verdadeira refundição de horizonte, é a Revelação.” *TdL*, 151.

687 “Encontra-se Deus em contradição com a miséria real acontecida. Estabelece-se um discurso muito mais de ruptura, ‘sub specie contrarii’, que de continuidade com a realidade.” *TdL*, 161. Libanio does not reflect the discrepancy between *sub specie contrarii* thinking and *analogia entis*. If liberation theology positively begins with “God’s action in the world”, how will the negative theology of the cross relate to this?
base communities, or the church of the poor, make it possible to imitate Jesus and his experience of God.\textsuperscript{688}

Libanio’s theology of the cross has a close resemblance to that of another liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino. He has consistently spoken of the cross as God’s revelation \textit{sub specie contrarii}.\textsuperscript{689} God also needs to be perceived through the \textit{via negativa}, not only through the “more” of analogical reasoning and \textit{via eminentiae}. Contrary to human reasoning, the cross is an element of “less”.\textsuperscript{690}

Sobrino’s christology was heavily criticized by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for being too anthropological. It questioned the \textit{homo verus}\textsuperscript{691} formulation and the idea that “salvation consists in the fact that what God wants human beings to be has appeared on earth”.\textsuperscript{692} In the same chapter, Sobrino also made a very ethical interpretation of Christianity, which was based more on “exemplary causality” than “efficient causality”.\textsuperscript{693} The criticism was severe: “This reduces religion to moralism.”\textsuperscript{694}

However, one could and indeed should see these statements in connection with other, more balanced ones. According to Sobrino, Jesus’ cross signifies that God has “irrevocably approached this world” and that he is “with us” and “for us”.\textsuperscript{695} Liberation theology, in Jesuit terms, is contemplation lived in the praxis of following Christ. In addition to the “less” of suffering and the cross, it is about

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\textsuperscript{688} “Sem dúvida, a experiência de Deus no abatimento, no aniquilamento, na \textit{kenosis}, foi um dos elementos mais originais da experiência de Jesus. A associação espontânea entre Deus e Poder, entre Deus e Glória, Esplendor, nunca nos permitiria descobrir a Deus na fragilidade, no pequeno, no ultimo do mundo. A vida de Jesus, na síntese do hino pré-paulino, foi uma \textit{kenosis} (Fl 2,5–11). Ninguém mais que o pobre em nosso continente é esse ultimo, esse ser kenótico. Experimentar Deus nele é imitar a Jesus na sua experiência de Deus. Por isso, a Igreja dos pobres oferece um contexto histórico para recriar a experiência de Deus, originária de Jesus.” \textit{TdL}, 112.

\textsuperscript{689} Sobrino 1977, 168; Sobrino 1991, 316.

\textsuperscript{690} Sobrino 1991, 315–316. Sobrino (1977, 167) accepted Bonhoeffer’s idea that “only a God who suffers can save us”.

\textsuperscript{691} Congregation 2006, VI:10.

\textsuperscript{692} The Congregation did not quote the whole passage: “Puede preguntarse ahora qué importancia salvífica tiene para nosotros que Jesúis sea ‘lo grato a Dios’. Pues bien, si esto que es grato a Dios no es algo arbitrario, ni mucho menos cruel, entonces, lo salvífico consiste en que ha aparecido sobre la tierra lo que Dios quiere que sea el ser humano: ‘ya se te ha declarado, oh hombre, lo que es bueno y lo que el Señor desea de ti: que actúes con justicia, que ames con ternura y que camines humildemente con tu Dios’ (Miq 6,8).” Sobrino 1991, 293.

\textsuperscript{693} Sobrino 1991, 294.

\textsuperscript{694} Congregation 2006, VI:10.

\textsuperscript{695} “Qué dice, en definitiva, la cruz de Jesús? Dice que Dios se ha acercado irrevocablemente a este mundo, que es un Dios ‘con nosotros’ y un Dios ‘para nosotros’.” Sobrino 1991, 296.
Deus semper maior. In following Christ, it becomes possible to see not only sin and injustice, but also love, hope, the Son of man, and God.696

Libanio’s concept of liberation theology is concerned less with Deus absconditus than with Deus revelatus. The reader has the impression that the positive hermeneutic function is more urgent than the theology of the cross based on kenosis. There is a mystical connotation here, which is directly linked to Teilhard de Chardin. Libanio wonders whether liberation theology could interpret all of human reality and history, revealing the latent reality (latência) of the history of humanity. Liberationist hermeneutics would interpret this latency as the continuous process of liberation.697 The Christian would be able to detect its “Christic structures” (estruturas crísticas)698, which refer to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s notion of Christ as the Center of the world. He is the center of the personality and the consciousness in the world.699 H. C. de Lima Vaz’s interpretation of Teilhard in the 1960’s emphasized Christ as the “Omega point” of the world, but this was no naturalism. It also stressed the theological and revelation-based character of the interpretation.700

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696 “Dios es entonces el Dios mayor que todo. [...] Lo que san Ignacio pretende es apuntar el único lugar que permite una contemplación en acción. Ese lugar no es otro que el seguimiento de Jesús. Dentro de ese seguimiento la historia puede ser contemplada como historia de Dios, pero no fuera de él. El seguimiento es el lugar auténtico de la contemplación: en él se puede ver qué es realmente el pecado y la injusticia, qué es el amor y la esperanza, quién es ese Hijo del hombre que nos ha precedido en el camino, y por último quién es ese Dios que abre continuamente historia hasta que al final sea todo en todos (1 Cor 15,28).” Sobrino 1977, 365; quoted in Antoncich 1980, 66.

697 “A hermenêutica da libertação não teria a força de desocultar, de desvelar a latência dos processos libertadores através da história humana? Não se pode, então, entender o devir da humanidade como um contínuo processo de libertação?” Tdl., 147.

698 On Libanio’s “Christic structures” above, see n. 304; n. 424.

699 The idea of a Teilhardian center was familiar to Libanio’s philosophical mentor Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, who was among the first to disseminate Teilhard’s ideas in Brazil in the early 1960’s. See e.g. the following: “[...] cons umação que se apoia numa Presença situada no ‘centro’ da história e coextensiva a todo o seu curso.” Vaz 1968, 247. Cf. Teilhard’s Le Christ évoluteur: "Prolongées logiquement jusqu’au bout d’elles-mêmes, les perspectives scientifiques de l’Humanisation déterminent, au sommet de l’anthropogénèse, l’existence d’un centre ou foyer ultime de Personnalité et de Conscience, nécessaire pour diriger et synthétiser la genèse historique de l’Esprit. – Or ce point Oméga (comme je l’ai appelé) n’est-il pas la place idéale d’où faire rayonner le Christ que nous adorons – un Christ dont la domination surnaturelle se double, nous le savons, d’un pouvoir physique prépondérant sur les sphères naturelles du Monde? ‘In quo omnia constant.’ [Co., 1, 17.] – Extraordinaire rencontre, en vérité, des données de la Foi avec les démarches de la raison! Ce qui paraisse menace devient confirmation magnifique.” Teilhard de Chardin 1969, 161–176 [=Le Christ évoluteur], 168. Emphasis added.

700 Vaz’s book on Teilhard (Vaz 1967) is an example of how much Teilhard mattered to the Brazilian Catholics in the 1960’s: the modern movements “en-avant” were reconciled with an “en-haut” God in a Christian synthesis (pp. 66–70). Marxists are referred to here as “atheist humanists” (p. 67). Incarnation was not “accidentally” added to the universe, but its fundament was “in the immanent presence of Omega-point in the very evolution” (p. 113). The difference from Marxism is Vaz’s vitalism (p. 115): “Life is not an epiphenomenon, but a central phenomenon in the material
Christian communities and all other people can work out this liberating action, and the actions of them all are considered in the light of the faith.\textsuperscript{701} The reader is not, however, quite made aware of what it means to consider action “in the light of the faith”. Libanio does not restrict the scope of liberation:

Here we are dealing with a liberating theological and theo logical [i.e. directly pertaining to God] reading of all human liberations in all times and all places.\textsuperscript{702}

In conclusion, it could be argued that Libanio’s concept of liberation theology had a strong element of Hegelian historical metaphysics. The positive idea of human history is strengthened by evolutionary thinking à la Teilhard de Chardin. There is, nevertheless, also a kenotic element that obviously comes from Libanio’s own spiritual roots as a Jesuit.
5.4. The ethical turn: the meaning of praxis in Teologia da libertação (1987)

According to Libanio, “praxis” can never be without theory. It is the complete entity of practice and theory, as he states in FCC I. He criticizes the practical reductionism of Marxist thinking that reduces the essence of the human being to his or her praxis. This section explores the hermeneutic role of praxis and how Libanio portrays its relationship with theology in Teologia da libertação.

This humanistic emphasis in Libanio’s thinking made it necessary for him to modify the liberation theological discourse on the “primacy of praxis” which, in his opinion, could only be hermeneutic in nature. In a notable passage he points to the fact that theological hermeneutics always has God’s revelation as its central point of reference or “ontological starting point”. The praxis can only be the “hermeneutic starting point”:

It does not seem evident that theology could start with pastoral or social practice. In fact, there is a false understanding of the “starting point” of theology. The “starting point” (ponto de partida), in the sense of the principles of understanding that are fundamental to it, cannot be the praxis. It is the revelation of God, and it is starting from the revelation that theology understands, interprets, and reads all the realities and, therefore, the liberating praxis as well. When the starting point is understood in this sense, it is not possible to say that it is the context, situation, history or social reality. Only the revelation is.

Here he adopts the terminology used by Juan Carlos Scannone in his article of 1986. Scannone maintained that the starting point (Sp. punto de partida) meant two things. The founding principle of theological science was the revelation as things were considered “in the light of the faith” and “in the light of God’s word”. Situations of poverty and injustice and historical liberating praxis were only the hermeneutic place (lugar) out of which (desde donde) theological reflection derived. Scannone was more critical even of the hermeneutic locus in his later article of 1990.

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703 “A práxis não é simplesmente a atividade material do homem. É também o seu conhecimento teórico. A teoria é, pois, um momento da práxis e não uma entidade independente, autônoma, abstrata, desligada. A práxis é esse conjunto de prática e teoria [...]” FCC I, 98.
704 FCC I, 98; see the whole context in n. 756.
705 TdL, 176.
Starting with the praxis means starting with the “reality”, in Libanio’s terms. Revelation here is the constitutive theological locus (*lugar*). It is interpreted in its historical context, which is the hermeneutic locus. Thus, the liberating practice can never replace the revelation as the constitutive theological locus. Libanio makes the point: “The question asked of the revelation is born in practice but the principles with which one answers the question come from God’s word.” He also adopts this correlative methodology elsewhere in the book:

Liberation is a question. It is the concrete liberating practices in the context of oppression. And the theology, as it assumes them as questions [that make up its raw] material (*matéria-pergunta*), re-structures within them its own, other contents.

Thus, praxis is the “question” the revelation answers. The revelation constitutes the “formal object” of theology. Libanio also lists the following four relationships between praxis and theology in liberation theology: theology “of”, “in”, “for”, and “through” (or “by”) praxis.

The first of these, the theology of praxis (*teologia da práxis*) is precisely the hermeneutic meaning of praxis as context. The expressions theology “of praxis” and “of liberation” do not mean a thematically pre-defined theology. It is not “of” liberation in the genitive sense (*genetivus obiectivus*), as theologies of work, matter, and earthly realities. Using language that is reminiscent of Paul Tillich’s method of correlation, Libanio refers to liberation as “a question”, which is followed by concrete liberating action in a situation of oppression. These acts can be performed by Christians and non-Christians alike.

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*punto de partida* de la teología de la liberación no estaba dado propiamente hablando por la praxis misma, pues ésta era ya concebida como respuesta a una palabra anterior, percibida en la fe, a saber, la palabra e interpelación del Señor en los rostros de los pobres: el encuentro de Cristo en los pobres.” He is referring to his earlier book (Scannone 1976, 19).

Scannone 1990, 304.

“*A pergunta feita à Revelação nasce da prática, mas os princípios, com os quais se responde à pergunta, vêm da Palavra de Deus.*” *TdL*, 176. Naturally, this begs the question of what the revelation is. According to Libanio (*TdL*, 212–213) God revealed himself in the creation, in the word and in the living word, Jesus Christ. Today, the revelation comes to us in the “archaic” form of traditions, which needs to be captured “in the contemporaneity of their historical moment”.

Scannone 1986, 139.

By the theology of the earthly realities, Libanio refers to the theological current started by Gustave Thils’s book *Théologie des réalités terrestres* of 1946.

According to Rubio (1983, 220), Gutiérrez in his early liberation theology ceased to speak of a praxis specifically of Christians and spoke of a human praxis in general. This naturally changed once more as he started to stress the spiritual nature of praxis in the 1980’s.
“raw material” (*matéria-prima*) as its starting point and creates an “adjective, not genitive” relationship with it. Libanio also criticizes the Althusserian mechanistic kind of “theoretical practice”, according to which the means of production remain unchanged by the raw material. Instead, the theory used to interpret the praxis [in this case: the theological tradition] is in turn transformed by it. This circularity also means that the praxis is also understood (*entendida*) in the light of the Tradition.\footnote{“Na prática teórica, a matéria-prima também transforma os meios de produção numa relação dialética com eles. No caso da teologia, o dado da Tradição já acumulado anteriormente, à luz do qual a matéria-prima é considerada, sofre o impacto reinterpretação dessa matéria-prima, que é, no caso, a práxis libertadora. Ao ser, pois, assumida pela teologia, a práxis é ela mesma entendida à luz da Tradição, mas essa Tradição também sofre o impacto de sua presença, obrigando o teólogo a reinterpreta-la.” *TdL*, 162. In *IT* (97–100, 320–322) Libanio and Murad deal with the Althusserian “theoretical practice” at length, also pointing (p. 321) to the fact that it follows the pattern of “material production”.}

Secondly liberation theology as **theology in praxis** (*teologia na práxis*) concerns the “practical relationship with praxis”. In other words, it is also “a relation with an interest” (*uma relação interessada*). Libanio is not referring to a “mere observer”, but to a committed person and committed pastoral activities.\footnote{Libanio goes more into detail about base communities and *pastorais comprometidas*, or committed forms of pastoral work of the Catholic church, in his other books and articles. He no doubt meant the work among the landless peasants (CPT), among the workers (*Pastoral Operária*) and the indigenous peoples of Brazil (CIMI). Cf. *QP*, 102–109; *PSC*, 150–163.}

Dividing language into its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic uses,\footnote{See *TdL*, 118.} he states that “the syntax meets the pragmatics”. Here he seems to be the closest to “looking at theology in the light of praxis” and not vice versa, even if he only mentions looking at it “in the light of the pragmatic rules”.\footnote{“Naturalmente não se limita a uma presença de observador, mas de comprometido.É uma relação interessada. Nesse momento, a sintática encontra-se com a pragmática. Essa regra sintática de uma teologia na práxis deve ser (como de fato já o foi) analisada à luz das regras pragmáticas, que avaliam o significado de tais opções e compromissos.” *TdL*, 163.} In other words, this is the meaning of liberation theology as “a theology in the praxis”, when the theologian links himself or herself with “well-defined practices” (*práticas bem-definidas*).\footnote{“Antes de tudo, o teólogo se articula com práticas bem-definidas. É uma teologia na práxis.” *TdL*, 163. Libanio explains that this meant that the theologian was inspired by the base communities and other popular groups, and was involved in the movements and struggles of the people.}

The idea of **theology for praxis** (*teologia para a práxis*) is linked to this, but it seems to be an explicitly *ad hoc* dimension. On the subject of Nicaraguan Sandinism of the 1980’s, Libanio wrote:

> The Nicaraguan experience has shown the urgency, but also some positive results of this theological work, which has been the supporting factor (lit. ‘sustentaculum’, *sustentáculo*)
of the faith of so many Sandinista Christians in spite of the innumerous difficulties that have come from other sectors of the Church.\textsuperscript{720}

If theology in praxis stresses the practical character of liberation theology, this emphasizes the theoretical aspect. Libanio classifies the “theology for praxis” model as primarily theoretical:

As every theology, it \textit{[liberation theology] is theoretical, but it has a practical intentionality}. In this sense, it interprets the Christian Scriptures with the finality to illuminate the praxis of Christians who struggle for the liberation of the collective poor.\textsuperscript{721}

The reference to liberation theology as a “theoretical theology” with a “practical intentionality” is problematic. Is there a gap between the theoretical theology and the practical praxis? How can liberation theology be a “new way” of doing theology if it remains as theoretical as the other theologies?\textsuperscript{722} Should one not acknowledge that religious language is somehow “performative” and not theoretical?\textsuperscript{723} Of course, Libanio was pointing to the fact that theology as such is theoretical but it can relate to the praxis of different people and communities in that “praxis” has also an informed and theoretical aspect. Besides, political praxis has a certain autonomy. Given its theoretical and strategic principles rooted in political science, theology “respects such autonomy and does not feel competent in this context”.\textsuperscript{724} Liberation theology, according to Libanio, was meant to sustain the faith of the Sandinista Christians and not their politics as such.

Three things need to be said about the “theology for praxis” model. Firstly, one could take the expression as an implicit criticism of the 1970’s radical liberation theology which was undoubtedly meant to sustain the political commitment of the Christian left.\textsuperscript{725} Secondly, this interpretation hardly does justice to what Sandinista Christians, ministers and poor priests alike, actually
wanted to use their liberation theology for. Thirdly, and most importantly, it is a question of the compatibility of the sciences. If one took the expression “theology does not feel competent in political science” at face value, it would be a severely critical comment on the liberation theological method, which is built on a dialectical relationship between political and social science on the one hand and theology on the other.

Last but by no means least, Libanio refers to liberation theology as theology through praxis (teologia pela práxis). He begins with a strictly theological statement: “The last judging instance (a última instância judicativa) of all theology must be God’s word.” This means that praxis cannot be the last instance, or the starting point, and this is naturally an implicit criticism of the “last instance” philosophy of Louis Althusser and the theologians of liberation who used his terminology. Libanio argues that “all theology needs to be orthodox”, and asks if the “criterion of orthopraxis” would finally pervert it. He needed to clarify his position:

First of all, orthopraxis cannot be either the absolute, the only or the exclusive criterion. If such were the case, it would totally falsify theology. Orthopraxis does not, therefore, mean that the last criterion of the truth of a certain theology would be the praxis, the efficacy of transforming action. Neither does [liberation theology] accept an orthodox Marxist vision in the sense that the human being should be his or her praxis, devaluing thus the human transcendental “existential”, the human dimension of gift and gratuity.

He recalls what Karl Rahner had said about theology necessarily being pastoral, although Rahner most certainly did not want to make pastoral action into the last instance of judging the genuineness of theology. Instead, orthopraxis could be an “evaluating and critical principle of theology”.

In addition to being critical of theology, the criterion of orthopraxis could serve as the critical moment of judging someone’s faith. The question of Christian love is linked to this: “Faith without works is dead”, in the words of the epistle of St. James’s (2:17). Praxis is a mediation of charity and therefore “it can and it

726 TdL, 164. On Gutiérrez’s remarks to the same effect in La verdad os hará libres (1986), see n. 146.
727 “[…] Ortopríaxis não significa, portanto, que o critério último de verdade de uma teologia seja a práxis, a eficácia da ação transformadora. Nem assume uma visão marxista ortodoxa no sentido de que o homem seja sua práxis, desvalorizando seu ‘existencial’ transcendental, sua dimensão de dom e gratuidade.” TdL, 164.
728 “São Tiago nos ensinara que a fé sem obras é morta. A obra da fé é a caridade. E a caridade tem necessariamente uma dimensão prática. E a práxis, no sentido da TdL, é uma das mediações da caridade. Como mediação da caridade, ela pode e deve julgar a fé. Ora, a teologia é uma reflexão sobre a fé e está a serviço da fé. Essa teologia-serviço da fé pode, portanto, ser criticada pela práxis, como mediação da caridade, pelo menos para dizer de uma teologia que ela não está cumprindo sua
must judge the faith”. It could become a critical instance of religious faith. This could be considered a modern version of the fides caritate formata principle.729

In fact, here Libanio clarifies the question of the theoretical nature of liberation theology in contrast to other theologies. All are somehow theoretical and practical, but liberation theology has “a relationship with the historical liberating praxis of the collective poor”.730 In his view, “theology through praxis” is another face of “theology for praxis”.731 Judging by the length of his arguments, it should be the other way round. Furthermore, theology “for praxis” could be considered ad hoc and political, whereas the “through (by) praxis” model questions the orthopraxis. In any case, it is here that he takes up the critical political situation of the church, recalling that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had issued a warning concerning the relation between orthopraxis and orthodoxy.732

The overall evaluation of “praxis” in Libanio’s texts depends on how one understands their purpose. Was Teologia da libertação doing a good job in maintaining a neutral stance as a reader?733 Was it an apology for or a critique of liberation theology, or both? Purely immanent criticism of the book as such is limited due to its tendency not to have a tendency (!). It would therefore be helpful to engage in some transcendent criticism as well.

Firstly, the concept of “praxis” has many roots. Even if the word comes from the Greek, it entered the Latin American intellectual world primarily through German-language philosophy, Marx and Marxists. It is possible to use “practice” and to mean “praxis” in philosophical terms, which has two different points of emphasis: the theoretical and “conscious” aspect, and praxis as historical, social, revolutionary, or even proletarian activity. These two points of emphasis reveal either a humanist or an orthodox Marxist viewpoint. The former was particularly

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729 On Libanio’s use of fides caritate formata, see DE, 183; cited in n. 651.
730 TdL, 165.
731 “Teologia pela práxis é a outra face da teologia para a práxis. Pois, se de fato um teólogo elabora sua reflexão para alimentar a fé de um cristão engajado, deve no mínimo, perguntar-se está realizando bem essa tarefa. Assim essa práxis, para a qual trabalha sua teologia, torna-se, nesse sentido, uma instância crítica dessa teologia. Portanto, teologia pela práxis.” TdL, 164.
732 The Instruction (LN, 1984) refers to the “revolutionary 'praxis' of the class”: “In this perspective, 'orthodoxy' or the right rule of faith, is substituted by the notion of 'orthopraxy' as the criterion of the truth.” (LN, X:1,3). There is also a positive remark: “A healthy theological method no doubt will always take the 'praxis' of the Church into account [...].” LN, X:3.
733 Libanio did not wish to join the ranks of the defenders or the adversaries of liberation theology, he merely wanted to provide a “didactic reader”. TdL, 7.
strong in the Hegelian and Marxist “revival” of the Brazilian youth with its open confessions of *consciência histórica* (Vaz) and *conscientização* (Freire). The latter was written on the banner of the Marxist revolutionaries of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s: there was a strong emphasis on the “primacy of praxis” to the exclusion of all information supplied by the ecclesial and other bourgeois superstructure.

While “praxis” originally came from Marxism (and Greek thought), “orthopraxis” originated in European philosophy and theology. Edward Schillebeeckx was instrumental in working out a Christian interpretation of orthopraxis.\textsuperscript{734} The reference to a “criterion” of orthopraxis in both *Libertatis nuntius* and in books such as *TdL* is not very helpful. In fact, orthopraxis is its own criterion because it includes the “ortho” element, as Edward Schillebeeckx noticed. In fact, it was Schillebeeckx who invented the term, as Gutiérrez implies in *Teología de la liberación*. It was originally used to free fundamental philosophy from the impasse created by dialectical theology and its supernatural starting point. The intuition of the liberation theologians, primarily Gutiérrez, in using praxis as “the first step” was perfectly in line with Continental political theology, Schillebeeckx and more specifically J. B. Metz. However, it was interpreted from an ethical and socio-political perspective and not on the basis of Wittgenstein’s original idea.

In order to clarify the link between the later Wittgenstein, Schillebeeckx and liberation theology, the following needs to be said. Schillebeeckx obviously noticed that the dialectical theological *prolegomenon* was supranaturalistic and problematic for the modern human being, which is why he made use of the language-game theory of the later Wittgenstein.\textsuperscript{735} In a religious language game one is involved in a certain praxis, which is also its own “norm” (ortho). Christianity is, in terms of Wittgensteinian pragmatism, primarily a practice more than a theory.\textsuperscript{736} As to the contents, Schillebeeckx gave his own definition of

\textsuperscript{734} “Se debe reconocer que ha sido E. Schillebeeckx quien desde 1969 ha ido elaborando una visión teológica completa de la relación ‘ortodoxia–ortopraxis’ y ‘teología–praxis’.” Alfaro 1994, 154.

\textsuperscript{735} Schillebeeckx (1974, 86) gives a good praxis-based interpretation of the later Wittgenstein and his language-game theory: “It is only within the whole of religious activity that talk about God acquires a clearly defined, intelligible meaning.” Cf. Kerr 1997, pp. 151–156, on which he discusses Wittgenstein’s interpretation of Roman Catholic natural theology and “proofs of existence” given to God.

\textsuperscript{736} Kurten (1998, 21) refers to the “secular fallacy” of the scientific age, which had led people to think of science as a “mirror of nature” and of religion as a “mirror of a metaphysical reality”.

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orthopraxis: “any praxis which manipulates human freedom and brings about alienation is both wrong and heterodox”.737

Looking at the whole picture of liberation theological “pragmatism”, or better still the relationship between theology and praxis in the latter half of the 1980’s, one notices that the discussion was primarily between political and Christian praxis. Absolute Marxist political praxis was criticised by the Vatican because it did not allow any critical discussion. Theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Clodovis Boff soon reacted to the Instruction.

Libanio continued on a different track. He had already been writing about liberation theology in the third person singular, and he continued to do so. His writings in Teologia da libertação reveal a critical attitude toward the politization of doctrine. He nevertheless gave credit to the Sandinista government: it was “a true laboratory of liberation theology”, in which many of the government’s ideas and principles had been inspired by critical and creative theological reflection.738

In terms of politics, Libanio was walking a thin line between Catholic progressive thinking, excessive politicization, and rampant conservatism.

He responds to the critique given against liberation theology at the end of Teologia da libertação. Practically all of it centers on the issue of praxis. As he states, the “subordination of truth to the liberating praxis” in particular was

Availing himself of a Wittgensteinian pragmatist critique, he states that “religious faith has become something primarily intellectual and the ability to express religious faith in all dimensions of life has been forgotten”. Wittgenstein did something different as he put an “emphasis on human praxis” (Ibid., 24). In the words of George Lindbeck in The Nature of Doctrine, one could speak of doctrines qua doctrines as “second-order propositions” (p. 25). Would this be very far from Gutiérrez’s original intention?

737 Schillebeeckx 1974, 132. This could be seen as his interpretation of Kant’s categorical imperative, which is also a formal, “unselfish” definition of morals.

738 “Nesse contexto, a experiência da Nicarágua desempenha papel fundamental. Pois, lá a revolução sandinista preenche várias das condições e das premissas teóricas do projeto subjacente à TdL. É uma proposta alternativa ao sistema capitalista. Não é moldada por um marxismo estranho ao país, mas, assumindo alguns elementos marxistas, forja outros originais, de tradição cristã e com a ampla colaboração de cristãos. [...] E lá também a TdL pode continuar sua atividade crítica no movimento dialético de prática e teoria, ação e reflexão, atuação política e discernimento teológico. É, portanto, verdadeiro laboratório da TdL. E é por esse prisma que se entende a obsessiva perseguição da administração Reagan ao projeto nicaragüense, já que ele se articula, em muitas de suas propostas e princípios fundamentais, com uma reflexão teológica cristã crítica e criativa.” TdL, 278. This is rather different from the idea put forward on p. 163 that a theologian should “respect the autonomy” of political scientists (n. 724). Given the fact that Nicaraguan Sandinistas are mentioned on the same page, one could claim that there are two different models of Christian influence, one personalist and the other directly political and liberation theological. The contradiction could be accounted for by Libanio’s intention always to present both sides of the conflict. However, this inevitably begs the question of whether it was possible to depict liberation theology and the Sandinista revolution in neutral terms.
criticized by the hierarchy.\textsuperscript{739} He nevertheless defends the location of liberation theology within the “modern horizon of hermeneutics”. With regard to the strictly theological aspect of liberation theology, he points to the critique of converting Christian charity into “efficacious historical praxis”, and of neglecting the personal and gratuitous aspect of Christian love.\textsuperscript{740}

Libanio’s \textit{Teologia da libertação} shows that the question of praxis was at the heart of the discussion on liberation theology in the 1980’s. One should nevertheless ask up to what point “praxis” is always a political, social or ethical concept. If there is little about traditional themes, such as repentance, counseling and salvation, is it because even the Christian interpretation has suffered a certain politicization, or at least ethicization? Can “praxis” or “orthopraxis” reveal the nature of Christian life?


5.5. The Jesuit discussion on praxis

Libanio’s theology was his personal contribution to the liberation theological discussion. His closest discussion partners were the other Jesuits who commented on his work and on whose work he in turn commented. The discussion on the concept of praxis focused on two main points. On the one hand, he maintained that there was no philosophical opposition between theory and praxis (or practice), but that did not mean that praxis should be divided into a “laborative” and a “theoretical” moment. On the other hand, the question of praxis is a theological issue and leads to the core of soteriology: are we “saved by praxis” if charity is the specific saving reality?

In his review of 1984 Libanio criticized an influential article written by his fellow Jesuit Francisco Taborda, which was published in the central theological review *REB* in 1981 and later in a book. Taborda maintained that “praxis” separated humankind from animals, and that it united man’s transforming activity and theory. Therefore, “praxis has two moments in a unity: the laborative moment and the theoretical moment”. Libanio criticized Taborda for making a “sophistical” distinction between the two moments of praxis and claimed that it would be better to speak about “theory always connoting praxis and praxis always connoting theory”. In this way “neither will be understood apart from its relation with the other”. He nevertheless shared Taborda’s concern about the excessive epistemological mind–body “dualism” that was visible in liberation theology.

Taborda primarily attacked the reductionist thinking to which the Marxist “primacy of praxis” had led many theologians. One must not follow the “Greek perspective” of putting theory first, nor the “modern perspective” of prioritizing

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praxis. Neither may be the “ultimate”. Nor may the Christian love of God be separated from the love for one’s neighbor. Taborda’s main point is this:

The theoretical moment of praxis is the moment of truth, in the same way as the laborative moment is the moment of love. The truth is not love, but it is only veri-fied in love; love is not the truth, but it is only edified acting in truth.\(^{743}\)

Taborda thought one could “affirm praxis as the way faith exists as grace”. He also used expressions such as “praxis is grace”\(^ {744}\) and “God is liberating praxis”.\(^ {745}\) The praxis should not be understood as the “activity”, nor should its relationship with theory be that of “part and whole”. This was his criticism of Clodovis Boff’s structuralism and of the Marxist theologian Giulio Girardi.\(^{746}\)

It is of interest in this study that not only did Libanio criticize Taborda and his terminological choice, Taborda also criticized Libanio and his stand on the soteriological nature of praxis. The criticism was based on what Libanio had written in *Formação da consciência crítica II* a couple of years earlier in 1979, in which he made a distinction between “human” and “Christian” praxis. Praxis is human because the human being differs from an irrational animal that does modify its work (*trabalho*) but does not have the “rational, free and human” aspects.\(^ {747}\)

From the Christian point of view, all human praxis is either “Christian praxis” or “anti-Christian”. “It is not about a praxis that would be parallel to or above the human reality”, it is rather about the “comprehension and evaluation (*juízo*) of human praxis”, which is based on the Christian revelation.\(^ {748}\)

Libanio states categorically that there can be “no purely human or neutral praxis” from the Christian point of view.\(^ {749}\) It was precisely this Christian maximalism that was confronted by Francisco Taborda. Firstly, he argued that the

\(^{743}\) Taborda 1981, 273.


\(^{745}\) Using the Rahnerian term of immediacy, Taborda states: “Se a práxis histórica é a mediação da presença imediata de Deus ao homem, poder-se-ia dizer que Deus é práxis libertadora.” Taborda 1981, 274. The expression “Deus é práxis libertadora” is quoted by Libanio in *QCCA*, 73.

\(^{746}\) Taborda takes a critical stand against Clodovis Boff’s idea of praxis as the “complete set of practices” (o conjunto de práticas, *TP*, 44), which comes from C. Lévi-Strauss. The fundamental problem of this thinking is that praxis becomes the “whole” of which theory is “part”: “Quanto ao problema do fundo: Giulio Girardi (Vérité et libération: les présupposés philosophiques d’une théologie de la libération, em *Ét. Théol. Rel.* 49 [1974] 271–294, com uma discussão: 294–297), não distinguiu ‘atividade’ e práxis, relaciona teoria e práxis como parte e todo. Mas esse modo de relacionar não é muito feliz [...].” (Taborda 1981, 258 n. 21.) C. Boff (*TP*, 367) illustrated the praxis as a big circle, inside of which there were the smaller circles of theory, science and the smallest of all, theology. Only the Praxis – with a capital P – was the totalidade.

\(^{747}\) *FCC II*, 28–29.

\(^{748}\) *FCC II*, 29.

\(^{749}\) “Não existe, por conseguinte, uma práxis puramente humana, neutra cristãmente.” *FCC II*, 29.
idea of an explicitly “Christian praxis” was problematic. He would prefer to speak of a praxis that was practiced “in the Lord” because the notion of a Christian praxis would mean there was something specifically Christian in it. The words Libanio used could be rightly understood as the Christian “interpretation” of the human praxis, and in this sense there was “coincidence” in the two Jesuits’ thinking. Secondly, in Libanio’s notion praxis could not be “soteriologically neutral”. In other words, his assertion that praxis was never “Christianly neutral” meant that it could never be “soteriologically neutral”.

Taborda himself preferred to speak of the Christian “motivation” of human praxis, not of some Christian (or anti-Christian) praxis as such, and believed that the Christian quality of human praxis, i.e. of any ethic, was always “indirect and mediated”. This did not, of course, deny the fact that Christians could from their point of view evaluate the praxis of other Christians and other people in general. Neither did it exclude the possibility that the Christian quality of the praxis would subsequently profoundly change it, or that Christians would join in the same battles as the most “authentic fighters” in the world.

The discussion between Libanio and Taborda helps to clarify Libanio’s own point of view. He agreed with Taborda on the importance of not taking some “praxis” apart as an absolute point of reference, because it is all informed by some theory. Human beings simply do not do anything if they do not know why they are doing it. Basic teleological anthropology makes the crudest “Stalinist” philosophy

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of praxis impossible. Its absolutization would mean that “the essence of the human being is praxis”, as Libanio wrote in 1978. However, he continued as follows:

The praxis is not simply the material activity of the human being. It is also the theoretical knowledge of it. The theory is, therefore, a moment of the praxis and not an independent entity, autonomous, abstract and detached. The praxis is the totality of practice and theory that contributes, in one single dynamic, to modifying the social relations, instead of being merely a reflex image of these [relations].

In fact, the words Libanio used in 1978 were echoed by Taborda in 1981, even if Libanio subsequently criticized this dichotomy of two moments. Both authors seemed to agree on the necessity of not mechanistically separating “theory” within the praxis because this would trivialize it. It was true that praxis was a teleological phenomenon of the human world, but theory was another part of it. An unhealthy separation happened when one spoke of the “primacy” of praxis. Taborda explicitly warned against giving primacy (prevalência) to either theory or practice in his Sacramentos, práxis e festa of 1987. The German Horst Goldstein agreed on the balanced duality of praxis as the “joint phenomenon” of both action and reflection in his Kleines Lexikon zur Theologie der Befreiung, but refers to it as the “first act” in Gutiérrezian terms.

Libanio had criticized the excessively objective nature of Marxist thinking in his FCC I from 1978: it was not possible to take the practice and theory of a certain praxis apart. Only a year earlier in 1977 he was using the argument to

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753 “A essência do homem é a práxis: eis o limite de tal pensamento. A práxis não é simplesmente a atividade material do homem. É também o seu conhecimento teórico. A teoria é, pois, um momento da práxis e não uma entidade independente, autônoma, abstrata, desligada. A práxis é esse conjunto de prática e teoria, a teoria contribuindo, numa dinâmica, a modificar as relações sociais, em lugar de ser simplesmente um reflexo das mesmas.” FCC I, 93. Emphasis added.

754 Taborda 1991, 26; German: Taborda 1988, 26: “Wer Theorie und Praxis einander gegenüberstellt und dazu noch dem einen bzw. dem anderen Pol das größere Gewicht beimisst, ist außerstande zu verstehen, was Praxis ist.”


Goldstein 1991, 180. Goldstein used the terms “praxis” and “practice” interchangeably. He maintained that there was a primacy of praxis as the first act and thus ignored Taborda’s point that the prevalência of praxis was incorrect. He was aiming at a synthesis of Taborda and Assmann / Gutiérrez: “Der Vorrang der Praxis bedeutet nicht, dass diese ohne Theorie bleiben sollte oder die Theorie [...] ersetzen könnte: ‘Tun ohne Theorie ist leer, Theorie ohne Tun ist tot.’ (Taborda 26)” Goldstein refers to his own translation of Taborda’s book (Taborda 1988, 25, 26).

756 Libanio interprets Marxism as practical humanism, which nevertheless is objective, anti-mystical and rationalizing. After the added asterisk [*] there is a polite criticism: praxis is both praxis and theory in their unity: “A práxis é a teoria em ato. [...] Todos os mistérios que desviam a teoria para o mistico encontram sua solução racional na prática humana e na compreensão desta prática (K. Marx). A práxis é entendida fundamentalmente em relação com o homem. Cada um se transforma e se modifica na medida em que ele transforma e modifica o conjunto de suas relações sociais. A essência do homem é a práxis: eis o limite de tal pensamento. [*] A práxis não é
prove that no “totally impartial epistemological interest” existed. His criticism of the objective understanding of praxis was a natural outcome of arguing for a “theoretical moment” or a “connotation of theory”. He gives a strong critique of sociological reductionism in TdL. The question of truth cannot be reduced to the question of who is talking and where, or to any sociological location. In particular, “liberation theology rejects the radically materialistic presupposition of the Marxist theory of knowledge”, although it acknowledges the importance of the social conditions of the theologian that “every sociology of knowledge has peacefully accepted”. However, it has been pointed that the theological locus (lugar teológico) in liberation theology was “to a certain extent” equated with the social location.

The philosophical reason why Libanio rejected the absolute sociology of knowledge was his circular interpretation of hermeneutics and dialectics. Liberation theology both reads the context in a theological way and allows it to have its effect on our understanding of God. This is the hermeneutic circle. However, it is also theology and open to communication with every other theology, and thus open to dialectical changes (superações dialéticas) in the future.
Libanio gives his own interpretation of the Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Hermeneutic models have wandered from an “objective” phase to the “subjective” and finally to the “third horizon”, which could be interpreted in either an orthodox or a “dynamic–dialectic” way. In this, he makes use of the Bergerian structure of the whole of FCC I from nine years earlier, the point being that the “orthodox” understanding “closes itself in the exclusive understanding of liberation on the social structural level”. This is obviously the dogmatic Marxist position because “every other liberation shall be added unto it (virá por acréscimo) by the very force of the structural change [=revolution]”. In giving this dialectical interpretation of the dynamic–dialectic “third horizon”, Libanio was echoing what Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote in Teología de la liberación concerning the three different levels of liberation. Gutiérrez also started from the theological level of liberation from sin and egoism, quoting St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians 5:1: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Cristo nos ha liberado para que gocemos de libertad).” For Libanio, the three levels are:

1. ethical–religious objectivity: liberation from error, evil and sin
2. subjectivity: liberation from individual psychological obstacles
3. the dynamic–dialectic level: liberation from oppressive economic and socio-political structures

He explains the interpenetration of the three levels in terms of the non-exclusive interpretation of Hegelian dialectical thought. A new level of understanding does not exclude the previous level, but it takes it and perfects it in as a true “dialectical synthesis”. This model could also be interpreted as a modern application of the Thomist axiom gratia naturam non tollit sed supponet et perficit. For Gutiérrez, there was both a Lutheran motivation given by Bonhoeffer.

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762 There are the three moments of “object” (momento do objeto, FCC I, 33–58), “subject” (momento do sujeito, FCC I, 59–83) and “the moment of the social” (momento do social (dialético), FCC I, 84–101), which loosely correspond to Berger’s “objectivation”, “interiorization” and “socialization” but are given a Hegelian structure. Libanio refers to Althusserianism (in the third person) in FCC I when he speaks of “certain forms of anti-humanism and of the predominance of the philosophies and theologies of praxis and structuralist [philosophies and theologies]”. FCC I, 101. This objective treatment gave room to a critical evaluation of the misunderstandings of the “third moment” in Tdl.

763 Tdl, 145.

764 Gutiérrez, TL, 66. Gutiérrez was quoting Bonhoeffer, who drew inspiration from The Freedom of a Christian by Martin Luther. The Swedish theologian Per Frostin in his excellent posthumous article recalled the Lutheran roots of this “liberated to love” logic, suggesting that “this school of thought is often misconstrued”. Frostin 1994, 92–93.
and a later scholastic motivation from Maritain’s thinking. The holistic system later moved toward the spiritual side. In 1986 Gutiérrez stressed the “third level” which for him was the spiritual level. Obviously, social liberation had been emphasized in TL fifteen years earlier. For Libanio, there was no question of putting either side first:

The dialectical perspective resolves the false dilemma that is often repeated as an accusation against liberation theology, that it begins with liberation from sin – and thus makes theology – or that it begins from social liberation – and the product will be mere sociology.

This expression was Libanio’s attempt to make liberation theology into a via media that both Marxists and Christians could accept. The obvious problem is that as theology it starts with the revelation. This is repeated in several places in TdL. Is it then possible to produce a Hegelian and “neutral” version of liberation theology based on the Aufhebung principle and the hermeneutic circle, starting from both the theology and the social reality, and moving back and forth?

Libanio wanted to show that the very core of liberation theology proprement dite did not run contrary to the Magisterium that accused it of Marxist “reductionism”. He admitted that there were “many publications” that appeared under the name of liberation theology but were nothing but “libertarian religious

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765 Gutiérrez quotes Creation and Fall (1966, 37) in TL, 67 n. 51. There is a clear indication of Maritainian influence in La verdad os hará libres: “the different levels of signification mutually imply each other (se implican mutuamente)”. (Gutiérrez 1990c, 155.) He also uses Maritain’s “distinguer pour unir” principle to explain the passage in TL (p. 238), maintaining that “the mentioned three levels condition each other mutually but are not confused” and that this is “the Chalcedonian principle”. In this “Chalcedonian” thinking he may have drawn inspiration from Libanio. For Sobrino (1994, 94), the ideas of “loved in order to love” and “liberated in order to liberate” come not from the Epistle to the Galatians but from the First Epistle of John, and he calls them “the logic of the theology of liberation” without specifying their Paulian or Augustinian (including Bonhoeffer & Luther) origin in Gutiérrez’s work.

766 “Liberación expresa, en primer lugar, las aspiraciones de las clases sociales y pueblos oprimidos [...]” Gutiérrez, TL, 68. This may be compared with Gutiérrez 1990c, 155: “El énfasis, por consiguiente, está puesto en el tercer nivel: la obra de Cristo que libera del pecado y nos hace entrar en comunión con él. Los cambios que pueden ocurrir en el terreno de lo social son importantes, pero insuficientes en la óptica cristiana.” (Emphasis added to both.) Obviously, the idea of the Chalcedonian principle would not allow Gutiérrez to make a retractatio of this kind. In this sense, Libanio in his TdL of 1987 was freer to pursue a liberation theological theology than Gutiérrez in 1986.

767 “A perspectiva dialética permite superar el dilema maloclocado, e frecuêntemente repetido como acusação contra a TdL, de que ou se parte da libertação do pecado – e então se faz teologia – ou se parte da libertação social – e o produto será pura sociologia.” TdL, 145. Libanio continues: “Rompe-se tal dilema, assumindo o conceito de libertação social, estrutural no sentido não-excludente das libertações anteriores – do pecado, dos entraves psicológicos – mas como síntese dialética que suprassume as positividades dos conceitos anteriores, negando-lhes somente os limites, as negatividades. Nesse sentido, a TdL não se enquadra nas suspeitas levantadas por afirmações do magistério da Igreja a respeito do reducionismo sociológico de seus conceitos.” TdL, 145–146.

768 LN, IX:8.
discourses or even ideological and non-theological discourses” and did not refer “properly” to liberation theology. All of TdL was devoted to making a theological reading of liberation theology. Libanio had obviously not wanted to go the same way as Gutiérrez a year earlier, making a complete U-turn and maintaining that in the end only faith mattered. What he does is suggest a circular dialectic in which the positivity of each “level” is preserved in a new interpretation. This is different from the Lutheran or Maritainian interpretation of the three liberations given by Gutiérrez. The critical question of whether these “levels” are commensurate needs to be asked. Can sociology, psychology, and theology be part of the same process, and if so, how?

The very relation between philosophical determinism and theological anthropology needs to be scrutinized, as happened in the case of Paul Tillich. This means that the paradox between sin and freedom is dealt with in a theological and not a philosophical way. People are basically “dependent” in Tillichian and Lutheran terms, but this does not exclude freedom in relatione. This is also a Thomist understanding of a dependent freedom: the closer the created being is to God, the freer it is. Libanio also acknowledges that it is only possible to speak of a person’s dependence on God and freedom at the same time by utilizing certain theonomical terms of “a relationship of freedom”. The creation by God who is free makes it possible to maintain that freedom is part of our relationship with God. Neither external nor internal oppression is more central because the person may become God’s “partner” in the sense of created freedom. God has created us as partners, and transcendence is therefore not an enemy of human subjectivity.  

769 TdL, 248.

770 Per Frostin makes use of Tillich’s theonomical understanding of Luther’s De servo arbitrio: “‘Man’s will in bondage to demonic structures is meaningful only if man, in his essential nature, is free. Luther’s (as well as Paul’s and Augustine’s and Aquinas’s) statement loses its profundity and its paradoxical character if it is identified with philosophical determinism. Only a being that has the power of self-determination can have a servum arbitrium, a ‘will in bondage’ because a being without the power of self-determination has no arbitrium (capacity for decision) at all.’” Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era. Chicago, 1948, 129; cited in Frostin 1994, 87. Frostin (p. 87, emphasis added) explains Luther: “(1) To be human is to live in relatione, the human heart is always related to an exterior centre, which enslaves or liberates. (2) Luther’s understanding of freedom is defined by his understanding of sin.” For a study of the relevance of Tillich’s theology to liberation theology, see Reisz 1978 and the comparison between Tillich and J. L. Segundo in Gross 2000.

771 “A libertação, como afirmação da liberdade, da autonomia do homem, em relação a forças externas e internas de opressão, pode significar uma tomada de consciência de sua condição de ter sido criado livre por um Deus livre. A Transcendência de Deus faz o ser existir, faz o ser ser aquilo que ele é. No caso do homem, faz a liberdade existir como liberdade, como parceira, inclusive em relação à própria Transcendência sem opressão. Portanto, a libertação no nível da subjetividade, na
Theonomical logic is influential in the soteriological and ecumenical discussions as well.772

Libanio warned against sociological reductionism, which meant taking one’s own social location as the determining factor of truth. Clearly, the whole ideological landscape of the Brazilian church, particularly among the Jesuits after Arrupe’s warning, had changed. Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, for example, readily acknowledged his work in the turbulent years of the early 1960’s but distanced himself from the sociological skepsis:

It was intended elsewhere to establish a parallelism, which certainly can be discussed and perhaps contested, between Marx’s critique of Hegel’s absolute Knowledge and philosophy of religion in the name of the materialist inversion which was demanded by the revolutionary praxis, and his critique of speculative traditional theology which the theologies of liberation have made in favor of the “orthopraxistic” demands of a socially committed faith [...].773

This sociological skepticism was imbedded in the German “new political theology” as well. Even if Johann Baptist Metz did not share a completely skeptic and, in this sense “pragmatistic”, view of the praxis with the Marxists, he could nevertheless say that “the suspicion against theology has become total”.774

The criticism against sociological reductionism was strong among the Brazilian Jesuits in the 1980’s. Moreover, everybody was able to agree on the importance of always seeing the praxis in the same light as the theory that informed it. Praxis could not be absolutized, in neither sociological nor purely terminological terms. It was only as a hermeneutic starting point that Libanio...
could maintain its primacy in TdL, as noted in the previous subchapter. Nevertheless there was, and to some extent still is, discussion as to whether it is possible to speak of a “soteriological primacy” of praxis. This is a discussion that has emerged directly from scholastic and Tridentian Catholicism.

Libanio’s thinking could be explained in connection with the ideas of another leading Brazilian Jesuit Mário de França Miranda, and with those of Jon Sobrino who, even though he is not Brazilian, has a lot in common with Libanio’s thinking. Miranda made a great effort to understand the Lutheran reformation and its background. The two “solas”, sola fide and sola gratia, that Lutherans proclaimed were aimed against the fides caritate formata principle. Luther was perfectly “catholic” in criticizing the scholastic idea that faith should need charity and good works in order to justify the person before God, for “charity sides with the faith and not with the works”. The works are a “consequence” of the faith and “proof” of its authenticity.775

Jon Sobrino’s The Principle of Mercy is an example of strict scholastic liberation theology. The book (originally published in 1992) sums up the themes he had developed in previous years. He quotes Leonardo Boff’s idea of liberation theology as “an adequate theory for the praxis of oppressed and believing peoples”. For Sobrino’s associate Ignacio Ellacuría it was “the ideological moment of ecclesial and historical praxis”.776 Hence, “liberation theology understands theology as the theoretico-ideological moment of praxis”.777 Sobrino walks the thin line between referring to “God as a primary object of theology” and suggesting that this theological specific “must be subordinated to, and directed toward (and later illuminated by) the elimination of the world’s suffering”.778 This practical concentration on helping the poor in their suffering was the reason why Sobrino referred to theology in Augustinian terms as intellectus amoris and

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776 Sobrino 1994, 38. There is no footnote to show where the long L. Boff quotation and the shorter Ellacuría quote come from.
777 Sobrino 1994, 38.
778 Sobrino 1994, 39.
intellectus misericordiae. Liberation theology engages in a “pre-theological option” that makes it possible to speak of “the primacy and the ultimacy of compassion”. He put it strongly:

Jesus asserts that what is ultimate and absolutely necessary is that persons follow him. Historically, he makes clear that what is most important is not to say “Lord, Lord”, but to do the will of the Father. Eschatologically, he makes clear that salvation – the final realization of God’s designs and the purpose of revelation – is realized when love of those in need actually takes place, no matter the explicit awareness that accompanies such love.779

Sobrino had taken up the concept of intellectus amoris in the 1980’s. This had immediately generated a critical response from Juan Carlos Scannone, an Argentinian Jesuit. Confronting intellectus amoris, Scannone stated that the hermeneutic circle needed to be such that the priority “both on the theological level of experience and praxis of the first act, and on the theological, reflective and theoretical level of the second act belongs to the faith”.780 The optic of the poor needs to be the optic of the poor Christ in the poor, and the starting point was an encounter of faith with the poor Christ. Scannone comes close to totally abandoning the liberation theological language game.

Scannone also mentioned the idea put forward by the Boff brothers that liberation theology has a “great dialectic of theory (faith) and practice (love)”.781 He argued that both Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Boff brothers started with spirituality, with the encounter of Christ in the poor. This means that “the starting point of liberation theology was not given, properly speaking, by praxis itself.”782 Scannone emphasized faith and contemplation as Gutiérrez did, but Sobrino preferred to speak of charity in ethical terms. In his view, the emphasis had shifted from the sociological to the ethical. The fides caritate formata model had taken the

779 Sobrino 1994, 41.
780 “Precisamente el amor y la misericordia de que hablamos más arriba son respuesta a una visión de fe y a una gracia del Señor que sólo la fe puede interpretar como tal. De modo que la prioridad en el círculo hermenéutico – tanto en el nivel teológico, experiencial y práxico del acto primero como en el nivel teológico, reflexivo y teórico del acto segundo – la tiene la fe.” Scannone 1990, 304. Scannone refers to Sobrino’s article Hacer teología en América Latina. Theologia Xaveriana 39 (1989), 139–156. For a similar logic of theologal–theological as a distinction between the ontological and the epistemological, see L. Boff 1985, 33, quoted in n. 894. For C. Boff’s similar idea, see n. 131, n. 830. On “theologal” in Libanio, see n. 342, n. 656, n. 880.
782 “Por eso se puede afirmar que ya entonces el punto de partida de la teología de la liberación no estaba dado propiamente hablando por la praxis misma, pues ésta era ya concebida como respuesta a una palabra anterior, percibida en la fe, a saber, la palabra e interpelación del Señor en los rostros de los pobres: el encuentro de Cristo en los pobres.” (Scannone 1990, 296.) He refers to the idea put forward by Gutiérrez that “contemplation and praxis form the first act which theology as the second act reflects on”.

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shape of an ethical demand: the faith and the “awareness” were not as important as the fact that love really existed. The primacy of praxis had become the primacy of love783, and the attempts to conceptualize theology actually depended on the ethical choice.784

Libanio also appeared to make a strong distinction between the “real” and “the consciousness”: the consciousness has a central role but so has the “reality”, which he refers to as charity and praxis:

Schema

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>religious discourse</th>
<th>theological discourse</th>
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consciousness of the level of the reality in the light of the Revelation = FAITH

| reality – order of salvation – domain of charity, of praxis785 |

Libanio explains the relationship between love / praxis / salvation, faith / consciousness and theology in these terms:

Firstly, we have the reality, the real (a realidade, o real), the order of salvation, the concrete world of salvific history, the space of charity, the praxis. In the second instance, we have the consciousness. It is not about a temporal second moment, but [it is] on the level of comprehension and logic. As “intelligent” beings, the reality only exists for us as it is “understood”, “present to us” and “conscious”. Now the level of the consciousness of charity is the faith. Faith is the risen consciousness (tomada de consciência) and understanding of the real, of history and of our praxis in the light of the revelation. Theology is situated in the third moment.786

There is a risk involved in this interpretation of fides caritate formata. The inherent anthropological dualism can lead to an unwanted result: to a distinction between faith and love and not to their union as orthopraxis would imply. The distinction is expressed as Libanio calls love the fundamental saving reality. Faith is only the consciousness of love, and faith does not belong to the “real” level but to the level of consciousness. It is as if “matter” were prior to “form”, and body to

783 According to Scannone, Sobrino replaced the “praxis” by “the practice love”: “Resumamos lo dicho: la teología de la liberación se autocomprende como intellectus amoris, en primer lugar, porque es reflexión crítica a la luz de la fe, de una práctica de amor [...].” Scannone 1990, 299.

784 “Insofar as it [the real fact, or the love] does not take place, all attempts to conceptualize or comprehend God’s truth will be in vain.” Sobrino 1994, 41.

785 TdL, 215. Note in particular the metaphysical character of the pattern: human consciousness is consciousness of the reality that is the foundation of everything.

786 TdL, 215, emphasis added.
the mind. In this, Libanio seems to run counter to the pragmatic and profoundly dialectical pattern of modern thinking he advocates elsewhere.\textsuperscript{787}

The dualism of \textit{fides caritate formata} model was contested by liberation theologians as well.\textsuperscript{788} As Leonardo Boff stated in \textit{A graça libertadora}, faith is “much richer” than the Tridentian formulation. He refers to a book by the Jesuit theologian Juan Alfaro of 1972.\textsuperscript{789} Moreover, among the Brazilian Jesuits, Mário de França Miranda has maintained that Luther’s notion of faith corresponds to the Tridentian notion of love. What Luther opposed in \textit{fides caritate formata} was, therefore, the idea that the human being could trust in his or her own works. Faith as such does not exclude good works, hope and love\textsuperscript{790} – “Sola fide nunquam sola”, in the words of Paul Althaus.\textsuperscript{791}

One conclusion from this perusal of the theological thinking of several Latin American Jesuits is that there is a fundamental terminological consensus. None of them supports the strict “primacy of praxis” model of the 1970’s, which does not mean that the question of orthopraxis would be forgotten. Faith and love are considered complementary. However, particularly Jon Sobrino stresses the practical aspect of the faith: mercy matters the most.\textsuperscript{792} Libanio supports the emphasis on love as the “real” level of Christian spirituality and salvation, of which faith is the informative side. He does not share Sobrino’s strongly sociological stance, however, and neither does he follow Scannone’s strong criticism of liberation theology. He takes a \textit{via media} approach to praxis.

\textsuperscript{787} Peter Berger considered the impossibility of absolutely objective information an axiom: “The institutional world is objectivat ed human activity […] it is important to emphasize that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one.” (Berger & Luckmann 1991, 78.) On Libanio’s use of Bergerian thought, cf. n. 571.

\textsuperscript{788} A non-Jesuit critique of both Luther and the scholastic \textit{fides caritate formata} appears in Comblin 1998b, 48: “Na tradição, e provavelmente na própria mente de Lutero – mas não em certas expressões dele – o agir de compaixão, o agir de apoio à libertação do outro, é parte da fé ou do conjunto existencial mencionado por S. Paulo.”

\textsuperscript{789} L. Boff (1977, 163) points particularly to Alfaro’s study of Tridentian and Lutheran terminology in Alfaro 1972. As he points out, Tridentium did say that faith was an intellectual assent. However: “Fé implica também esta dimensão; mas ela é muito mais rica; biblicamente fé significa também confissão, obediência e confiança fundada em Deus e não no esforço humano.” Libanio naturally admits this, but many times he seems to emphasize the intellectual assent to the exclusion of the aspect of trust.

\textsuperscript{790} “A dificuldade de Lutero estava no modo como entendia a formulação católica da ‘fé informada pela caridade’, lida numa perspectiva nominalista, como se o homem pudesse se apoiar na caridade, fruto de suas forças naturais, para obter a justificação. Lutero não quis assim excluir as boas obras, a esperança e o amor. Sua noção de fé equivale à versão católica da caridade.” Miranda 2004, 121.

\textsuperscript{791} Cited in Miranda 1991, 94; translated “só a fé nunca sola” in Miranda 2004, 121.

\textsuperscript{792} As Jon Sobrino stated in his article “Hacer teología en América Latina” (cf. n. 780), “there is nothing outside the exercise of it [mercy] that would illuminate or demand it (nada hay fuera de su mismo ejercicio que la ilumine o exija)” (Scannone 1990, 298; cit. from p. 145 of the article).
6. The specific discussion on Marxist analysis in the 1980’s

6.1. Marxist analysis: the theologians’ term for scientific Marxism

The question of praxis was a question of faith and ethics. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Libanio preferred to interpret praxis as a mediation of Christian love (caritas). Another common term in liberation theology is “Marxist analysis”, which refers to the fact that it does start with praxis, but that social praxis needs to be scientifically analyzed. Yet it is not any analysis, but precisely dialectical Marxist thinking that is the best means of understanding Latin American reality.

Naturally, the specification of analysis as Marxist begs the question of whether it is, after all, ideological. Liberation theologians have responded to the criticism by insisting that Marxist analysis is scientific and not ideological. Their underlying justification lies in the Althusserian division of Marx’s production and thinking into the ideological and the mature scientific phases. For instance, referring to Marxist analysis on their trip in the Soviet Union and Poland, they made the point that their “scientific” Marxism was different from the ideology of Marxism. In this, they reiterated the Althusserian position of the 1960’s.

Paradoxically, the emphasis on “science” was obviously in line with official Marxism. How else could these views have been published in those countries? Althusserianism clearly reflected a greater scientistic trend within the Soviet block,

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793 A group of liberation theologians visited the Soviet Union in summer 1987. Leonardo Boff gave an interview to Izvestiya in which he spoke of “Marxist analysis” (marxistiskiy analiz). It was necessary to know the mechanism of oppression in order to liberate the oppressed (Charolyev 1987). Frei Betto continued on to Poland and made an Althusserian distinction in the local newspaper Trybuna Ludu: Marxists and Catholics could co-operate in Latin America because “scientific Marxism” had been separated from Marxist “ideology” and could thus be linked with the Gospel: “Łącząc nauki Ewangelii z naukowym marksizmem (aczkolwiek odrzucają jego ideologię) teologia wyzwolenia stała się wkrótce problemem interesującym cały Kościół powszechny, niepokojącym ostatnich papieży, wywołującym liczne dyskusje i kontrowersje.” (Jaworski 1987, 1, emphasis added.) On a similar distinction between the “essential” scientific content of Marx’s message and its “accidental and contingent” ideological elements, see Comblin 1974, 17. It is obvious that Marxist analysis means this “scientific” Marxism of the later Marx. The Soviets made a similar effort to propagate scientific Marxism with the help of philosophical literature (Konstantinov, Kuusinen, Rutkevich, Oizerman, et al.), but the expression “Marxist analysis” was not common in the Soviet Union.
where Marxism was officially a scientific world-view as opposed to religion. This brings us to the core of the problem of both praxis and Marxist analysis. It is a question not of science \textit{qua} science, but of its positivistic and scientistic interpretation as a safe starting point and criterion: praxis could be used to prove a statement in the same way as natural science proved its theories. Influence of this kind came directly from the Soviet Union. This is illustrated in Clodovis Boff’s footnote in \textit{Teologia e prática} in which he states that the book on praxis by the Soviet philosopher M. N. Rutkevich was good for explaining “the general problem of the epistemological statute of praxis”.\textsuperscript{794} The idea of praxis as a “criterion” came from this book, and shows how deeply it was linked to scientific thinking in Marxism.

There were reasons, therefore, why the words “praxis” and “scientific Marxism” sounded negative in the ears of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Libanio’s \textit{Teologia da libertação} was written in an interesting period when liberation theologians were still productive, but as mentioned above, the Roman instructions and particularly the “first instruction” \textit{Libertatis nuntius} had been published and influenced the book.

Marxist analysis was criticized in Puebla in 1979, and twice in the early 1980’s. In the final Puebla document, which was approved of by the Pope, the criticism of militant atheism is very severe. The document in its official form quotes the encyclical \textit{Octogesima adveniens} from 1971\textsuperscript{795}, in which the previous


\textsuperscript{795} Items 543b–545 of the “papal version” are: “El colectivismo marxista conduce igualmente -por sus presupuestos materialistas- a una idolatría de la riqueza pero en su forma colectiva. [...] El motor de su dialéctica es la lucha de clases. Su objetivo, la sociedad sin clases, lograda a través de una dictadura proletaria que, en fin de cuentas, establece la dictadura de partido. Todas sus
pope warned against the alleged possibility of taking some pieces of Marxism apart. Marxism, as Pope Paul VI said, could also be understood “as a scientific activity” and “as a rigorous method of examining social and political reality”. He nevertheless reminded his audience that the theory was intimately linked with practice:

Although this type of analysis gives a privileged position to certain aspects of reality to the detriment of the rest, and interprets them in the light of its ideology, it nevertheless furnishes some people not only with a working tool but also a certitude preliminary to action: the claim to decipher in a scientific manner the mainsprings of the evolution of society.\(^\text{796}\)

In other words, Paul VI considered the idea of separating different Marxisms “illusory and dangerous”. This very point was repeated at Puebla, at least in the version that was officially approved. People should not forget the “intimate link” between Marxist analysis and ideology, which in any form would inevitably lead to totalitarianism.\(^\text{797}\)

Given the severe anti-Marxism in the official Puebla document, it is no surprise that the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe wrote a letter on “Marxist Analysis by Christians” in December 1980. He observed that there were various ideas of what “Marxist analysis” actually meant.\(^\text{798}\) His main point was the following (#5):

\begin{quote}
First, it seems to me that in our analysis of society we can accept a certain number of methodological viewpoints which to a greater or lesser extent arise from Marxist analysis, as long as we do not attribute an exclusive character to them.\(^\text{799}\)
\end{quote}

\[^{796}\text{OA, 33.}\]
\[^{797}\text{OA, 34; cf. n. 795. Vuola (1997, 43–44) portrays the inner division of the Latin American Catholic church at Puebla: the use of the more liberation theological Second Report (Secunda relatio), which was based on the contributions of the local bishops, was blocked and the final draft was made in the Vatican. In this sense, Arrupe (1990, 307) refers directly to what Pope John Paul II thought, not to the third episcopal meeting at Puebla (CELAM III) as such.}\]
\[^{798}\text{Arrupe 1990, 307. The letter of December 1980 was published in April 1981.}\]
\[^{799}\text{Arrupe 1990, 308.}\]
The word “elements” made liberation theologians react. They defended themselves, insisting that they were not using Marxist analysis as a whole, but only some elements or “methodological pointers”. In the early 1980’s, many explanations were given for their use of Marxist-influenced social science, as in Rosino Gibellini’s book *The Liberation Theology Debate*:

On the theme of Marxism Gutiérrez says more precisely: “Certainly the social sciences are used in the study of social reality, but not that which is known as ‘Marxist analysis’, certainly not – as Fr Arrupe put it – ‘exclusively’.” The Boff brothers also deny that Marx is either the father or the godfather of liberation theology. “All in all Marxism was always used as a *mediation* in the service of something greater, which is faith and its historical demands. [...] All in all it is an operation of *Aufhebung*: acceptance and critical transcendence.”

Gibellini was supportive of the liberation theologians. Only “elements” were taken from Marxist analysis and critically integrated into the specific horizon of Christian theology. Moreover, as Gutiérrez said, this never happened “exclusively”. The social sciences were “in no way” the same as Marxist analysis, and most certainly not in the way Arrupe intended.

There were things that Arrupe admitted in his letter. In certain situations, counter-violence could be justified (#12), and he expressed the wish that the Jesuits would remain “fraternally open” to dialogue with the Marxists (#19). What he expressly criticized, however, was the use of Althusserian–Harneckerian analysis as historical materialism, which some Christian equated with Marxist analysis (#8). The great problem was that politics, culture and religion “lose their substance” in this Marxist analysis and are “wholly dependent on that which occurs in the sphere of economic relations”.

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800 Boff & Boff (1987, 28) refer to Arrupe’s letter of Dec. 8, 1980, yet maintain that there are three methodological pointers that have proved fruitful in understanding the world of the oppressed: “the importance of economic factors, attention to the class struggle, and the mystifying power of ideologies, including religious ones”. Because Marx was not the guide, “Marxist materialism and atheism do not even constitute a temptation for liberation theologians.”


802 Gibellini 1988, 46–47.

803 This is the meaning of Gutiérrez’s explanation in “Teología y ciencias sociales” of 1984: “En las ciencias sociales contemporáneas [...] hay la presencia de elementos de análisis que vienen del marxismo. [...] Pero la presencia de estos puntos no permite de ninguna manera identificar ciencias sociales con el análisis marxista; sobre todo si se toma este último con lo que el padre Arrupe, en una conocida carta sobre el tema, llama ‘su carácter exclusivo’ [...]”. Gutiérrez 1990c, 78.

804 “According to a good number of Christians who are themselves sympathetic to Marxist analysis, even if it does not imply either ‘dialectical materialism’ or, a fortiori, atheism, it nonetheless encompasses ‘historical materialism’ and, in the view of some, is even identical with it.” Arrupe 1990, 308–309.

805 Arrupe 1990, 309.
In this, Arrupe was in fact criticizing the whole metaphysical model of Althusserianism. It was no longer a question of “relative autonomy” granted to religion. No, religion was entirely discarded as an independent entity and considered as “wholly dependent” on the economy. Everything was supposed to be “intimately” a function of productive relations (#9). This was the core of Arrupe’s criticism of the Harnecker-type of Marxism that was spreading rapidly at the time.

On ethical grounds, Arrupe also criticized Marxist social analysis for promoting “a radical theory of antagonism and class struggle”. He made the point that it was “social analysis in the service of class struggle” (#11). Libanio wrote *Pastoral numa sociedade de conflitos* in 1982, quoting Arrupe’s critique of Marxism. The division of society into classes was didactically helpful but it did not acknowledge all the “limit situations”, such as well-paid workers in some sectors. His strongest criticism concerned the issue of using class struggle to beat class struggle, and incitement to hatred as a motivational factor until its “revolutionary explosion”. This was wrong, and neither did the end justify the means.

Libanio also criticized the scientific character of Marxist analysis, but he did so in connection with his criticism of class struggle. Explaining the whole of history through the heuristic notion of class struggle gave it an impoverished and monotonous reading. Taking Marx’s idea in the *Communist Manifest*, namely that “the history of all society has been the history of class struggle”, gave an unbalanced interpretation of history firstly because no other factors were given the same weight, and secondly because they were also explained by the class struggle. In this second half of his argument, Libanio was implicitly criticizing Althusserian economic determination “in the last instance”.

By way of contrast, it is interesting to see how another Latin American Jesuit, Juan Luis Segundo, reacted to Arrupe’s warning. Firstly, he published the

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806 Arrupe 1990, 309.
807 PSC, 127.
808 “A base de luta de classes é objetiva. Não depende das liberdades e consciências. Mas no afã de querer superar esta situação de opressão, pode-se ser levado a acentuar tal luta de classes como meio de obter tal superação. E nesse movimento podem surgir dois problemas éticos. Um de que o ódio entre como motivação no acirramento do conflito de classes até sua explosão revolucionária. O outro advém de que um meio éticamente duvidoso – pelo menos em algumas de suas formas – é usado para um fim em si justificável. O fim não justifica os meios, segundo o antigo axioma da ética tradicional.” PSC, 231. He stresses: “Tem de ficar claro que não é crísis suscitar o ódio nas classes populares.” PSC, 233.
809 PSC, 228–229.
three-volume *El hombre de hoy ante Jesús de Nazaret* in Madrid and not in Latin America. Secondly, he reacted to the situation caused by Arrupe’s letter and the Vatican policy, but he did so by theorizing even more deeply on the relationship between Marxist science and ideology. To him, the first volume of Marx’s *Capital* was “a great anti-ideological work”. He pointedly defended historical materialism: it was not only the “in the last instance” logic of “relative autonomy” that was valid. Historical materialism was “not a ‘philosophy’ [...] but a scientific method, no matter how limited its ‘precisions’ are”. One can see an implicit – naturally not explicit – critique of Arrupe’s warning in this philosophical book *Fe e ideología*, which is the first volume of the trilogy.

The philosophical review of the Brazilian Jesuits *Síntese*, led by Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, similarly referred to the class struggle in its 21st issue in 1981. Structural injustice called for change, but a more profound change than the mere “changing of the poles of domination”, i.e. revolution. The editorial article once more promoted a version of Christian social personalism à la Mounier & Maritain.

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810 “Marx no dice que se deba (o pueda) ‘explicar’ cada forma religiosa por las relaciones de vida económica de cada periodo (como si éstas fueran *causa suficiente* de aquellas). Dice que se deben *inferir* las formas relativas correspondientes. Está en juego en la traducción la ‘autonomía relativa’ de la superestructura, determinada sólo ‘en última instancia’ por el modo de producción.” Segundo 1982, 130 n.18.

811 “Está ante todo lo que en la jerga marxista se llama el *materialismo histórico*, que no es, por cierto, a pesar de muchos malentendidos, una ‘filosofía’ o una teoría sobre el origen o constitución del universo, sino un método científico, por limitadas que sean sus ‘precisiones’.” Segundo 1982, 129. Cf. the criticism by Marejev that the Soviet histmat “expanded” the materialist concept of history to nature as well and was in fact a stronger world-view than diamat (Marejev 2006, 133–134). Many Marxists before Althusser and Balibar, such as G. Plekhanov, regarded diamat and the materialist concept of history (i.e. histmat) as a unified system (see Kühller & Petrioli & Wolf 2004, 322).

812 *PSC*, 227.
6.2. Marxist analysis and “theologia omniocculata”: Clodovis Boff’s methodology

The Brazilian Jesuits reacted to the warning published by Pedro Arrupe in early 1981 and to the Puebla document. The liberation theologians, particularly Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, had been among the most radical priests in the country for some years. Both of them publicly embraced the Althusserian method and made a theological application of it. However, things started to change rapidly after the first instruction of the Vatican was issued in 1984. The notorious process against Leonardo Boff started, which in fact makes it more difficult to put his production into perspective. Due to the process and Leonardo’s important role in the Brazilian church, Libanio does not mention him very much in TdL, but he does engage in a discussion concerning Clodovis Boff’s theological method. It would be useful first to take a brief look at this methodology, which is at the same time the “official” liberation theological method.

Clodovis Boff’s dissertation *Teologia e prática* (*TP*, 1978) was an important piece of work. Many doctoral dissertations never come into the limelight, but his was famous before it was even translated into Portuguese. Professor Vaz called it “significant” and “monumental” as early as 1977. It has indeed been as important for liberation theology as it has been controversial. Clodovis Boff proclaimed openly a synthesis of scholastics and Marxism that was essentially based on making “theology out of the non-theological”, or processing a theological interpretation from pre-theological, scientific data. Clodovis’s brother Leonardo

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813 Francisco Taborda (1981, 250 n. 1) begins his article on praxis by referring to #545 and #406 of the Puebla document. This shows that the Brazilian Jesuits *in corpore* followed a somewhat different line from that of the radicals.

814 According to Adenor Brighenti, Clodovis Boff was the only theoretician of liberation theology to develop an all-embracing systematization: “En lo que respecta la TdL, optamos por buscar su epistemología y su método [...] en el pensamiento de Clodovis Boff, el único de sus teóricos que elaboró una sistematización global, particularmente de la sintaxis del método de esta ‘nueva manera de teologizar’.” Brighenti 1994, 211.

815 Vaz (1983, 5) suggested that the publication of C. Boff’s thesis would inaugurate the “critical phase” of liberation theology in the same sense as Rubio’s dissertation. One could say that the opposite happened: liberation theology was, in fact, dogmatized. The introduction was first published in 1977, as was the rest of the book.

816 The Finnish theologian Tapio Saraneva explained Clodovis Boff’s liberation theology in 1991, but suppressed its Marxist links: “No prominent representative of liberation theology regards the
Boff called this a *theologia omniocculata* methodology. According to Leonardo, theology refers to everything that is in the world, as long as it is considered in divine light.\[817\]

However, it is obvious that Clodovis Boff meant scientific Marxism or “Marxist analysis” when he referred to science as the starting point. In principle, the *theologia omniocculata* model is possible in theology if one is committed to the Thomist *duplex veritatis modus* logic, which presupposes the ontological unity of all being, yet allows various readings of the same reality. This was also the early interpretation suggested by Antonio Alonso:

But it is necessary to ask what Marxist analysis is, to what degree it is helpful and what is its scientific validity. If it really is a scientific analysis of the reality it will be necessary to accept it because there are not two truths. But this acceptance cannot take place *a priori*.\[818\]

The Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984 made it clear that scientificalness was necessary. If one wanted to transform society, one needed “scientific knowledge of the situation and of the possible strategies”. Science also provides the “proof of the seriousness of the effort”.

relationship with Marxism as something that will essentially influence theology. Marxism as an all-embracing social philosophy and world-view is strictly refuted. Instead, Marxism – or rather: Marxist sociology – is utilized as a means of analyzing the social reality in the same way as theology also otherwise makes good use of the secular sciences. Marxist sociology is just another way of *mediating to theology its object, i.e. the world*, which is interpreted in the light of God’s word. [...] Marxist sociology, which could also be called dialectical structuralism, helps better than functionalism to analyze the conflicts and class antagonisms that cause suffering. (Kukaan vapautuksen teologian huomattavista edustajista ei pidä suhdetta marxilaiseen teologiin oleellisesti vaikuttavana seikkana. Marxilaisuus kokonaisvaltaisena yhteiskuntatilaisuudena ja elämänkatsomuksena torjutaan jyrkkästi. Sen sijaan marxilaisuutta – tai paremminkin: marxilaista sosioologiaa – käytetään hyväksi yhteiskunnallisen todellisuuden analyysivälineenä niin kuin teologiassa mutenkin käytetään hyväksi sekulaarien tieteiden apua. Marxilaisten sosioologia on yksi niistä tavoista, jotka *välittävät teologialle sen objektin, so. maailman*, jota tulkitaan Jumalan sanan valossa. [...] Marxilaisten sosioologia, jota myös saatetaan sanoa dialektiseksi strukturalismissa, auttaa paremmin kuin esimerkiksi funktionalismi analysoimaa kärsimyksen aiheuttavia konflikteja ja luokkavastakohtaisuuksia.)” Saraneva 1991, 77. Emphasis added. It is precisely the question of “the world as the object of theology” that is essential to C. Boff’s theological methodology. Saraneva quotes (p. 59) Boff’s problematic thought: “C. Boff says that there is no Christian praxis as such. There is only praxis inspired by the faith, and *praxis that is interpreted as Christian. Theory is theology of the non-theological.* (C. Boff sanoo, ettei kristillistä praksista sellaisenaan ole olemassa. On vain uskon inspiroimaa praksista ja *praksista, joka tulkitaan kristilliseksi. Teologia on ei-teologisen teologian.*)” Emphasis added.

\[817\] “Por fim, a teologia é ‘omniocculata’, seu olho alcança todas as coisas, até as mais comezinhas, pois vai além de seu objeto, Deus. Como já ensinava santo Tomás no primeiro parágrafo da *Summa theologica*, a teologia não possui apenas Deus como referência, mas todas as coisas, desde que consideradas à luz de Deus.” L. Boff 2000, 234. Saraneva’s interpretation seems different from this, but what does L. Boff mean by saying that “theology goes beyond (além) its object, God”? Can this in any way be defended as a “theological” method?\[818\] “Pero, hay que preguntarse qué es el análisis marxista y en qué grado sirve o cuál es su validez científica. Si realmente es un análisis científico de la realidad habrá que aceptarlo, porque no hay dos verdades. Pero esa aceptación no se puede hacer *a priori.*” Alonso 1974, 43.
However, the Instruction made it clear that the word “scientific” in itself could give rise to misunderstandings of the scientistic kind. In other words, “mythical fascination” often glorifies ideas that are not scientific at all. By this, the Vatican meant materialism, and reiterated that “the borrowing of a method of approach to reality should be preceded by a careful epistemological critique”.819

Two things were presupposed: Clodovis Boff’s commitment to Althusserian thinking, and both his and Libanio’s commitment to the Thomist duplex veritatis modus logic that would make the liberation theological method possible. I will return to this later, but will now take a look at the method, which Libanio interprets as follows:

The curve in this scheme begins with “a datum of reality” and then goes to “the mediation of autonomous reason”. This is where the “pre-theological datum” is first processed as the raw material (matéria-prima) of theology. After that comes the strictly theological part of auditus fidei and intellectus fidei, by which Libanio means the theological “hermeneutic mediation”, in the words of Clodovis Boff. The result is a theological product.

The hermeneutic curve shows how the datum of reality is first interpreted by means of autonomous reasoning. From this pre-theological stage, it comes to the higher ground of theological hermeneutics. The pattern is in line with Clodovis

819 LN, VII:3–4. Rubio’s criticism was straightforward as he called the liberation theologians’ scientism “ingenuous”: “Além disso, a fé na ciência e na objetividade do método analítico marxista proclamada por muitos cristãos latino-americanos, parece-nos bastante ingênua.” Rubio 1983, 262.
820 TdL, 216.
Boff’s theological application of the Althusserian model of theoretical practice with its three stages G1–G2–G3.\textsuperscript{821} Each “G” stands for a generality. Going from G1 to G2, one crosses the line of “epistemological rupture”. The terms of “generality” and “epistemological rupture” or “epistemological break” (\textit{coupure épistémologique}) came to Althusser’s thinking from Gaston Bachélard who was a French positivist. Clodovis Boff prefers to speak of three types of mediations, socio-analytical, hermeneutic and practical (MSA, MH, MP), instead of G1, G2 and G3. The three-part distinction corresponds to the “see–judge–act” method of Catholic Action which was more generally adopted in liberation theology.\textsuperscript{822}

The Althusserian notion of theoretical practice is very theoretical, but Althusser’s thinking is also very concrete and materialistic. This is the paradox in Clodovis Boff’s dissertation. On the one hand, “the real things remain behind the cognitive process”.\textsuperscript{823} The empirical is “real”. In the same way, Marta Harnecker strongly emphasized Althusser’s distinction between empirical concepts and theoretical concepts.\textsuperscript{824} C. Boff adopted this distinction and found a “surprising agreement” between Aristotle and Althusser because they both shared the same matter–form thinking.\textsuperscript{825} Boff nevertheless quoted some of the criticism given by F. H. Cardoso and Althusser’s self-criticism. The distinction (i.e. between material/empirical/real and formal/theoretical) was considered “metaphysical”.\textsuperscript{826}

On the other hand, Clodovis Boff stated that theology belonged to the level of the theoretical concepts, which \textit{per definitionem} came after the real, empirical concepts and experiences of the material world:

\begin{quote}
After Marx, theology cannot put the material conditions of life in parentheses any longer without risk of mystifying the reality of the evil situations in an ideological manner (I 2).
The theological word concerning the Social only has meaning (\textit{crédito}) in the position of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{821} On the process of theoretical practice from G1 to G3, see C. Boff, \textit{TP}, 144–150. For a criticism of the term “epistemological rupture”, see Scannone 1990, 331–332, and Kee 1990, 198. On pp. 189–195, Kee criticizes Jon Sobrino’s concept of epistemological rupture, which was also dealt with by Vuola (1997, 57–60). One has the impression that the “rupture” referred to by C. Boff and J. Sobrino carried very different meanings. J. Sobrino’s arguments are, consequently, not dealt with here.\textsuperscript{822} See especially the table in C. Boff, \textit{TP}, 27.
\textsuperscript{823} “As coisas reais permanecem atrás do processo cognitivo […]” C. Boff, \textit{TP}, 147.
\textsuperscript{824} Cf. n. 238.
\textsuperscript{825} “[…] notamos um surpreendente acordo de fundo entre esses dois autores: materialismo de base, distinção entre o real e seu conhecimento assim como entre a ordem e a estrutura autônoma de cada um deles […]” C. Boff, \textit{TP}, 146 n. 18.
\textsuperscript{826} C. Boff (\textit{TP}, 147 n. 21) mentions this criticism of the “metaphysical distinction” between the “real object” and the “theoretical object” given by F. H. Cardoso in his \textit{Althusserianismo ou marxismo} of 1973, and also Althusser’s self-criticism against the theoretical nature of the theoretical practice, which was published in 1974 and soon translated into German as well (see Althusser 1975b).
second word, i.e. only after having done justice to the condition mentioned. This is precisely the function of MSA [social science].

This means that theology needs to start with the socio-analytical mediation of the social sciences. The hermeneutic process could be compared to a material production process in which the MSA is turned into MP [practice] by means of MH. In other words, the mind–body problem is overcome by making the hermeneutics completely mental, formal and cognitive. There is a dialectic between the sociological knowledge and its theological interpretation.

The cognitive process qua theological process is justified by the fact that every truth is, in ontological terms, theological. This brings us back to the foundational idea that “there is nothing that may not be theologizable in principle”. The theoretical range of liberation theology (or TdP, “theology of the political”) comprises “all praxis, even a political praxis that declares itself atheist”. In this omniocculata method, Clodovis Boff follows the pluralist thinking of his elder brother Leonardo, who maintained that “God is always present in everything”, especially in a liberating process that could be led by a “Christian, Marxist, socialist or pagan”.

It is worth taking a look at what was Clodovis Boff’s perhaps most radical text, which was published by the Jesuit publishing house Edições Loyola in 1979 and was entitled Sinais dos tempos (‘Signs of the times’). It shows Marxist scientistic thinking in practice. Boff proclaims the doctrine of historical materialism à la Althusser and Harnecker:

For these latter ones, the ‘theology of the ST [sinais dos tempos]’ is the T 2 [theology of the political, or liberation theology] and the T 2 inasmuch as it is theology is a theology of the empirical historicity, inasmuch as it is a theological interpretation of that which could be shown by Historical Materialism. It is the theological re-reading of the Marxist reading of history. To speak here of a “theology of Marxism”, or of “Marxist theology” would be to turn the terms of the question upside down. It is simply about a “theology of the historical [reality]”, or of the “historical positivity”, which assumes as its “natural” mediation the “science of history”, or Marxism, inasmuch as it is the theory of social analysis, or inasmuch as it is Historical Materialism. Secondly, besides the religious or theological interpretation of the historical [reality], a “refoundation” (‘refundição’) of the Positivity of the Faith assumes importance. To put it briefly and simply, an understanding of (explicitly) Christian Positivism is postulated that

827 C. Boff, TP, 378.
828 “Se, a partir da Fé, tudo se reporta a Deus, então, do ponto de vista da prática teológica, não há coisa alguma que não seja em princípio teologizável. O campo teórico da TdP pode, pois, se estender a toda Práxis, até mesmo a uma prática política que se declare atéia.” C. Boff, TP, 379.
829 “Deus, pois, está sempre presente em tudo, no caso de nossas reflexões no processo de libertação, movimentado por quem quer que seja, cristão, marxista, socialista ou pagão.” L. Boff 1980, 80. [First edition 1976.]
belongs to the order of the manifestation and not to the order of the constitution. In other words, the Faith is all the signifying domain of the Church and it does not “produce” the Salvation, Grace or Agape, but it reveals, proclaims and celebrates it.

The theological blockage that had persisted in Vatican II concerning the concept of the “supernatural” is thus removed, and a coherent discussion concerning the historical realities opens up. Theology has, then, the function of construing the intelligence of the Faith concerning the theologal or salvific dimension that underlies (se encontra subjacente) all history.

These two moments thus linked allow us to respond to each of the two basic questions. In fact, if the autonomously secular texture of the historical and social reality mediated to us by the Marxist text is not taken seriously, the “theology of the ST” ends up transforming “times” into “mere signs”. It thus transforms the real facts into abstract signs and the abstract signs into real facts. This is the critique given by Marx and Engels to Khulmann (sic) on the second last page of German Ideology. Regressing to a different historical [stage of] evolution, the “theology of the ST” is effectively turned into a “meteorology” of the religious type, something that Socrates was accused of.

On the other hand, the theological reading of the historical denies “natural” reason the “last word”. The openness of history is thus conserved forward and upward. A concession is made to the “science of history”; or better, the produced truth is taken from it, but we progress ahead without fear. The Word of Faith, even in that which is concerned with the historical, is not anti-, nor para- but meta-rational.830

Clodovis Boff showed in this book that he represented an “exclusively” positivist methodology at the turn of the 1970’s and 1980’s. To people like Libanio, his radical statements came as no suprise. The main point in the passage is the scientistic creed of believing in “historical positivity”.

830 “Para estes últimos a ‘teologia dos ST [sinais dos tempos]’ é a T 2 enquanto teologia da historicidade empírica, enquanto interpretação teológica daquilo que lhes pode mostrar o Materialismo Histórico. É a releitura teológica da leitura marxista da história. Falar aqui em ‘teologia do marxismo’ ou de ‘teologia marxista’ é colocar os termos da questão de modo atravessado. Trata-se simplesmente de ‘teologia do histórico’, ou ‘da positividade histórica’, que assume como mediação ‘natural’ a ‘ciência da história’, ou seja, o Marxismo, enquanto teoria de análise social, ou seja, enquanto Materialismo Histórico. Em segundo lugar, do lado da interpretação religiosa ou teológica do histórico, impõe-se uma ‘refundição’ da Positividade da Fé. Falando depressa e claramente, postula-se aqui um entendimento da Positividade cristã (explicita) como pertencendo à ordem da manifestação e não da ordem da constituição. Quer dizer, a Fé e todo o regime significante da Igreja não ‘produz’ a Salvação, a Graça ou o Agapé, mas o revela, o proclama e o celebra. O bloqueio teológico em que permaneceu ainda o Vaticano II, sobre o conceito de ‘sobrenatural’ fica assim levantado. É fica aberto um discurso coerente sobre as realidades históricas. A Teologia tem, então, por função, construir a inteligência da Fé no que concerne à dimensão teológica ou salvífica que se encontra subjacente em toda a história. Esses dois momentos, articulados assim, permitem responder respectivamente a duas questões básicas. Na verdade, se não se leva a sério a textura autonomamente secular do histórico ou do social, que nos é medida pelo texto marxista, a ‘teologia dos ST’ acaba transformando os ‘tempos’ em ‘sinais apenas’. Transfirma assim os fatos reais em sinais abstratos e os sinais abstratos em fatos reais. É a crítica que fizeram Marx e Engels a Khulmann (sic!) na penúltima página de A Ideologia Alemã. Recorrendo a outra evolução histórica, transforma-se realmente a ‘teologia dos ST’ em ‘meteorologia’ de cunho religioso, algo como aquilo de que se acusara Sócrates. Por outro lado, com a leitura teológica do histórico, nega-se a razão ‘natural’ o dizer da ‘palavra final’. Conserva-se, assim, a história aberta para frente e para cima. Concede-se portanto à ‘ciência da história’, melhor, toma-se dela a verdade produzida, mas se vai adiante sem medo. A Palavra da Fé, inclusive no que concerne ao histórico, não é nem anti-, nem para- mas meta-racional.” C. Boff 1979, 161–163. The emphasis (bold & italics) has been added. Boff maintained that he was expounding the true method that he had previously published in TP.
In fact, Libanio did notice the many problems in Clodovis Boff’s methodology. His article “Teologia e hermenêutica” at the end of 1976 criticizes Clodovis Boff, even if the name Boff does not appear. Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade did not take up this aspect of Libanio’s thinking but he argued that Libanio basically “followed” the lines in C. Boff’s main book. Libanio’s article deals with the perilousness of logical positivism, however. It is worth noting that the article consists in Libanio’s reaction to the dissertation published earlier in the same year in Belgium. Information about this dissertation started to flow rapidly into the Brazilian theological environment. Libanio remains on a very general level as he speaks of the logical positivism and the later Wittgensteinian “language games” (jogos de linguagem) theories.

According to Libanio, faith is not a mere language game or a self-regulating (auto-regulado) discourse. This was different from C. Boff’s thesis, since he maintained just that. Libanio argues that an inner logic and self-regulation is not enough for the language of the faith, since it is about “the discourse of the faith in a community that wants to grow” and has a communitarian frame of reference. An empty logical discourse remains on the level of mere logic. Libanio also refers

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831 Clodovis Boff’s *Sinais dos tempos* was published by Edições Loyola in 1979. This could indicate a political orientation among the Brazilian Jesuits in the late 1970’s, or simply their open policy toward new authors. Ricardo de la Cierva (*Jesuítas, Iglesia y marxismo*, or Cierva 1986) portrayed the political development of the Jesuits since the mid-1960’s as a degeneration. In a tendentious manner, he sought to explain the fact that their numbers had declined as the order had become politicized. This was visible in the Nicaraguan cabinet with its Jesuit ministers, and in the fact that Gonzalo Arroyo SJ had led the Christians for Socialism in Chile, and in the Salvadorean Jesuits (Sobrino, and also Elcurria who was still alive). He also criticizes the *Escatologia cristã* of Libanio and Bingemer, but rather superficially (Cierva 1986, 316–317). Cierva’s book has good documentation but a conservative bias. He openly confesses his sympathies for Opus Dei. He praises (p. 278) its attitude to the Vatican 1984 Instruction LN: “Medios del Opus Dei, como era de esperar, han reaccionado con lucidez y altura ante la Intrucción vaticana.”

832 According to C. Boff (*TP*, 205), theology was a “self-regulated discourse” (discurso auto-regrado). It was distinguished from general “religious discourse” by its method (p. 203).

833 “Superada, bem ou mal, esta lide intelectual [racionalismo e empirismo], eis que surge outra ameaça para o discurso teológico. Desta vez, não se trata de discutir as verdades, seu sentido. O ataque foi mais radical e prévio. Questionou-se a própria possibilidade de a Teologia construir um discurso sensato, isto é, que obedeca ao mínimo lógico de um discurso coerente. [...] Não restava nada para a Teologia, a não refugiarse no mundo dos sentimentos, da afetividade. [...] A insuficiência da lógica mostra-se em dois níveis. Não basta que o discurso seja coerente, auto-regulado, corresponda às estruturas lógico-lingüísticas dentro do jogo de linguagem próprio. Trata-se sobretudo de um discurso sobre a fé de uma comunidade em vista de seu crescimento. Não se pode esquecer a sua fundamental referência à experiência. É o lugar da semântica. Além disso, este discurso está construído a partir de um lugar social e exercerá seu papel no jogo de interesses sociais em curso. É o campo da pragmática.” *Teologia e hermenêutica* (1976), 927–928, emphasis added.
to Althusserian theoretical practice (prática teórica) which could be considered implicit criticism of Clodovis Boff.834

Clodovis Boff wrote an article for the compiled work Mysterium liberationis in 1990 that gave the impression that there was no change in his methodology, at least not until the early 1990’s.835 Here, however, the reader must be prepared for a surprise. Libanio was more than capable of interpreting the signs of change in the Brazilian theological environment. Clodovis Boff had, in fact, undergone a major change in his thinking as early as 1984 – the same year the Vatican Instruction on liberation theology (LN) was issued. This leads us to the core of the matter, that of the “exclusive” use of Marxism in liberation theology. The next section deals with the discussion in the mid-1980’s concerning the “exclusive” nature of Marxist analysis.

834 On the relationship between the theoretical practice and the tradition, see ibid., 921–922.
835 A decade later, after having been banned from teaching, Clodovis Boff softened and in fact watered down his methodology. He argued that “a certain method” was no longer necessary and that “a new theological spirit” (un nuevo espíritu teológico) was emerging (C. Boff 1991, 89). The article does represent a similar type of methodology, but in a more diplomatic and blurred way. He did not mention “theologies 1 and 2” (as in TP, 32) either, but referred to traditional theology as “moment 1”, which he nevertheless put aside (Así pues, dejaremos de lado el método del “momento 1”, que corresponde a la “teología clásica” [...], p. 99). It was liberation theology that was “moment 2”.

6.3. The discussion on the “exclusive” nature of social analysis

The idea of theology as theologia omniocculata has two problems, one practical and the other philosophical. Firstly, when liberation theologians wanted to engage in praxis-based discourse, they used social science as a starting point. This led to a discussion of whether Marxist analysis could be used in an “exclusive” fashion. Secondly, the very possibility of taking social praxis as a starting point arose because any reality could be the starting point for theology as it was “revealable” from the theological point of view. In other words, theology supplied a “panopticon” from which the “omni-occulata” view could be seen. The second of these questions, that of the “revealable” was dealt with in Chapter 2.

I will concentrate on the “exclusive” nature of social analysis as discussed in the 1980’s, and particularly in the book Teologia da libertação.

As mentioned, the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe’s letter was critical of the use of Marxist analysis in liberation theology. Theology could make use of sociology, but not in an exclusive manner. In a similar way, the Vatican Instruction Libertatis nuntius of 1984 criticizes the exegesis of the liberation theologians, which gives an exclusively political reading of the Exodus narrative. Likewise, the political reading of Magnificat is “principal and exclusive”, and “an exclusively political interpretation” is given to Christ’s death. Arrupe and the Vatican were not incorrect: in his most famous book from the early 1970’s Hugo Assmann stated that theology started “only from an analysis of reality”.

Libanio refers to the danger of an “exclusive” liberation theology, but he also reminds the reader of the conservative risk. Theology is most commonly “emptied” when it concentrates on the exclusively personal dimension of sin and the change that happens in people’s hearts, without considering the social

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836 McGrath (2004, 222–223) uses M. Foucault’s “panopticon” imagery of Surveiller et punir to argue that “[...] atheism saw itself as the panopticon, the vantage point from which religion could be viewed and mastered.” In the liberation theological method, theology takes back its traditional vantage point and views social reality from there.

837 LN, IV:3, X:5,12.

838 “[...] it is standard practice in Latin America, where theology starts only from an analysis of reality and usually takes a tripartite form: analysis of reality, theological reflection, and pastoral considerations.” Assmann 1975, 63. Italics in the original.
implications. Faith gives the “motive” for political “reason” in scholastic terms, and this gives the Christian a certain political freedom. In this logic Libanio, in fact, parts company with both the Roman and the liberationist brand of theocracy and approaches the Lutheran solution of two kingdoms and the modern ethical theories. Faith is the “ultimate motivation for political action”. He is critical of the *iure divino* justifications of the church institution: it was not only a question of how far a popular ideology could criticize the faith and the church, it was also about whether the divinely instituted structure was capable of self-criticism, given its canonical justification. In this sense, the three dimensions of the *humanum* (the common human ethic), the link between creation and redemption, and praxis as charity had to criticize both the ideologies and the church. Faith without works was dead.

There cannot be absolute and exclusive politics either. Libanio refers not only to the “emptying” and excessive individualism of faith, but also to the risk of political reductionism. The very idea of considering the social reality “in the light of the revelation” means that the lop-sidedness (univocity) of an excessive political reading is overcome: “liberation” does not only stand for “political liberation”. He quotes paragraph #5 of Arrupe’s letter and stresses that it is possible to accept “a certain number” of methodological points deriving more or

839 *TdL*, 151.
840 In *Fé e política*, Libanio is critical of the “many discourses” of Pope John Paul II at Puebla in 1979 in which he had “insisted that a Christian did not need an ideology because he had the Gospel”. *FP*, 52.
841 “Talvez possa ajudar-nos aqui uma distinção simples que a clássica escolástica faz entre ‘razão’ e ‘motivo’. [...] Em poucas palavras, a fé apresenta-nos a última motivação para o agir político. As ideologias são motivações em nível mais imediato.” *FP*, 52–53.
842 Libanio does not share Leonardo Boff’s radicalism, and he puts his argument in the form of a group of questions: “Até onde uma ideologia popular pode criticar expressões de fé e comportamentos da Igreja? Até onde a Igreja tem dificuldade de entender essas críticas e muito mais assimilá-las, instituindo autêntica autocrítica? Até onde, reivindicando uma fundação por Jesus Cristo, uma instituição, ligada a normas de Direito Divino, simplesmente elimina críticas da ideologia popular, não contra a fundação divina da Igreja, mas contra elementos burgueses-liberais aí incrustados?” *FP*, 61.
843 *FP*, 62–69. Here Libanio stresses the human element of liberation as “promoção humana” (p. 62). He refers to the Epistle of James (p. 66), and also to Mt. 25 where “charity toward the unknown brother” is the criterion for the authenticity of faith.
844 *TdL*, 151–153. He calls the risks “esvaziamento e univocidade”, “emptying and univocity”.
845 Libanio recalls that the spiritualizing risk is greater because it is more subtle: “[...] o desvio da espiritualização [...] esvazia a prática, retendo o termo. [...] Progressista no discurso, conservador na práxis.” *TdL*, 152.
less from Marxist analysis, but this must not be given an “exclusive” character. Emphasis on the “non-exclusive” character of the option for the poor seeks to maintain the universality of love within the church: “Option for the poor, yes; option for the poor of an ideological (Marxist) inspiration, no!”

Libanio also refers to the discussion on the exclusive use of social science as a methodological starting point. Liberation theology was not based on mere common sense because it often concealed the “mythical” ideas and social interests of the dominant class. The pejoratively “common” element of common sense could signify the perverted consciousness of this dominant class, which was why liberation theology “makes use of praxis, the social reality, of the socio-analytical mediations”. This would mean that socio-analytical mediation was used in a Freirean way to “conscientize” people, in other words to lead them away from the objective “intransitive” status toward an active, “transitive” state of mind.

Naturally, the theological method presented by Clodovis Boff is not as “conscientizing” as the Freirean method that largely inspired liberation theology. It stresses the results of sociological science in a structuralist sense and not the humanist Marxist element of conscientization. This leads to the very acute question of the “exclusive” character of Marxist socio-analytical mediation. In his article of 1986, Juan Carlos Scannone strongly criticized the way in which Clodovis Boff had applied the Althusserian “theoretical practice” model in theology. It should forge a “Chalcedonian” union between theological and historical reality, and their theological and analytical interpretation. In this way, it [liberation theology as theoretical practice in the Chalcedonian way] does not forget that the material object of liberation theology is the real history and the living liberating praxis

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846 The Puebla document (DocP, 1165) refers to “amor preferencial pero no exclusivo por los pobres”.
847 “Opção pelos pobres, sim; opção pelos pobres de inspiração ideológica (marxista), não!” TDL, 243.
848 “Ao estabelecer a relação teórica com a práxis – teologia da práxis – a TdL não a faz a partir do senso comum. [...] Pois o senso comum frequentemente oculta conhecimentos míticos da realidade ou interesses das classes dominantes, que conseguem passar como ‘senso comum’ a sua própria visão. ‘As idéias dominantes são as idéias das classes dominantes’ (K. Marx) e o senso comum exprime muitas vezes as idéias ‘comuns’, isto é, dominantes. Por isso, a TdL recorre para apropriar-se da práxis, da realidade social, de mediações científicas sócio-analíticas. Essa é uma das regras sintáticas originais da TdL e que mais problemas têm causado.” TDL, 167.
849 In his article on conscientization Libanio refers to the “intransitive consciousness”, which is transformed into a “transitive-critical consciousness”. In between, it is in a transitory state called “semi-intransitive” or “transitive-ingenuous” (transitivo-ingenua) consciousness. See Conciença critica / conscientização. Boletín de Filosofía 9 vol. 2 (1997-1998), 175-185, 180–181.
and not exclusively the theoretical result of the social sciences, as C. Boff conversely maintains.850

Scannone argues that every science devised by humans only has a partial vision of the human reality, such as “history, or the historical events and praxis”. All these, however, are incorporated into liberation theology. Hence, he concludes that no particular science with its partial interpretations and viewpoints could suffice for theology. Only philosophy offered the means of coming to terms with the totality. Not even all the particular sciences put together were capable of it.851 Moreover, no social science purported to offer only “brute facts” (datos brutos), but it always interpreted them and made a value judgment as to what interpretation should be given. He followed Habermas’ critical argument to the effect that there could be no impartial social science.852 He mentioned the criticism of the “exclusive” use of Marxist social science, and also referred to the way the totalizing and “determining” role of Marxist ideology was confronted in the Vatican Instruction.853

What is most significant in methodological terms is that Scannone points to the need for philosophy to understand faith. Philosophy is “the most historic and operative conceptualization” ever used. This is a criticism of the very first intentions of Gutiérrez’s liberation theology: Gutiérrez had expressly wanted to base theology more on the social sciences and less on philosophy, and even less on

850 “Por lo tanto no olvida que el objeto material de la teología de la liberación es la historia real y la praxis liberadora viviente, y no exclusivamente el resultado teórico de las ciencias sociales, como en cambio lo afirma Cl. Boff.” Scannone 1986, 145.
851 “[…] el objeto material de la teología de la liberación es la historia real y la praxis liberadora viviente, y no exclusivamente el resultado teórico de las ciencias sociales, como en cambio lo afirma Cl. Boff. […] ¿Porque corregimos a Cl. Boff en su comprensión del objeto material de la teología de la liberación? Porque cada ciencia humana sólo tiene en cuenta un aspecto regional o parcial de algo humano global como son la historia y los acontecimientos y praxis históricos. Estos, tomados en su globalidad, son el objeto material de la teología de la liberación. Las ciencias humanas no le proporcionan, por consiguiente, todo su objeto material, sino que cada una de ellas colabora en la comprensión crítica y científica de un aspecto regional del mismo en su globalidad. Pero ni siquiera todos ellos sumados llegan a proporcionarlo totalmente, ya que hay algo humano global en la historia y en la praxis que, en el nivel teórico, sólo puede ser reflexionado por una comprensión global del hombre, como la tiene la filosofía.” Scannone 1986, 145.
852 “[…] en el método de las ciencias sociales mismas […] no se trata sólo de una mera aprehensión de datos brutos, sino también de su interpretación teórica, del juicio crítico de verdad acerca de ella, y de la valoración que lo acompaña cuando se elige tal interpretación en vez de otra.” Scannone 1986, 146. In fact, this is an example of critical theory that is used to criticize liberation theology. Originally, LT also made use of Metz’s political theory, in which practical reason and critical theory were central. This is evident in the expression “critical reflection of praxis” in TL. 853 The criticism of Marxist ideology as a “determining principle” (“principio determinante”, Scannone 1986, 156) in liberation theology is from LN, VIII:1.
Scholasticism. Scannone did find a comment by Leonardo Boff, however, to the
effect that philosophy criticizes every claim made by a scientific method to
“absolutize or exclusivize itself”.855

Libanio gives his interpretation of Scannone and points to the need for
philosophy:

There is something human in this object [the material object of liberation theology] that can
only be captured by philosophy, and which escapes the social sciences. Liberation theology
needs to be at the service of the wisdom that the simple people of God have. And this
sapiential knowledge has a synthetic (sintética) and global understanding of events and the
historical situation that escapes those sciences. Therefore, the exclusive product of the social
sciences would impoverish liberation theology, even if it [i.e. the product] is a necessary
part of it.856

Libanio managed to give a rather different picture of the faith of the “simple
people of God” than in his other comment on their “common sense”. We could
thus conclude that the faith of simple people naturally escapes the scope of the
social sciences. Nevertheless, they retain some of the “false” consciousness
whereby conscientizing information may help. This is not only another example of
the paradoxical nature of TdL as a book. The liberating paradigm is paradoxical
itself: simple and pre-modern people need to be brought to the post-modernity of
the theologians, but one must also help them to keep their faith. There is the Scylla
of secularism, and the Charybdis of political and cultural alienation.857

Libanio was following a line widely accepted in the philosophy of science in
suggesting that the common link between particular sciences and theology was
always philosophical. This was the point made by Wolfhart Pannenberg in his
famous Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie, for example. According to his logic,

854 Gutiérrez (TL, 25) stated that there must not be an encounter between “the faith and a
determined philosophy in an exclusive way [en forma exclusiva]” and “not even [exclusively]
between faith and philosophy”. Instead, “for example, the importance of social sciences for
teological reflection in Latin America is evident”.
855 “Por otro lado, según lo indica L. Boff, la filosofía, por estar abierta a la totalidad, critica toda
pretensión de cualquier método o teoría científica de absolutizarse o exclusivizarse.” Scannone
1986, 147. (I could not find this expression in the Spanish translation, L. Boff 1985.)
856 TdL, 179.
857 “Seu sucesso [da TdL] dependerá dessa operação teórica, que evitará os dois escolhos
principais: secularizar a piedade pré-moderna do povo até as raias do secularismo ou mantê-la à
custa da renúncia das descobertas críticas da pós-modernidade em perigoso grau de alienação
política e cultural.” TdL, 100. One could well ask if liberation theology, in this sense, was too
modern. Could there be a post-modern religious alternative that would make it possible to be
unalienated and still believe in God? Libanio suggests “being in touch with the people” [vinculação
da TdL com o povo], but does this really help liberation theology?
it would be easy to conclude that the social sciences alone did not provide a basis for theology.\footnote{The German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg put forward the same idea in \textit{Wissenschafstheorie und Theologie}: it is philosophy that collects the “totality of meaningfulness” insofar as that which is philosophically implied in the various singular sciences exceeds the very limits of these sciences. This is because the “results” of a certain science are not transferred to other sciences in any natural way. Indeed, one could ask why else these were originally separated from philosophy and from each other (!). “Dabei gehört es zur Aufgabe der Philosophie, die in den Wissenschaften implizierten, aber die Disziplingrenzen überschreitenden Sinnbeziehungen als Sinntotalität der Erfahrung zu thematisieren und von daher den unterschiedlichen Erfahrungs- und Wissensgebieten ihre Bedeutung zuzuweisen.” Pannenberg 1973, 343. It is telling to see that there is no work by Pannenberg cited in the bibliography of Clodovis Boff’s \textit{epistemological} \textit{Teologia e prática} – and even more so to see Pannenberg’s book included in the bibliography of his newer \textit{Teoria do método teológico} (C. Boff 1998, 729).}

Libanio nevertheless tried to bridge the gap. He accepted the point made by Scannone: Clodovis Boff indeed started with the “raw material” of the social sciences, while Scannone took praxis as human, lived-out history as the starting point. He nevertheless sought to harmonize the differences between the two:

These two positions – Clodovis Boff’s and J. C. Scannone’s – are closer to each other than would seem at first glance, and they are not mutually exclusive. They point to different moments or levels of the liberating praxis on which liberation theology purports to reflect critically.\footnote{“Clodovis Boff usa o modelo da prática teórica para concretizar mais a questão da MSA. Assim estrutura a prática teórica teológica a partir da matéria-prima oferecida pelas ciências do social. […] J. C. Scannone, por sua vez, prefere colocar como objeto material da TdL a história real, a práxis libertadora viva (e não simples e exclusivamente o resultado teórico das ciências do social), pois estas só vêem um aspecto regional, parcial da história. […] Estas duas posições – Clodovis Boff e J. C. Scannone – estão mais próximas do que pode parecer num primeiro momento. Não se excluem. Apontam para momentos ou níveis diferentes da práxis libertadora […]” \textit{TdL}, 179.}

Libanio synthesizes the two in the sense that one could give a Christian reading of the results of the social sciences, which nevertheless impoverish the theological process in the sense that they interpret it “only” (\textit{únicamente}) from the social perspective. Theology is also spiritual. Its mystical and contemplative elements cannot be forgotten because they are already part of the “first step” of liberation theology.\footnote{In this, Libanio could also have been referring to Gustavo Gutiérrez: Gutiérrez started to interpret the “first act” as not only sociological but as a praxis of prayer and contemplation in his \textit{We Drink in Our Own Wells}. See Gutiérrez 1985.} He states that “Clodovis Boff was right in affirming that liberation theology assumed its raw material not exclusively from socio-analytic mediations.”\footnote{“Ora, as mediações sócio-analíticos não conseguem captar toda essa riqueza da matéria-prima e de certo modo a empobrecem, ao interpretá-las \textit{unicamente pelo prisma sócio-analítico}. Entretanto, o material elaborado pelas mediações sociais permite à TdL trabalhar com maior clarividência, lucidez, uma vez que recebe já o dado criticamente analisado. E nesse sentido, Clodovis Boff tem razão em afirmar que a TdL assume a sua matéria-prima, \textit{não exclusivamente}, das mediações sócio-analíticas. Não se pode desconhecer no trabalho teológico a presença desses
Nevertheless, it was based on a text by Clodovis Boff written in late 1984 in which he re-thought Marxist analysis. Positively speaking, this would allow reference to C. Boff’s method as “not exclusive”.

Libanio knew the article\(^{862}\) and could therefore explain that Clodovis Boff was not in favor of the exclusive use of social science. Boff’s tone was different. Marxism was now a “theory that is closely related with practice”. He used the language of critical social theory: “It is not only an interpretation of the social reality, but also a willingness to change it. It is also ‘a theory of revolution’.”\(^{863}\) He was now openly warning of the dangers of scientism: as a totalitarian metaphysics of knowledge it led to atheism, and a theologian thus had to abandon it.\(^{864}\) There were certain principles in Marxism that were more like “points” (\textit{pistas}) in the interpretation of society, such as “the determining quality of economy in the last instance (\textit{em última instância}), class struggle as the motor of history, the role of religion, morals, philosophy, jurisdiction, etc. in the ideological system, the theory of surplus value”.\(^{865}\)

Clodovis Boff does not directly dismiss these “points” but he gives them a non-exclusive role. They should not become a \textit{mathesis universalis}. Marxism could explain [only] the social and historical reality, but this, too “naturally only as a dimension of things, and not as a thing”. Here, in spite of the intriguing ambiguity of the formulations, are some echoes of Kant’s epistemological critique.

\(^{862}\) C. Boff 1984 is mentioned in \textit{TdL}, 206, but it should be the 8th and not the 3rd issue of 1984 (3/8, not 3/3).

\(^{863}\) C. Boff 1984, 11.

\(^{864}\) “Mais: o ‘marxismo’ não é tomado também como uma gnose, uma historiosofia e menos ainda como uma espécie de cientificismo ou de metafísica como ciência do ser total. Tudo isso leva ao materialismo como posição filosófica de fundo e, naturalmente, ao ateísmo. Isso só pode ser rejeitado por um pensador de rigor e, a novos títulos e rotundamente, por um homem de fé que é o teólogo.” C. Boff 1984, 12.

\(^{865}\) “Mas em que consistiriam os princípios que configuravam esse método de leitura da sociedade? É impossível aqui formulá-los como se formulam teoremas ou proposições formais. Pode-se apenas aqui enunciá-los como sendo: a importância determinante do econômico para entender como se estrutura e se transforma uma sociedade (a ‘determinação’ em última instância pela base econômica); a ‘luta de classes’ como ‘motor da história’ numa sociedade dividida; o uso ideológico da religião, moral, filosofia, direito etc.; a ‘teoria da mais valia’ para explicar a exploração capitalista etc. Essas ‘pistas’, mais que princípios, abrem acesso à realidade social, mas necessitam ainda de uma ‘aplicação’ concreta para poderem dar a luz que podem dar.” C. Boff 1984, 13. All these definitions, including class struggle as the “motor of history”, could be found in Harnecker’s manual. See Harnecker 1975, 202: “Y es justamente esta \textit{lucha de clases}, realizada dentro de los límites fijados por la estructura social, la que, en las sociedades de clase, es el motor de la historia.” Later in the book (p. 236) she specified that “not a person or people in general, but the masses committed to the class struggle” that were the motor of history. On the ideology in Harnecker (and in \textit{DP/SDP}), see n. 579.
The essence of things (das Ding an sich) is not accessible to science because a science only answers the questions it has asked itself.\textsuperscript{866} In other words, each particular science is limited by its own formal object.

Clodovis Boff thus became a slightly revisionist Marxist after having been an orthodox, scientific Marxist. It was no longer essential to belong to the Communist party, but one had to change society. In this enterprise, the new Workers’ Party and Lula could prove more helpful. This would be more genuine than the return to historical Marxism or the Marxist renaissance that Althusser had intended.\textsuperscript{867} Althusserianism was losing influence at the time, and C. Boff had to accept the permanent loss of fame of the leading Marxist philosopher by the 1980’s. In his opinion, the epithet “social scientist” was more suitable for those who study society, since no science is named after its founder – it is only the philosophical, ethical, and religious doctrines that are based on authorities. His self-critical article ends with the hope that Marxism would rid itself of both Marxists, Marx himself, and of the “heavy load of its historical realizations”. \textsuperscript{868}

The article was entitled “O uso do ‘marxismo’ em teologia”. Marxism was put in quotation marks to show that Clodovis Boff wanted to give a revisionist type of reading: it is not the reader of Marx who is a “Marxist”, but a person who “reads the social reality as Marx did”.\textsuperscript{869} Marx said that he knew that he was not a Marxist.\textsuperscript{870}

\textsuperscript{866} C. Boff did not forget the “power” (vigor) of Marxism in this task: “O ‘marxismo’ pode explicar o social ou o histórico (não evidentemente como coisa, mas como dimensão das coisas). E nisso exatamente ele mostra seu vigor.” C. Boff 1984, 13. Emphasis in the original.

\textsuperscript{867} More important than “the mighty party” [“partidão”, reference to world communism and to the local communist leader, Luis Carlos Prestes of PCB] and its cells is change, and C. Boff tells of a member of the Workers’ Party PT who thought that Lula was more Marxist than Prestes: “‘Marxista’ não é simplesmente aquele que está inscrito num partido ‘marxista’ mas aquele que transforma a realidade social. Nessa linha, talvez não seja destinuída de razão a afirmação daquele militante que disse: ‘Lula é mais marxista que Prestes e os núcleos do PT mais que as células do Partidão.’” C. Boff 1984, 15.

\textsuperscript{868} “O que importa, sobretudo, é libertar o ‘marxismo’ dos próprios marxistas, inclusive da pessoa de Marx e de toda a pesada carga de suas realizações históricas, e tudo isso para que, superando suas pretensões totalitárias, ele livre enfim sua verdade universal.” C. Boff 1984, 16. Emphasis in the original. This is a different impression from the one given in C. Boff’s Cartas teológicas sobre o socialismo (C. Boff 1989), however, which could be taken to be nothing but a nice defense of the real socialism in different countries: Cuba, the Soviet Union and China. There could be some inconsistency here between C. Boff and his public statements.

\textsuperscript{869} “Assim, é ‘marxista’ não o leitor de Marx, mas o leitor da realidade social como Marx.” C. Boff 1984, 15.

\textsuperscript{870} “Marx, entre indignado e desenhoso, disse curto e grosso: ‘Tudo o que eu sei é que eu não sou marxista.’” C. Boff 1984, 15.
“practical”. Even Marxism was always but an “approximation of the real”, yet one must do something: not “repeat and follow Marx but understand and transform society”. This is precisely the “practice of which Marx gives an example”.

In the light of Clodovis Boff’s article, Libanio is right in pointing to the fact that social sciences were not taken in an “exclusive” manner in his thinking, at least not always. Juan C. Scannone did not refer to the article, however, which was never very well known, at least outside Brazil. He was also right in pointing out that Clodovis Boff did take social science “exclusively” in his books in the 1970’s, with all the criticism that was to come. In any case, Clodovis Boff referred to his own methodology in Teologia e prática as “exclusive” when he wrote his self-critical preface to the third edition in 1993. The book was too “rationalist” because in it “the access to the truth of social reality is an exclusive task of the so-called ‘social sciences’” and because it did not take common sense and popular wisdom into account.

Libanio formulated the question of the philosophy of science as a question of positivism in his article from 1976. Clodovis Boff also referred to “the illusion of positivism” in his revisionist article of 1984. Most critically, Hugo Assmann made the point in 2000 that “see–judge–act” methodology was problematic: there could be no “seeing” of reality that did not include “judging” as well. In this sense, liberation theologians have engaged in Kantian self-criticism. The issue of self-critique is covered in Chapter 7. Meanwhile, the next section focuses on the presuppositions in Libanio’s metaphysical thought.

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871 Clodovis Boff stresses that “Marxism” is not a “reflection” of the reality in the Leninist sense but always somehow hypothetical. “Marx’s book” is not the Capital but the reality itself: “Não verá o ‘marxismo’ como mero reflexo da realidade, como a formulação absolutamente do real social. Pois nenhuma ciência se identifica com a realidade que quer entender. Toda ciência, inclusive o ‘marxismo’, é sempre ‘aproximação’ ao real. Por isso é sempre precária, corrigível, perfectível, com uma margem mais ou menos larga de hipoteticidade. Assim, o Capital concreto não é o que está no livro de Marx. Está fora, na realidade, o livro de Marx permite apreendê-lo o quanto pode, mas nunca de modo totalmente adequado. É ilusão do positivismo pensar que a teoria possa colar com a realidade, mesmo que se chame de prática. Isso dá na ‘ideocracia’, que é enfiar toda a história na cabeça.” C. Boff 1984, 14.

872 “Sobre a mediação sócio-analítica (MSA) [Title]. O livro se ressente de certa tendência racionalista, quando dá a entender que o acesso à verdade social é tarefa exclusiva das chamadas ‘ciências sociais’. Não leva em conta o papel do ‘senso comum’, em particular da ‘sabedoria popular’ [...]” C. Boff 1993, viii. Emphasis added.

873 Assmann 2000, 116–118; cf. n. 29.
6.4. Semantic or ontological pluralism?

In *Introdução à teologia*, co-published with A. Murad in 1996, Libanio once more gives a thorough analysis of the liberation theological method as an Althusserian theoretical practice.\(^{874}\) He continues along the same lines as in *Teologia da libertação* from 1987, but his tone is more critical. In fact, he was critical of the theoretical practice model in *TdL*, but moved away from this Marxist structuralist thinking to adopt a circular hermeneutic approach in *IT*. The main emphasis now is on Thomism as theology, and no longer on strictly scientific “analysis” as a starting point.\(^{875}\) This section deals with the Thomist application of theoretical practice, the linguistic model of referring to several things as “liberation”, and circular hermeneutic thinking.

The neo-Thomist idea expressed in Clodovis Boff’s dissertation was to interpret the reality that is “given” by the social sciences in the light of the faith, which is why he referred to a subsequent and secondary theological hermeneutic. He did this by considering the earthly realities that could be taken into the theological process “revealable”, *revelabilia*. This was also justified by the idea that there was a “theological” (ontological) quality in the reality that could be given a “theological” (epistemological) interpretation.\(^{876}\) This procedure is built on the Thomist formal logic of *duplex veritatis modus*. In this model, human language creates two worlds, but this semantically dualist world is ontologically one and the same. Clodovis’ brother Leonardo also maintained that there was semantic “dualism” in modern thinking but this did not mean that there would be ontological dualism.\(^{877}\) It is evident that this scholastic thinking was closely followed by Libanio in *TdL*.

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\(^{875}\) In his preface, C. Boff (1993, viii) maintains that it was only in his excessive and “exclusive” emphasis on social science that he had succumbed (reconheço ter cedido) to Althusserianism, and not in the field of theology. This is not quite true, however, because the entire MSA–MH–MP methodology is an application of the Bachélar–Althusser–Balibar idea of G1–G2–G3 in *Lire le Capital*.

\(^{876}\) On “theological – theological” in the Boff brothers and Libanio, see n. 780, 894.

\(^{877}\) “Na linguagem criamos sempre dois mundos, por isso, semanticamente o pensamento moderno é tão dualista quanto o clássico. Mas só no nível da linguagem. Ele tenta, no interior do dualismo semântico, pensar a realidade originária e identica.” L. Boff 1977, 50. Boff mentions Kant as the first modern thinker. One is at pains to see how this “epistemological dualism” could be modern, since Leonardo Boff, in the same way as Clodovis Boff and Libanio, subscribe to a rather unmodern notion of the duality of the ontological and epistemological. To many people, this would
Juan C. Scannone wrote in his 1986 article that Clodovis Boff’s strongly “theologal” and ontological justification of liberation theology was also based on “revelabile” in a Thomist sense. In other words, the general ontological and metaphysical presupposition was not sufficient – one needed to put knowledge of the historical and scientific world into perspective.878 He nevertheless considered contemporary history to be different from biblical history: we use the experience of God’s presence today to see what God’s word has to “say” in the new situation.879

Libanio’s methodological ideas in TdL are very similar to those expressed by Clodovis Boff. He also refers to the “theologal”, or “pre-theological”, stage that comes before the specifically theological stage. Social analysis is pre-theological, and analytical choice is made on a “theologal and evangelical” basis. This means that the Gospel values “scrutinize” the instrument, which should also be scientifically valid.880

However, elsewhere Libanio warns precisely against this mixture of science and ethics. Marx made his analysis with a view to uniting both scientific and ethical logic. There was a “terrible difficulty” in trying to do this, which is particularly visible in his value judgment that religion “lives in and out of the misery of the people”. Libanio maintains that he did not wish to criticize Marxist analysis, but he succeeds in pointing out the main problem with Althusser’s

878 “A ese respecto dice Cl. Boff: ‘el postulado ontológico fundamental para que lo no teológico pueda ser capaz de volverse teológico es su carácter teologal. Pues bien, si Dios es efectivamente (como es) el sentido del mundo, de la historia, entonces no existe en principio ningún objeto o acontecimiento que no pueda ser teologizado’. En lenguaje tomista diríamos que no se trata de un ‘revelatum’, sino de un ‘revelabile’.” Scannone 1986, 141. Scannone does not criticize this ontological presupposition as such. However, he qualifies it in a hermeneutic direction: making an ontological point does not mean anything as such if we do not know how to interpret this “theologal character” of the world.

879 Scannone (1976, 61–62) maintains that theology discerns how God “reveals himself salvifically in history, also in the concrete, political and conflictive history of Latin America”. However he distinguishes (p. 62 n. 6) between contemporary and Biblical history. Our history has a hermeneutic importance: “Por un lado no puede decirse que la historia actual sea lugar teológico en el mismo sentido que la historia bíblica, pero, por otro lado, ella es necesaria para que la misma palabra de Dios siga diciéndose a situaciones nuevas, descubriendo así dicha palabra su ‘reserva de sentido’.”

880 “Pelo capítulo anterior, vimos que a maneira de apropriar-se específica da TdL em relação às práticas pastorais libertadoras se faz através de mediações sócio-analíticas. O uso dessas mediações ainda não configura propriamente um momento teológico. É pré-teológico, porque simplesmente prepara a matéria para a reflexão teológico. Mas mesmo neste momento pré-teológico, há uma interferência teologal. O critério de escolha do instrumento, além da pertinência e competência científica, é de natureza teologal, evangélica; pois submetem-se ao crivo dos princípios evangélicos as opções e interesses subjacentes aos instrumentos de análise. Mas ainda não estamos no âmbito da especificidade teológica.” TdL, 219.
division of Marxism and Marx’s history into the “philosophical and ideological” and the “scientific.” He implies that there were not two different “Marxes”, the humanist and philosophical and the scientific: Marx was moved by “an ethical impulse” but his work lacked an ethical theory.

Libanio similarly criticizes liberation theologians for engaging in a double discourse in choosing the “dialectical instrument” i.e. Marxist analysis, because they opted for the poor. Their starting point was non-scientific, yet they purported to make a scientific decision in choosing a particular science to help them. He asks: “Does that not mean confusing the order of the real with the order of the desire?” In other words, is it possible to declare a certain theory, such as “functionalist analysis”, invalid as a scientific theory because of one’s ethical option? Libanio is making a Humean point: a value judgment cannot be mixed with an empirical scientific statement. The choices of liberation theologians are “ethical and ideological” as such. Libanio does not enter into the discussion on critical theory, as Schillebeeckx does in The Understanding of the Faith. There are two different voices in Teologia da libertação. One explains liberation theology in rather apologetic terms: it is portrayed, for example, as nowhere near the 1960’s theology of revolution. The other gives a critical reading, which is implicit in its attack on Marxism. This reading of TdL as Janus-faced explains and facilitates criticism of Jung Mo Sung’s reaction to it in Teologia e economia.

882 According to Majumdar (1995, 79), Althusser started to strongly emphasize the distinction between Marxist philosophy and Marxist science in 1968 in Lénine et la philosophie. In his introduction to Harnecker he emphasizes the division into histmat and diamat, but maintains that both focus on class struggle. Class struggle is certainly an ethical matter. Cf. Althusser 1975a, xiii.
883 “Outra questão espinhosa pode ser levantada pela epistemologia, ao perguntar-se como se justifica teoricamente escolher um ‘instrumental científico’ a partir de critério não-científico, mas ético, ideológico da opção. Pois a TdL escolhe o instrumento dialético por causa de sua opção pelos pobres. Tal não significaria confundir a ordem do real com a ordem do desejo? Pode-se descartar sem mais uma teoria – por exemplo, a análise funcionalista – por força de uma opção, quando aquela teoria quer explicar a realidade e a opção quer implantar um ideal, defender um valor?” TdL, 191.
884 See n. 667.
Sung points specifically to the passage in TdL in which Libanio refers to the “pre-theological” moment that is not a “properly theological moment”. Libanio is obviously explaining liberation theology in its own terms, but Sung does not mention in his own criticism of the way Clodovis and Leonardo Boff “chose” Marxist analysis instead of functionalist or other sociology that the same thing was also criticized by Libanio. According to Sung, the Boff brothers “justify the option for Marxist analysis in the name of an ethical option”. He could have pointed out Libanio’s similar criticism seven years earlier.

Libanio defends the idea that any human knowledge is a possible revelabile or “starting point” for theology, but it is only a hermeneutic “starting” point and not the central principle. In fact, one takes up theology not through an ideological choice but because of faith. He refers to the central role of faith in the hermeneutic circle:

In the hermeneutic circle of liberation theology faith has an absolute priority and relevance. The theogical meaning is in the word of the poor person that confronts us, in the oppressive reality and in the liberating movements, and it is the moment that puts the hermeneutic circle in motion. With the pre-comprehension of God’s word we read the situation, and with the pre-comprehension of the situation and of the poor person’s word we re-read God’s word. Faith is an irreducible instance that guides the circle (que guia o círculo).

This idea would correspond to a hermeneutic idea of theology based on the Scripture and Christian traditions. However, Libanio takes a further step, referring at the same time to a metaphysical reality. In the same hermeneutic circle, “faith reveals the transcendent meaning of concrete history, the salvific dimension of the political events and the symbolic value of the human liberations”. Here, Libanio was at least partly following the interpretation of liberation theology given by Leonardo Boff. There is now an indirect relationship between social science and theology, but it is based on an ontological understanding of “God’s project”:

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885 Sung 1995, 144–145, esp. 144 n. 94.
886 Sung 1995, 129. Sung repeats the criticism of the ethical option (p. 137) and claims (p. 132) that the division between science and philosophy is positivist, referring to August Comte’s intention to use scientific knowledge as the foundation of new society and E. Durkheim’s sociology. Curiously, Sung does not mention Habermas here.
887 Libanio contrasts political and ideological choice and an “option of the faith” in the same way as Scannone did (1986, 150). It would be more interesting to ask whether the two options had something in common as ethical options, and if the faith option was somehow also an ethical option.
888 TdL, 220.
889 “No círculo hermenêutico, a fé desvela o sentido transcendente da ação histórica concreta, a dimensão salvífica dos acontecimentos políticos, o valor simbólico das libertações humanas.” TdL, 220.
Therefore, with a clearer idea of the situation, it is possible to understand better God’s salvific project, which starts in history and is prolonged to the final Kingdom. The encounter with Marxism takes place in the interpretation of the reality, and not in the interpretation of the revelation. It only indirectly influences this reading of God’s word as it sheds light on the contexture of the social reality, on the basis of which God’s word is interpreted.890

Libanio thus puts forward both an ontological and a hermeneutic argument in the same paragraph. God’s salvific project is ontologically “in history”, yet the historical knowledge [Marxist analysis] is not on the same level as the revelation. It is necessary to pause for a while and to recall Libanio’s fundamental idea of the human encounter with God.

Libanio’s fundamental theology in Teologia da libertação is based on the same transcendental Thomism as his Discernimento espiritual ten years earlier. He once more quotes Karl Rahner’s idea of an encounter between the human being and God in human historicity. This categorical, historical experience offers an experience of God even if the human being is not always conscious of it: “The experience of God happens within concrete historical structures.” Hence, it is “always a posteriori”, and demands an encounter with the environment. In a Rahnerian manner, Libanio argues that a human being “co-experiences God in human experiences”, which is what Catholicism is all about as it opposes ontologism, quietism, and pantheism. Thus, “the transcendental experience is mediated by a categorial encounter with the concrete realities of our world”.891

It is this “mediated immediacy” that makes the mediation necessary. One encounters God as “transcendent in immanence” and as “greater than the world in

890 “Então, a partir de maior clareza sobre esta situação, pode-se melhor entender o projeto salvífico de Deus, que se inicia na história e se prolonga para dentro do Reino definitivo. O encontro com o marxismo se dá na interpretação da realidade, e não na interpretação da Revelação. E só indiretamente influencia nessa leitura da Palavra de Deus ao elucidar a contexture do real social, a partir de onde se interpreta tal Palavra de Deus.” TdL, 205.
891 “Consciente ou não, todo homem é remetido, na sua última profundidade, não simplesmente ao Mistério sagrado, mas a um Deus pessoal, que se auto comunicou a ele na história. Por isso, o homem, seja por causa de sua radical historicidade, seja por causa da livre iniciativa de Deus ter-se revelado na história, só pode experimentar a Deus em conjunção com a experiência do histórico categorial. A experiência de Deus se faz dentro de estruturas históricas concretas. Neste sentido, toda experiência de Deus é aposteriorística. O homem realiza a experiência transcendental de Deus somente no encontro com o mundo circunstante. Ele co-experimenta Deus nas suas experiências humanas. A teologia católica sempre rejeitou toda forma de ontologismo, quietismo, panteísmo, cuja pretensão seria ter um acesso direito, imediato não-mediado de Deus (ontologismo), ou de todas as coisas que são deus (panteísmo), ou na sua pura interior subjetividade (quietismo). A experiência transcendental está mediada por um encontro categorial com as realidades concretas do nosso mundo.” TdL, 107.
the world”.892 The transcendental Thomist method gives room to both classical theism and the belief in an extra-mundane God, and to the “concrete” real mediations of God. It is clear, however, that this initial intuition soon becomes generalized and universalized, and the world itself could be considered God’s sacrament.

It was Leonardo Boff’s liberation theology that most strongly emphasized the universal sacramental character of the world.893 In his seminal introductory book, he maintains that there is “salvation in the liberations” and that there is “a theological reality” [i.e. a reality directly in connection with God] in realities that could be considered profane, even if not manifestly so. Christians are called upon to make the theological reality visible.894 However, there is a further speculative step. On account of this hidden reality, one not only has a personal mystical experience, but also discerns the salvific value of a historical situation. A theologian who enters the second “judging” phase of hermeneutic mediation (MH) is in a position “to discern the historical-salvific value of the situation” in terms of how society is oriented toward God’s plan (designio).895 Leonardo Boff’s book A graça libertadora no mundo (Liberating Grace) of 1976 makes the point clear:

The task of theological reflection is to try to discern God’s plan (o desígnio de Deus) in historical situations: in our case, in the dimension of grace and dis-grace in the Latin American situation.896

Teologia da libertação metaphysically postulates “the same real” that is the basis for using socio-analytic instruments in theology.897 Libanio also suggests that

892 “Deus é percebido como maior que o mundo no mundo, Senhor da história na história, Transcendente na imanência, Absoluto no relativo, Inominado no nome, Indelimitável no limite, Indisponível na mediação criada à nossa disposição, Inespacial no espaço, Eterno no tempo.” TdL, 108.
893 Cf. Nordstokke’s criticism of the dual nature of L. Boff’s thought: Boff firstly allows for immanent reality as a de-sacralized category, which is implied in his reference to “the real world” of science and not of religion. In this he follows Gogarten’s and Bonhoeffer’s theories. On the other hand, he maintains that God’s revelation happens in continuity with the general human knowledge of the transcendent. Nordstokke 1990, 57.
894 “En otras palabras, en esas realidades que se consideran profanas hay una realidad teológica, pero sin manifestarse. Sólo la fe permite ver esa realidad teológica presente dentro de lo económico, político y educacional. Es tarea de la reflexión cristiana poner de manifiesto y desentrañar esa realidad en una reflexión, en una celebración litúrgica y en una expresión de oración.” L. Boff 1985, 33. His contribution to the book [Pt: Da libertação] of L. and C. Boff is called in Spanish “La salvación en las liberaciones: el sentido teológico de las liberaciones socio-históricas”.
895 “[...] discerniendo el valor histórico-salvífico de la situación; a la luz de las categorías de fe como reino de Dios, salvación, perdición, gracia, pecado, justicia, injusticia, caridad, etc., se juzga si este tipo de sociedad se orienta o no al desígnio de Dios.” L. Boff 1985, 23.
896 L. Boff 1977, 105.
there is an analogy of being that allows us to “find in diverse sciences that which unites them to one another”. Between the realities there is “a deep connection” that will “allow connections of knowledge and language”. This is the hermeneutic structure of human knowledge and the Gadamerian “fusion of horizons”.  

His approach in *TdL* is somewhat ambiguous, however. The idea of both theology and Marxist social science (*qua* science) interpreting the same reality is based on the neo-Thomist formal logic in which the material object comes first. Only secondarily is it formally interpreted. There is a passage in *TdL* which seems to be based on the opposite logic of considering the material object secondary and the formal object primary. The “first fact” is the emancipatory will and the love of justice, and critics should not be misled by the Marxist “terms” in liberation theology. Marxism is “peripheric, second, partial and [only] instrumentally present”, and the Christian faith is the “determining factor”.

Does Libanio here advocate, *nolens volens*, the Althusserian idea of Marxism as science – even if he starts the subchapter stating that it is *not* about Marxist analysis as such? The emphasis on the “formalities and fundamental structural elements” points to the original Thomist idea of considering the *formal object* first: the Marxist elements are only “material and occasional coincidences”. This defense of liberation theology in *TdL* seems to contradict the system of putting the material object first in Cajetanian terms.

897 “É o ‘mesmo real’ visto sob ângulos de saberes diversos.” *TdL*, 176.
898 “Epistemológicamente supera-se tal jogo de transposição apelando para a analogia, que capta precisamente nos conceitos de diversas ciências aquilo que os une entre si, distanciando-se de uma equivocidade provocadora de enganos e uma univocidade empobrecedora. Além disso, a estrutura hermenêutica do conhecimento se baseia na profunda conexão que existe entre as realidades, que permite, por sua vez, conexões de conhecimento e de linguagem.” (*TdL*, 149, emphasis added.)
899 Libanio (*TdL*, 141) mentions Gadamer’s anthropocentric turn and the “fusão de horizontes” (German: *Horizontverschmelzung*) as an example of the hermeneutic consciousness that has become self-conscious, as distinct from the traditional innocent objectivity.
900 “De fato, tal caminho [de definir a TdL a partir da presença do marxismo no seu interior] não parece correto – sem entrar, no momento, na questão da presença de termos marxistas na TdL – por confundir o motor, a base, a inspiração, o qualificador determinante da TdL – que é a Fé Cristã – com uma questão periférica, segunda, parcial e instrumentalmente presente nela.” *TdL*, 42, emphasis added.
901 “[...] regra elementar da lógica que de identidades materiais não se conclui necessariamente a identidade formal. [...] Pois as verdadeiras formalidades de ambos [TdL e marxismo] são profundamente diferentes e em pontos básicos radicalmente contraditórias. Ora, as boas e verdadeiras definições se fazem através das formalidades, dos elementos estruturais fundamentais, e não através de coincidências materiais e ocasionais.” *TdL*, 43, emphasis added. For another assessment of the fundamental incompatibility of Christianity and Marxism, see *TdL*, 196; n. 96. The idea of the difference between Christianity and Marxism in *formal* terms leads to the question how they can be reconciled in *material* terms, when it comes to the sociological *matéria-prima* (cf.
He had spoken of God as Absolute in clearly Hegelian terms in *Fé e política*:

“Eternity is the presence of the Absolute of God within our temporal history.” Faith was a fragile and transitory mediation that nevertheless made the definitive happen. The Hegelian dialectic of history was not everything, but there was an eschatological reserve. Faith had an eschatological dimension that made it possible to participate in the “Free Absolute Future of God”.

This Hegelian “pantheistic” trait is the strongest when Libanio refers to the possibility to detect not only God’s plan but also the “Christic structures” (*estruturas crísticas*) of the world. This term occurs several times in his work until the 1990’s. He also mentions the Christic structures in *TdL*:

The need for concrete historical mediation for the experience of God also comes from the *mystery of the Incarnation*. If we take the radical humanity and historicity of Jesus, Son of God, into account, then human history has turned into a place of God’s revelation and of encounter-experience of him and with him. If everything and everybody are created in Christ, all realities are penetrated by “Christic structures” (*estruturas crísticas*). They, in turn, are God-revealing and therefore make the experience of God possible.

Libanio here acknowledges that Christic structures exist, but he does not indicate what they are or what exactly they reveal about God. This is in clear contrast to the way he spoke of “structural sin” nine years earlier in *FCC I*: social structures were a sign of human good and evil. The word “Christic” comes from Teilhard de Chardin’s incarnatory mysticism, but Libanio’s notion of Christic

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*TdL*, 162; n. 715). One should point to Libanio’s criticism of the use of mere scientific facts as “theologizable” (*TdL*, 179–180; n. 859, n. 861). The emphasis on both the formal (original Thomism) and the material object (Cajetan, Maritain, Boff) in *TdL* begs the question if their mutual relationship could be made more explicit. St. Thomas allowed a non-theological material object to be theologized, but theology *principiiter* (*S. Th*. I a.1.q.3, n. 104) should follow its own formal *principium*.

902 “A partir de uma compreensão dialética, com o instrumental teórico oferecido por Hegel, podemos entender a eternidade como a presença do Absoluto de Deus no interior de nossa história temporal. Toda vez que o homem participa desse Futuro Absoluto de Deus no tempo transitório presente de sua vida constitui-se ele mesmo eternidade no tempo. Esse é o significado profundo da dimensão escatológica da fé: ela nos possibilita participar desse Futuro Livre Absoluto de Deus já no presente histórico. Ela é uma mediação frágil, transitória em que o Definitivo acontece.” (*FP*, 34.) On Rahner’s concept of the future in relation to Marxism, see Rahner 1965.

903 See *DH*, 208 (n. 304); *TdR*, (n. 424) in which he gives an explanation based on the incarnation.

904 *TdL*, 109.

905 There are social structures that violate many people’s rights, and these structures are not neutral: “[...] começa-se a falar de violência institucionalizada [...] aparecem pro detrás dos interesses cristalizados nas estruturas, que violentam o direito de muitos. De mesma maneira podemos falar de pecado estrutural e não somente de pecado pessoal. As estruturas não são neutras. Carregam a maldade e bondade dos interesses que plastificam em sua realidade concreta.” *FCC I*, 96–97. The different interpretations of the term structure are not explained: structural “sin” can only be the result of human action, whereas “Christic structures” are metaphysically superior to humans.

906 See Teilhard’s mystical text “O christico” (*Le christique*) in which he sums up the meaning of many other texts as a personal testimony of his mystical thought (Teilhard de Chardin 1978, 222–
structures runs parallel to what Leonardo Boff wrote in *A graça libertadora* about the “Christic atmosphere”, for example:

We live out the Christian mystery, not only in terms of a mystical union with the person of Jesus Christ, but also in terms of an experience of the world, in which the faith detects a cosmic presence of the Resurrected One who plenifies all the reality and leads people to live as [God’s] sons and daughters.907

Leonardo Boff considered this “an ontological *plus*” and a “latent possibility or virtuality” that had not yet been experienced. It made the experience of the cosmic resurrected Christ possible: “This is grace in the world which has always had a Christic and filial character” and “different levels of sacramentality”.908 One could criticize Boff’s ontology for introducing “levels” and the idea that something “latent”, “virtual” and “potential” still existed in the world: if there was only “one reality” of the world and the church etc., how could one defend the distinction in this union?

Boff’s solution a few years later also became Libanio’s solution: there was only a different “reading” and “optic”.909 In other words, ontological unity is linked with epistemological plurality. This is what Libanio wrote about liberation theological methodology: there is unity on the level of the real but plurality on the level of the interpretation, which makes it possible to predicate both socio-analytic and theological things of the same reality.910 The very liberation of the poor is both a scientific “historical fact” and a radically human fact, and one must see the “same real” through different types of knowledge.911

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907 “Vive-se o mistério cristão não apenas em termos de união mística à pessoa de Jesus Cristo, mas também em termos de uma experiência do mundo, dentro do qual a fé detecta uma presença cósmica do Ressuscitado, plenificando toda a realidade e levando os homens a viverem filialmente.” L. Boff 1977, 226.

908 "É a graça no mundo, que sempre possui um caráter cristico e filial. Esta presença de Cristo cósmico-ressuscitado ganha níveis de sacramentalidade diferentes: manifesta-se no mundo, nos homens, nos justos, nos cristãos, na comunidade dos fiéis, nos sacramentos e no poder sagrado de seus chefes etc. É sempre o mesmo Cristo total em aparições fenomenológicas diversas.” L. Boff 1977, 226.

909 “Em consequência disso podemos dizer: graça e des-graça não se dão a parte [...] mas são dimensões da única e mesma realidade. O que ocorre é uma diferença de ótica e de experiência que origina uma diferente leitura.” L. Boff 1977, 105.

910 "É o ‘mesmo real’ visto sob ângulos de saberes diversos. Esse ‘mesmo real’, numa unidade histórica indivisível, é ontologicamente chamado a realizar livremente um projeto que lhe supera as próprias possibilidades puramente históricas, por parte de um Deus, que, [...] convidou-o para livremente participar de sua vida íntima já na história e em plenitude para além da história.” *TdL*, 176–177.

911 *TdL*, 176; for the text, see n. 372.
However, the postulate of **ontological unity** is in contradiction with the notion of the **one language** that one contextualizes. Libanio referred to “connections of knowledge and language”\textsuperscript{912}, which means that the reality is not one, but it is only interpreted by means of the same language. This should be formalized as two different ontologies:

1. **The reality is one**, “the same real”. We have several readings (**leituras**) of it. This is semantic pluralism linked with ontological monism.

2. **There are several realities**: social reality, religious reality etc. This is ontological pluralism linked with a kind of semantic monism. The same term “liberation” could be used to interpret both if we “dis-univocize” it, i.e. if we snatch it from one semantic sphere to mean, or at least connote, something else.\textsuperscript{913}

The first model corresponds to what Clodovis and Leonardo Boff suggested. The idea of the “same reality with different readings” is a modern application of Cajetan’s neo-Thomism, according to which the **revelabile** is seen in different “lights”.\textsuperscript{914} The second model could be understood as a linguistic theory. It is remarkable that Juan Carlos Scannone, a leading Jesuit philosopher, could be supportive of both. He spoke of a “dis-univocizing” method in the early 1970’s.\textsuperscript{915} Later on attention was drawn to neo-Thomist liberation theology à la Boff, but Libanio did not notice that the two ontologies were different: one monist, the other pluralist. He used both models in **TdL**.\textsuperscript{916}

The real difficulty arises if one considers Marxist analysis to be **revelabile**. In Thomist terms there is a **duplex veritatis modus**, which means that the same truth can take two forms, philosophical and theological. One cannot exclude Marxism *a priori*: in fact, one has to accept Marxist science if it is scientific, i.e.

\textsuperscript{912} **TdL**, 149; n. 898.

\textsuperscript{913} For a thorough analysis of this “dis-univocizing” method, see Rubio 1983, 204–208. Rubio (p. 204) remarks that the concept of dis-univocization was used by Scannone as early as 1972. In this process the socio-political language serves as a mediator of liberation theology when it does not remain absolutely political but opens up toward the “new” in the wake of historical freedom.


\textsuperscript{915} Scannone often mentioned this “dis-univocizing” logic in his early articles (this, in my view, could be called ** simplex triplici veritatis modus**) and later referred to C. Boff’s neo-Thomist **revelabile** thinking (**duplex [juna] veritatis modus**).

\textsuperscript{916} Libanio refers to “the same real” in **TdL**, 176, and to ”snatching” the term of liberation in **TdL**, 152. He also mentions “liberation beyond (para além) political liberation”, which is an ontological postulate (**TdL**, 152). The reality is, in other words, not the same.
true. However, Libanio contradicts this Thomist logic in what he wrote about the final, ontological discrepancy of Christianity and Marxism: they are fundamentally incompatible because Marxist ontology is based on matter and Christianity on spirit.\textsuperscript{917} He leads his readers back to the fundamental “Althusserian” question whether Marxist science could, after all, be separated from dialectical materialism.\textsuperscript{918}

The incompatibility between Christianity and Marxism would undermine the possibility of using Marxist analysis as a starting point for theology. It would also mean that the Thomist presupposition of one reality is fundamentally questioned. Perhaps nobody was a theoretical atheist in St. Thomas’s and Cajetan’s days, but modern sciences do not constitute a \textit{revelabile} for theology. Clodovis Boff advocated the idea of considering scientific results \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}, which is not part of modern thinking. Thus, the only chance of speaking of liberation would be the linguistic alternative: “snatching” it from politics and psychology, and interpreting it theologically. In this sense, it would be used as a hermeneutic key to understanding the Christian tradition – not to deciphering the “one reality” in metaphysical terms.

When Libanio refers to hermeneutics he also means the hermeneutic circle. In this he is a follower of “rational circularity”, which was introduced in Brazil by Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz. Vaz considers Hegelian dialectics circular, and in this sense hermeneutic. This will never lead to an absolute within the history of the world because the absolute is not material, as it is in Marxism. This begs the question of whether Vaz interpreted Hegel correctly.

Following Vaz’s philosophy, Libanio refers to a circular dialectic where the human being will never acquire absolute knowledge. Hegelian dialectics is “circular” and self-improving, whereas Marx’s model is “linear” and leads to the suppression of the other, at least for some time.\textsuperscript{919} Thus, once again Libanio is

\textsuperscript{917} \textit{TdL}, 194; for the text, see n. 96.
\textsuperscript{918} This is the subject matter of \textit{TdL}, 195–200. He mentions P. Bigo’s idea (p. 195) that Marx never distinguished science and ideology, and many others who had taken part in the discussion: Pope Paul VI, P. Arrupe, L. Boff, T. Cavazzuti, L. Althusser, H. C. de Lima Vaz. He rightly points out that the question of whether “Marxist analysis”, “global Marxist vision”, or “isolated Marxist categories” should be used, often led to “academism that is far from practice” (p. 199).
\textsuperscript{919} \textit{IT}, 288–289. Libanio cites two articles on dialectics by Vaz: \textit{in Enciclopédia luso-brasileira de cultura} (1967), and Sobre as fontes filosóficas do pensamento de Karl Marx (\textit{Boletim Sefaf-MG}, (1982:2), 5–15). There is an early example of Vaz’s rational circularity in his article “Marxismo e ontologia”, which was originally published in \textit{Síntese} in 1959: “Ora, a mediação hegeliana será, antes de tudo, uma circulação racional entre a totalidade e as partes, entre o infinito e o finito.” Vaz
critical of the notion of class struggle. The fact that he shared the idea of a circular
dialectic also makes it intelligible why his moral theology has been regarded as an
“oscillation” between concrete acts and personal decision.920

The image of a “hermeneutic–circular” Hegel, which both Vaz and Libanio
present, makes it impossible to understand the objectivist nature of his philosophy.
In fact, Vaz forcefully suppressed the idea of Hegel as an objectivist thinker, and
stressed his “religious subjectivity”.921 The emphasis is on the world-spirit as a
“spiritual essence”, as opposed to Marx’s materialism.922 However, was it not
Hegel’s objectivistic thinking that caused the reaction by Marx and others?

Hegel, Marx and Aristotelian Thomism share a belief in transcendent
Providence, whether it is qualified as God’s action (Christ the “center” in
Teilhardian terms), world-Spirit or the development of material reality. It is
difficult to maintain teleological development (toward God’s Kingdom, the
absolute state or the dictatorship of the proletariat) and genuine circularity at
the same time. There is systematic problem in claiming that Marxist “linear” teleology
is wrong and at the same time taking refuge in a theological teleology according to
which God acts in the world. The idea of providence is necessarily “linear”,
however one interprets the final cause.

It is possible, however, to make good use of the dialectics of the absolute and
the relative, which is what Libanio does in explaining the spiritual experience of
the poor. The experience of God among the poor shows the provisional nature of

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920 This was the criticism of Nello Figa (1995, 40): “[...]la oscilación de J. B. Libanio entre una
moral que exclusiviza el valor de la opción fundamental, en detrimento de los actos, y una moral
que reemprende la primacía del valor moral de estas decisiones concretas [...]” For a longer quote,
see n. 56.

921 Vaz does remark that Schelling’s objectivity “for ever” marked Hegel, but his originality was
“undoubtedly” in the religious subjectivity he represented: “Se a exigência da totalidade, provinda
de Schelling, marcou para sempre o pensamento de Hegel, foi sem dúvida a dimensão da
subjetividade religiosa que o situou na sua linha de aprofundamento original e o levou a
descoberta do instrumento dialéctico de reconciliação e integração.” Vaz 1968, 158. Emphasis
added. Unfortunately, stressing Hegel’s merits as a “subjective” thinker inevitably makes it more
difficult to understand Marx’s critique. Namely, what Marx opposed in Hegel was not only the
un-material and speculative nature of the Spirit but also its objective and un-human character. This
becomes unintelligible if Hegel is anachronistically made into a modern hermeneutic thinker.

922 According to Vaz, Marx did not understand that the Infinite was “a spiritual essence” (essência
espiritual). This interpretation links Hegel with Thomism, but it leaves the common teleological
problem unanswered. On teleological optimism in “Hegelian Marxism” and liberation theology, see
Vásquez 1998, 33–40. It is of historical interest that a few years later the Jesuit review Síntese was
financed by the anticommunist IPES (Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais, 1962–1972), which
was financed by the CIA. See Beozzo 1993, 49.
the mediating context and the definitive nature of God, who is at the center of it. Libanio calls this transcendental experience of the ultimate hope an **eschatological experience:**

Inasmuch one experiences God himself there is something of the absolute and definitive in this experience. But inasmuch one has this experience in a determined historical mediation there appears, by way of contrast with the experienced Absolute, the relative aspect of the historical mediation. Therefore, every concrete experience of God points to a horizon of hope beyond itself. It avoids the total identification of the mediation with the Absolute. The relative is not absolutized, but it is not emptied (esvaziado) either, because one experiences God in it. Nobody can reveal this double face of the eschatological experience of God better than the poor person. Because there is nothing more relative than his or her situation of poverty, because he or she fights to overcome it. There is nothing more Absolute than God who is revealed there, because no-one alone would discover in the poor person the infinite value up to the point of being ready to give one’s life for the poor, if the call of the infinite and absolute God was not experienced in him or her.923

Two things should be noted about this rather long quotation. Firstly, it appears to be an **ad hominem** argument: if someone is ready to give his or her life for a poor person, it is necessarily an experience of the Absolute. However, have not people given up their lives for political ideologies, and fanatic leaders, for example? The core of the argument is that the poor person cannot give a reward for good deeds. In fact, this is a Kantian motivation for a belief in God, perfectly in accordance with the postulate of practical reason. God is the ultimate guarantor of morals: because “hope” is experienced when helping the poor, one acts morally as one believes in its fulfillment.

Secondly, the concept of “kenosis” in Libanio’s thinking suggests that he does not accept the Marxist interpretation of kenosis as an emptying (Port. esvaziamento). This was one aspect of Hugo Assmann’s revolutionary theology that was heavily criticized by Juan Carlos Scannone. The specifically Christian contribution was totally absorbed in the mundane reality. This was a “dialectical emptying” (vaciamiento dialéctico), which was the opposite of the traditional “static dualism” and distinction of planes. Neither model was sufficient to account for “the incarnation of the eschatological in history”924, and what was needed was

923 Tdl, 114.
924 J. C. Scannone criticizes the idea of kenosis as an emptying in “one line of liberation theology”, which is precisely the theology of the Christians for socialism movement: “Sin embargo una de las corrientes de la teología de la liberación (representada por ejemplo por H. Assmann) – quizás por el influjo hegeliano recibido a través del marxismo – corre el peligro de pensar de tal modo la kénosis de lo específicamente cristiano en la única historia que éste tienda a quedar absorbido por la mundanidad. [...] Tanto el dualismo estático de una distinción de planos, como el vaciamiento dialéctico de lo teologal en lo mundano, no dan cuenta de la encarnación de lo escatológico en lo histórico [...]” Scannone 1976, 55, 60. See also p. 35–37, esp. 36: “[...] aunque el lenguaje teológico debe ‘desapropiarse’ kenóticamente de una ‘esfera propia’ dualisticamente separada de la
not a totality, and not two totalities – neither monism nor dualism. Only “an indivisible unity, not of the order of nature but of freedom” would leave room for the transcendent God. This is the Cullmannian dialectic of the “already, but not yet”, which Libanio also adopted.925

Libanio considered the poor person to be the best representative of this kenotic existence of already – not yet. Loved by God, he or she is a sign of the “already” of God’s Kingdom, and as a poor person a sign of the “not yet”.926 He draws a parallel between Jesus and the poor of Latin America, who are “kenotic beings”.927 This means that the circularity and the mediated immediacy of his thinking are also seen in the option for the poor. The theologia crucis inevitably leads to a model of mediated immediacy and to the idea of God’s presence as “already – not yet”. It is this hermeneutic dialectic that is Libanio’s ipsissima vox. More than metaphysics, it is a spiritual experience.

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925 “No se trata, por consiguiente, de la unidad de cada plano por separado, ni tampoco de una unidad dialécticamente nivelada y reductora. Se trata de una unidad indivisible entre historia e historia de la salvación, entre praxis histórica y praxis histórico-salvífica, entre pueblo y pueblo de Dios, unidad indivisible pero gratuita e histórica – no del orden de la naturaleza, sino de la libertad. – De ahí que esa unidad se dé en una dialéctica concretamente determinada, pero abierta a la novedad imprevisible del futuro, a la alteridad distinta de cada pueblo y cultura, y a la transcendencia de Dios. Se trata de la dialéctica del ‘ya, pero todavía no’ [...].” Scannone 1976, 86.

926 TdL, 111.

927 TdL, 112.
7. Confronting the crisis

7.1. Reacting to the criticism of liberation theology

Jung Mo Sung in his Teologia e economia (1994) wrote a long criticism of the way liberation theology and the Boff brothers in particular divided the theological methodology into different stages or steps. He argued that it was impossible to neatly divide theology into the compartments of ethical choice – social analysis – hermeneutic interpretation – transforming social action. He critically refers to how the choice of Marxist social analysis is portrayed as “better [than the functionalist sociology] corresponding to the aims intended by the Christian faith and by the practices that liberate the oppressed and powerless”. This reflects the way in which Clodovis Boff had divided sociology into the functionalist and the dialectical in his 1970’s dissertation, of which the better one had then to be chosen according to both scientific and ethical criteria. Ethical choice is always prior (prévia) to scientific activity. According to Sung, this means that political and ethical solutions have already been devised in actu in the practice of Christian groups. Ethics thus becomes an extra-scientific criterion: science and ethics remain two distinct spheres. First and foremost, it is a problem that the “ultimate intention” of ethics, philosophy and theology bears no relation to the social analysis inherent in liberation theology. This is the same concern that Vítor Westhelle expressed a little later.

Libanio listened to the criticism. He published Introdução à teologia (IT) in 1996 in collaboration with Afonso Murad. Here we find “the critical accounts of liberation theology” (balanço crítico da TdL) on five pages, and evidence that Sung’s critique was heeded. Libanio (and Murad) states that only some

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930 Westhelle 1995, 39–43.
theologians and social scientists in Brazil and in the DEI of Costa Rica had reflected on the question of theology and the economy in a “coherent and consistent” manner even though so much had been said about socio-structural and pre-theological analysis in liberation theology. He refers to the questions Gustavo Gutiérrez raised in the preface to the 14th Spanish edition of his main work in 1990: the world had changed during the era of liberation theology, and traditional left-wing thinking and theories of dependence were no longer sufficient. The criticism echoes the sentiments expressed in Jung Mo Sung’s book:

Scathing critiques are appearing against the first methodological moment of liberation theology – the “seeing” via instruments that analyze the reality. Above all, liberation theology is being accused of working on a weak empirical basis and on philosophical foundations that are wanting. Today more than ever the lacunae and incorrect aspects of Marxist analysis and the harmful effects of the utopian perspective of real socialism are becoming evident. Even if it were an unacceptable simplification to establish a necessary link between the collapse of real socialism and certain practical and theoretical difficulties with liberation theology, the events in Eastern Europe have affected certain aspects of the liberation theological discourse. They have obliged the theologians to review and eventually to deepen them. The unfolding of the crisis of socialism and the victory, even though a Pyrrhic victory, of neo-liberal capitalism no doubt points to the insufficiency of Marxist analysis. Today’s capitalism is extremely complex and it has acquired a globalizing character by the work and grace of gigantic multinational conglomerates. This has recently been accelerated by the developments in microelectronics, telematics, robotics, information technology, and the like. The Marxist categories are now too small to take the profound changes of capitalism in recent decades into account. Its neo-liberal expression raises new problems which require new instruments of analysis and criticism. Liberation theology, inasmuch as it has until recently been captive to the theory of dependence and to the rigid Marxist categories, has elaborated a discourse that is in dissonance with the present political and economic moment.

931 “As principais tendências da TdL, apesar de terem usado no momento pré-teológico elementos das análises socioestruturais, não desenvolveram nenhuma reflexão coerente e consistente entre teologia e economia. O grupo do CEI [sic! pro DEI] de Costa Rica e alguns poucos teólogos no Brasil preocuparam-se por elaborar tal veio teológico, que ficou muito esquecido pela maioria dos teólogos.” IT, 190. Libanio also mentions Assmann, who had been active in the 1990’s particularly at the DEI (Departamento Ecumênico de Investigaciones) in Costa Rica. Naturally, he had published books in his native Brazil and could still be considered a Brazilian theologian. Libanio mentions his influential Crítica à lógica da exclusão (Assmann 1994a), in which he remarks that the option for the “poor” is no longer viable in a situation in which they have become the outcasts, the excluídos of the social system. Libanio mentions this in IT, 87. Later, Assmann turns this inside out once more: one must not give the impression that the market economy only casts people out. As late as 1994 he was still enchanted by the binomen of “oppression–liberation” and by “reductionism”. Assmann 2000, 121. Later (Assmann 2000, 122) he quoted Adam Smith: a functional economy cannot be based on a beggar mentality (sic!).

932 “Contra o primeiro momento metodológico da TdL – o ‘ver’ através de instrumentais analíticos da realidade – as críticas fazem-se contundentes. Antes de tudo, acusa-se a TdL de trabalhar com base empírica frágil e com embasamento filosófico deficiente. Hoje mais que nunca evidenciam-se as lacunas, incorreções da análise marxista e os efeitos deletérios da perspectiva utópica do socialismo real. Mesmo que seja simplificação inaceitável estabelecer nexo necessário entre o colapso do socialismo real e determinadas dificuldades práticas e teóricas da TdL, os acontecimentos do Leste Europeu afetaram certos aspectos do discurso da TdL. Obrigaram os teólogos a revê-los e eventualmente aprofundá-los. O desfecho da crise do socialismo e a vitória, embora de Pirro, do capitalismo neoliberal, apontam, sem dúvida, para a insuficiência teórica das
According to Libanio, liberation theology was not directly affected by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. In calling such an idea a “simplification” he was saying much the same as Hugo Assmann two years earlier. However, he explains the crisis of liberation theology in the 1990’s by the fact that it had really always been “captive” to the Marxist theory of dependence and the “rigid Marxist categories”, i.e. orthodox Marxism in general. These confessions sound very different from his repeated assertions as late as 1989 that Marxism and liberation theology, even if they had been pronounced dead, were still alive but “not in the same form as before”.

He goes to suggest, however, that the main inspiration of liberation theology, the notion of social justice and freedom, remains valid but should be related to the free market economy. In other words, the gap between the social teaching of the Catholic church and liberation theology that opened up “from prejudice” has been excessively wide. He mentions the discussion on the connection between social doctrine and liberation theology that was going on in the 1990’s and in which he participated.
Moreover, Libanio criticizes Althusserian “theoretical practice” in *Introdução à teologia*. He (and Murad) broke almost all ties with the theory, even if some terms still sound Althusserian, going further than C. Boff’s later epistemological article in the major collection *Mysterium Liberationis*, published in 1990.\(^{935}\) He again acknowledges that “theology is determined not by its raw material, but by the means of production”\(^{936}\), giving, however, a different idea of the raw material. The “pre-theological” material that a human being has is no longer “non-theological” in the sense that it is mundane information. On the contrary, in the new inductive “from below” (von unten / anabasis) theology it is about **experience**.\(^{937}\) The new datum (*dado*) and experience are mixed in with the specifically theological ingredients: the Bible, tradition, and earlier theological formulations.\(^{938}\) It is no longer called the theology of the political or liberation theology, nor does the “pre-theological” come from the social sciences. As far as this “small difference” was concerned, he admitted he was now following the thinking of Juan Carlos Scannone and not C. Boff’s ideas. He cites Scannone’s interpretation of Gutiérrez’s theological thought, the material object of which is human reality, and the formal object of which is God’s revelation:

J. C. Scannone makes a small diversion from C. Boff’s reflection. Whereas C. Boff held that the pre-theological material came from the social sciences, J. C. Scannone widens this object.

“The material object of both the scientifically theological Christian reflection and of the pastoral reflection (of the social Magisterium, too) are the real history and society, not only the theoretical result worked by the social sciences, even if this were duly taken into account and – eventually – assumed by the reflection in question. This is because every human science only takes a regional or partial aspect of something human into account, such as history, society, and culture. Every one of these [i.e. history, society, and culture], taken in its globality and in its global totality are the material object of the reflection of the faith meant here. The human sciences do not, therefore, provide all the material object which has to be interpreted, judged and evaluated in the light of the revelation (the formal object), but each one of these [sciences] does work together to help us critically and scientifically understand a regional aspect of this [material] object.”\(^{939}\)

\(^{935}\) The two-tome *Mysterium Liberationis I–II* was the swan song of liberation theology. It was not only that one of its editors – Ellacuría – was already dead when it was published in 1990, it also shows how massive a project it was to state what “liberation theology” comprised. Given its 1,331 pages, it is perhaps nowhere near as important as the writers might have expected in the late 1980s.


\(^{937}\) IT, 103.

\(^{938}\) IT, 99.

\(^{939}\) “J. C. Scannone apresenta pequena divergência em relação à reflexão de Cl. Boff. Enquanto Cl. Boff considera a matéria pré-teológica vinda do trabalho teórico das ciências sociais, J. C. Scannone amplia este objeto. ‘O objeto material completo tanto de uma reflexão cristã...”
Libanio thus takes distance from the liberation theological idea put forward by Clodovis Boff in *Teologia e prática* that the social sciences should provide the material starting point for theology, insisting that all of “history, society, and culture” is its material object. What role is left for the Scripture, then? Is not the Bible the first material object of theology? What does it mean to say that these are evaluated in the light of the revelation, the formal object?

Let us first consider the elements in *IT* that are critical of liberation theology, then those that are positive. Elsewhere in the book Libanio makes it clear that Althusserian “theoretical practice”, if taken into the theological field, is not a process of making non-theological information theological. It is rather a hermeneutic process of a strictly theological nature, even if the “pre-theological” material may have its effect:

As hermeneutic mediation deals with theology, it is theological. In this way, with all the theological data that we already have – the Scriptures, tradition, theology previously elaborated – the theologian approaches the new datum in a theological manner. [...] It is a new theological product that is incorporated from this moment on into the prior theological capital. The datum can also produce a counter-effect in the previous theological capital, however, obliging it to be reformulated. In this way, too, we have a new theological product. The *theological theoretical practice is not a simple transformation of the pre-theological datum into the theological*, and may consist in re-readings of theological data in a new version, either because it was reconsidered or because of the impact of new pre-theological data.940

The idea of taking the whole world as the starting point is not the only difference between Libanio’s new interpretation and “traditional” liberation theology, which starts with [Marxist] social scientific information about the world.

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In this sense, the words of Scannone in *Introdução à teologia* could give rise to some misunderstanding. Libanio nevertheless puts the quotation in a context in which it becomes clear that theological hermeneutics is governed by the strictly theological “capital” that consists of the Bible, tradition and theology. The nature of the “pre-theological” material is secondary rather than primary. Libanio took great care not to suggest that the “impacts” were scientific. They were rather of the existential kind: “the reality, the concrete, the living out of the faith, the experience of God, the questioning of existence”.941

He also describes the basic structure of liberation theology in positive terms, even if he modifies the scientistic approach. In fact, its two enemies are scientism and dogmatism – as stated in C. Boff’s *Teologia e prática*.942 Liberation theology begins with praxis, but with “praxis as a question”. It directly raises questions about the interpretations of the Christian revelation. He defines praxis as “the reflective action that transforms the reality in terms of the future for the other, primarily the poor”.943 The praxis has to be “theoretically clever and practically efficient”944, and therefore requires socio-analytical mediation. The theologian does not approach this “innocently”, but adopts “theological” criteria.945 Libanio is no longer suggesting the distinction he made in *TdL*, in which he stated that the pre-theological moment only “prepares the material for a theological reflection” and that there was only a “theological inference”. The specific character of liberation theology was thus that the pre-theological (and only theological) material was

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941 "O pressuposto da reflexão implica que a matéria-prima da teologia – a saber, a realidade, o concreto, a vivência da fé, a experiência de Deus, os questionamentos da existência – possa tanto ser objeto de reflexão (o mundo da teologia) como esta reflexão teológica pode depois ser de novo traduzida em vida, em realidade." *IT*, 99. This quotation shows that Libanio has completely abolished the absolute difference between the “religious discourse” and “theological discourse” inherent in Clodovis Boff’s liberation theology: the hermeneutic circle, in turn, will make the theological information part of the existential experience, as it began with the “raw material” of existence itself. The idea of “raw material” has become existential instead of social scientific, as it was with Althusser, Harnecker, and Clodovis Boff.

942 *IT*, 176–178.


944 “[A práxis] Situa-se entre a realidade de opressão e dominação existente e nova situação de libertação a ser criada por ela. Para isso necessita ser teoricamente lúcida e praticamente eficaz.” *IT*, 171.

945 Explaining the first moment of liberation theology, the “pre-theological moment” (*IT*, 174–178), Libanio writes: “O teólogo não se aproxima ‘inoentemente’ das ciências sociais, dos instrumentos de análise. Dispõe de critérios ‘teológicos’ dados pela fé, que estão a pedir aquela MSA que melhor desvele as estruturas de injustiça, de dominação da realidade social.” *IT*, 175.
considered “in the light of the divine Revelation”.\textsuperscript{946} Whereas we could take the “theological” in \textit{TdL} as something un-reflected, we can hardly consider the “theological criteria” in \textit{IT} unreflected or un-propositional.

There are two points worth making. Before embarking on a more detailed examination of the praxis “in the light of the revelation”, we need to ask two critical questions. Firstly, if the praxis asks a “direct” question concerning our interpretation of the revelation, how can the revelation in turn become a critical instance of the praxis? How is the hermeneutic circle worked out if we do not know in propositional terms what is being interpreted?

Secondly, let us consider the Scylla and Charybdis of “scientism and dogmatism”, in Libanio’s own words. He was very aware of the problem of the social sciences “not being theological”, in other words of the scientistic risk, but he kept defending the non-theological quality of socio-analytical mediation.\textsuperscript{947} However, he changed the emphasis from the “un”-theological [C. Boff] to the “pre”-theological, even if the content remained much the same. A decade later in 1996, he kept the term “pre-theological”, but in fact it became a theological moment. How could the “theological criteria” be considered somehow [only] pre-theological, even in quotation marks? The passage merits quoting in its totality:

The theologian does not approach the social sciences or the instruments of analysis “innocently”. He or she has “theological” criteria given by faith at his or her disposal, which identify the MSA [\textit{mediação sócio-analítica}] that best discloses the structures of injustice, domination and social reality. […] Without entering directly into the question of Marxist analysis, one could say that liberation theology puts the dialectical reading above the functionalist reading. The former stresses class conflict, whereas the latter values the harmony of the system. Marxist analysis can be assumed in these elements, which capture the oppressive logic of the capitalist system. There is a theoretical problem: how do we

\textsuperscript{946} “O momento especificamente teológico consiste em trabalhar a pergunta levantada pela situação, analizada com mediações sociais, à luz da Revelação divina. […] a maneira de apropriar-se específica da TdL em relação às práticas pastorais libertadoras se faz através de mediações sócio-analíticas. O uso dessas mediações ainda não configura propriamente um momento teológico. É pré-teológico, porque simplesmente prepara a matéria para a reflexão teológica. Mas mesmo neste momento pré-teológico, há uma inferência teológica.” \textit{TdL}, 218–219. He and Murad continue this “in the light of the divine Revelation” logic in \textit{IT}: “O momento especificamente teológico consiste em trabalhar a pergunta, levantada pela situação, analizada com mediações sociais, à luz da Revelação divina. A teologia elabora já um dado da realidade devidamente interpretado pelos instrumentos de análise social.” \textit{IT}, 179.

\textsuperscript{947} “Ao abordar a realidade através dos MSA, a teologia da libertação se defronta com um \textbf{primeiro problema sério}. Estas mediações não são teológicas. São elaborações das Ciências do Social.” Metodologia da teologia da libertação. \textit{Teocomunicação} 10 n. 48 (1980), 118-126, 122, emphasis in the original. But he continued: “Então a teologia vai ter que escolher um tipo de instrumental de análise para analisar as práticas da comunidade, dos cristãos engajados. A teologia exerce aí uma função de escolha, de juízo.” In other words, as early as 1980 Libanio saw that the only way of justifying the use of some sort of theoretical extra-theological material could be an ethical judgment (juízo). This is different from \textit{IT} only in the emphasis on the \textbf{non}-theological (“não são teológicas”).
know whether the use of some of its categories could be called Marxist analysis outside the structured and organic totality in which it is introduced. Certainly, because this totality includes an atheist and Prometheic-voluntarist vision of the historical reality, reduces the human being to the one and only dimension of “praxis”, and transforms the “class struggle” into the exclusive motor and only determinant of all human history, Marxist analysis in its globality shakes the foundations of the Christian faith, which therefore flees from it. Nevertheless, it is possible to select elements of this analysis that do not necessarily imply opposition to the Christian faith.

The elements of the analysis of the reality are not constitutively theological: they are pre-theological, even if they are chosen according to theological criteria.948

Libanio’s long passage somehow contradicts the Scannone passage in its emphasis on the social sciences, even if Libanio only refers to “elements” or to “categories” taken from this analysis and not to the atheist, anti-Christian aspect of scientistic Marxism. Atheist anthropology is also linked with the violent revolutionary ethics of class struggle, as Libanio rightly points out – most certainly in the Althusserian-Harneckerian Marxism of Latin America.

Thus, Libanio seems to argue with Scannone that theology must not take some “science” as its starting point, but should begin from the globality of the world, history and culture. In stating that the “the theological theoretical practice is not a simple transformation of the pre-theological datum into a theological one”949, is he not opposing the liberation theological method? It is difficult to detect what his idea of liberation theology really is in the totality of the book *Introdução à teologia*. One is led to the conclusion that some “elements” of Marxist sociology indeed can be used to make theology more contextual, but the “three-step” mechanistic liberation theological method must be questioned.

Thus, if the social sciences as “one step apart” were taken as the starting point of theology, we would be dealing with the interests of two parties, the

948 “O teólogo não se aproxima ‘inocentemente’ das ciências sociais, dos instrumentos de análise. Dispõe de critérios ‘teológicos’ dados pela fé, que estão a pedir aquela MSA que melhor desvele as estruturas de injustiça, de dominação da realidade social. [...] Sem entrar diretamente na questão da análise marxista, pode-se dizer que a TdL privilegia a leitura dialética da realidade em oposição à leitura funcionalista. A primeira focaliza o conflito de classes em sua análise, enquanto a segunda, por sua vez, valoriza a harmonia do sistema. A análise marxista pode ser assumida naqueles elementos que permitem captar a lógica opressora do sistema capitalista. Há um problema teórico de saber se se pode ainda chamar de análise marxista o uso de algumas de suas categorias fora do conjunto estruturado e orgânico em que ela se apresenta. Certamente, como esse conjunto inclui a visão atéia e prometéico-voluntarista da realidade histórica, reduz o homem a sua única dimensão de ‘praxis’ e transforma a ‘luta de classe’ em motor exclusivo e unicamente determinante de toda a história humana, a análise marxista em sua globalidade entra em choque com dados fundamentais da fé cristã, que, por isso, a refugia. No entanto, podem-se selecionar elementos desta análise que não implicuem necessariamente essas dimensões opostas à fé cristã. Os elementos de análise da realidade não são constitutivamente teológicos, mas sim pré-teológicos, ainda que escolhidos com critérios teológicos.” *IT*, 175–176.

949 *IT*, 99. See n. 940.
scientist and the theologian. Libanio once more attempts to bridge the gap by employing a type of Cartesian language in which both scientific and ethical interests meet, although the emphasis is on the ethical, theological end. He makes it clear that the “pre-theological” stage is, in fact, an ethical one: there must be a theologically determined, ethical science. He is now arguing in a Habermasian manner:

The fact that they [the social sciences] are dependent on values allows the theologian, in the name of the faith-criteria he or she has, to criticize them.\footnote{There seems to be no space left for the prolegomena of theology, since the social sciences are “dependent” on theological values even if the faith does not meddle with their “constitution”. The theologian looks at everything from above as he/she makes the “choice” and the “option” and “determines” the right kind of science: “Por isso, nesse momento pré-teológico requer-se correta articulação entre certo grau de autonomia das categorias socioanalíticas e sua relação de dependência com valores de caráter ético e religioso. A autonomia das categorias obriga o teólogo a levá-las devidamente em conta. \textit{Seu caráter de dependência de valores permite ao teólogo, em nome de sua criterioria da fé, criticá-las.} Portanto, a escolha do instrumental teórico tem de obedecer ao duplo critério da cientificidade e da eticidade de seus interesses. E dessa conjugação surge a opção do melhor instrumental em dado momento histórico. Pois ambos os critérios sofrem o impacto das mudanças históricas. Não há, em rigor, a possibilidade de determinar uma vez para sempre o melhor instrumental teórico de análise da realidade. Isso suporia o imobilismo científico e a paralisia ética do ser humano. Concluindo, a fé influí na escolha do instrumental, mas não em sua constituição. Critica-lhe os interesses e valores éticos.” }\textit{IT}, 177. Emphasis added (=the translation).

This does not help to bridge the \textit{garstige breite Graben} between the values and the facts, however. The power rather rests with the theologian (or the Church) in terms of deciding which science best suits the historical context, in both the scientific and the ethical sense. Because the social sciences are “dependent” on theology, the theologian may criticize them. Is this not the old \textit{philosophia ancilla theologiae} model, this time applied to the modern sciences as posited in Maritainian neo-scholasticism? Would this not mean that the theologian is equipped with a divine genius? What about autonomous science and its own historic development, without theology? Moreover, is not every true science always up-to-date, regardless of the ethical “options”?

It would now be helpful to introduce some category of natural law ethics, or the \textit{primus usus legis} [the first use of law, i.e. the use of the law for social justice] and the two-kingdoms doctrine (\textit{zwei-Reiche-Lehre}) of the Protestant heritage in order to clear up the mess. The social domain is of interest in theology – although in the ethical rather than the soteriological sense. Liberation theology, because of its scholastic roots, puts excessive emphasis on the role of charity in salvation. This also has methodological consequences: one does not know where the specifically theological domain starts. Of course, if the ultimate interest is to give a
theological account of the social reality, everything becomes theological and salvific. Was this not the early criticism voiced by F. Taborda when he warned of “the Christian praxis”?951

The Scannone passage could give rise to another misunderstanding. It is a widely accepted principle that each science is governed by its “formal object”, or the scientific statute that sets out how to explore the reality.952 Should we then take the revelation, or the Bible, to be nothing but a formal object? Is not “God as revealed” the formal object of the revealed theology, of the sacra doctrina of St. Thomas, and God and his revelation the material object?953 It is problematic to think of the social reality as dependent on theology, and of social praxis as “Christian praxis”, but it is not evident that one could use the divine revelation as a way of criticizing something else, either.

Let us begin by illustrating how Libanio distances himself from liberation theological and scholastic logic. He explains the autonomy of each science in a way that is reminiscent of the “formal object” in the widely accepted sense. Every science is based on its own formal object, and not on the object of some other science, whether it be divine or human. He argues in IT:

Every world of knowing [=every science] makes explicit its own intra-systemic and autonomous truth, which is irreducible to any other. It becomes a critical instance of itself and not of others. Neither does it allow itself to be criticized by others. The positive-hermeneutic vision reigns in the sense that every scientific interpretation itself delimits its world of truth, its parameters, its objectivity.954

This scientific thinking would perhaps be no problem in theology if it were not expanded to cover all human knowledge. Libanio mentions August Comte, the founder of positivism, who regarded religion as part of the childhood of humanity,
suggesting that “the object of theology is God, a reality that is transcendent and impossible to experience in the positivist sense”. In this world of exact science, theology had a “poor role”.955 Positivism turned the tables: if theology used to be the leading science in the Middle Ages, the scientific model of modernity was natural science. Libanio was therefore forced to clarify what theology really is and how it relates to other sciences. He based this on their common emancipatory character:

Theology also makes use of models and paradigms in furthering understanding of its central object, which is the self-communication of God in history in words and deeds. [...] Theology, being faithful to its own ultimate and fundamental aim of being liberating, can be in dialogue with other exact and human sciences in the sense of mutually criticizing and stimulating the concretization of the emancipatory project, which is the ultimate meaning of every human science. [...] The most positive and exact science surrenders in the last instance (em última instância) to the mystery of being and of the real – God – as unknowing that sustains all knowing. And theology lives on and for this mystery. On this level the dialogue between theology and science is perfectly established. Karl Rahner reflects on how theology has the consciousness of being a perception of human existence, which on the plane of principles is prior to science and its concept of the world and the human being. It therefore maintains a specificity and a dignity of its own before the demands of the sciences.956

Here Libanio makes reference to Christian apologetics, or fundamental theology, in a very normal and “international” sense. The only thing that somehow betrays the liberation theological influence is the Habermasian idea of the emancipatory interest of every human science, including theology, even though Habermas only affirmed this of the social sciences.957 Theology is a science among others, but it is a science of a very particular kind. It will not demote other sciences to its ancillae, but it must endeavor to give answers to the questions with which

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955 “Esta visão positivista marcou muito a compreensão vulgar de ciência, como se [...] suas descobertas fossem inquestionáveis com a pretensão de desvendar todas as áreas da experiência humana. [...] Evidentemente nesse quadro, a teologia fazia pobre papel. Tendo como objeto Deus, realidade transcendente e inexperimentável no sentido positivista, ela era alijada do mundo científico. O filósofo positivista A. Comte relegara a religião – o mesmo vale para a teologia – ao mundo da infância da humanidade e das pessoas.” IT, 83.

956 “A teologia utiliza também modelos e paradigmas para entender seu objeto central, a saber, a auto comunicação de Deus na história em ações e palavras. [...] A teologia, fiel a seu propósito último e fundamental de ser libertadora, pode dialogar com as outras ciências exatas e humanas no sentido de mutuamente se criticarem e se estimularem em vista da concretização do projeto emancipatório, sentido último de toda ciência feita pelo ser humano. [...] A mais positiva e exata ciência remete, em última instância, ao mistério do ser, do real – Deus – como um não-saber que sustenta todo saber. E a teologia vive deste e para este mistério. Nesse nível se restabelece plenamente o diálogo entre teologia e ciência. K. Rahner avança a reflexão no sentido de a teologia ter consciência de ser uma concepção da existência humana, que, no plano dos princípios, antecede à ciência e à sua concepção de mundo e do homem. Mantém, portanto, especificidade e dignidade própria diante das exigências das ciências.” IT, 86–87.

957 Libanio expands the Habermasian idea of emancipatory social science to encompass theology. He implies the three kinds of science, yet he expands the emancipatory interest to all human sciences. In this sense he promotes the idea of two kinds of science (“exact and human”), which stems from Windelband, but speaks of an emancipatory interest in Habermasian terms. On Habermas’ and Windelband’s notions of science, cf. n.205.
people “in the last instance” are concerned. In this sense the other sciences are dependent on theology, and not vice versa.⁹⁵⁸ It goes without saying that this “last instance” is very different from the Marxist “last instance” of Althusserian determinist metaphysics. Unlike Marxism, which claims to know the last instance, theology admits that it deals with a mystery – and also with the self-communication and revelation of this mystery.

It is illuminating to read one of Libanio’s questions for students in IT, and to see the distance from the most extreme political theological formulations in Latin America: “Why is theology more speculative than practical?”⁹⁵⁹ The answer is to be found in St. Thomas Aquinas: because theology is “more concerned with divine things than with human acts”. Instead of a starting point somewhere else than itself, theology needs its own principle. The relationship between theology and science is an interdisciplinary one, and there is no one-way street from sociology to theology as intended by the liberation-theological method.

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⁹⁵⁸ The circularity is taken to the extreme: if liberation theology stressed its dependence on social science, we are now faced with the fact that the “most positive and exact sciences” are dependent upon theology and the emancipatory human project.

⁹⁵⁹ The students are asked to ponder: “Por que a teologia é mais especulativa que prática?” IT, 108. The answer (S. Th. I a.1 q. 4) is: “Magis tamen est speculativa quam practica: quia principalius agit de rebus divinis quam de actibus humanis” (Engl. “It is speculative rather than practical because it is more concerned with divine things than with human acts”).
7.2. Liberation theology as narrative theology

The Catholic *intra muros* discussion on liberation theology started long before the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was aired in Brazilian, Latin American and overseas theological reviews rather than in books, and it was here that criticism was voiced. Libanio had clearly been seeking an alternative theology ever since the 1970’s. He was not always happy with the way in which Christianity was used to criticize society and religion. That is why he could be characterized as a narrative theologian. This section deals with his criticism of the politization of the base communities, and of the mixture of ethics and science in liberation theology.

There is evidence of a critical approach in his reports on the *Encontros intereclesiais*, or the great inter-community meetings that have been organized every two or three years. The most significant of these dealing with the issue of religious language are from 1986 and 1989. He makes it clear that he preferred a narrative understanding of the theology of the people. Criticism of the poor people’s religion in the 1970’s had turned into criticism of the theoretical and political liberationist agents (community leaders) who did not understand it. He was basically saying the same things for which liberation theology was later criticized.

In 1986, Libanio made some touching remarks on the nature of the faith of small communities and their members. He considered these base ecclesial communities “far from the secularism of the educated elites”, truly moved by an encounter with the Bible. They testified that “the Bible and life are inseparable” and that “they are the two wheels of the bicycle: one makes the other go ‘round”. He was happy with this development, but he was critical of the

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960 In *Olhando para o futuro*, published in 2003, Libanio maintains that the young Brazilians of the University group (JUC) of Catholic Action in the 1960’s lived on a “trajectory of Feuerbachian and Marxist criticism” when they abandoned the “parallel and alienated religion”. *OF*, 71–72. However, he argued that liberation theology, which grew out of the JUC experience, “was the most global refutation of Marxism” (p. 65). The apparent contradiction as late as 2003 shows, at least in part, why he had both supported and criticized the liberation theological movement: it simply had both Marxist and anti-Marxist elements.

961 On the history of these meetings until the mid-1990’s, see Teixeira 1996.

962 “As CEBs estão longe do secularismo das elites ilustradas. A ladainha maravilhosa de ditos sobre a presença da Bíblia na comunidade revela clareza tal fato. A Bíblia é ‘apoio, força, proposta de vida, certeza de Deus, iluminação, inspiração, nossa história, promessa, mensagem de
politization of liturgical happenings. He also mildly criticized the politization of the whole meeting.963

He directed his most severe criticism against the pastoral community agents who wanted to use the group meetings to further their political aims. He makes a remark in the passive voice: “Political manipulation is even talked about, the politization of the faith and of the liturgies.”964 This was a concern that the simple people of the countryside and the Church hierarchy had expressed. Those who had caused the politization were obviously the organizers of the meetings and the local communitarian agents. Libanio was not absolutely against all political language in the liturgy, but it had to be incorporated so as to help the “masses” understand that they were participating in a church service. Too many “signs, gestures, presentations, posters, texts and spoken orders” will rid people of the liturgical feeling.965 It would help everybody if it was clear why there was a liturgical gathering:

The fundamental thing in the liturgy when it comes to the entry of the social [things] is therefore the atmosphere of faith, of an experience of God, of prayer that has to deal with everything. Because the meaning of this presence of the social [things] is to provoke trust in God, praise of God, gratitude toward God for victories in battle, confessions of cowardice, and many other sentiments that are strictly religious and liturgical. Starting from this perspective may avoid feelings of unease, and help in overcoming them if they do arise.966

Given the “right use” of the social symbolism, the political consciousness-raising would not be disturbing, according to Libanio. It is part of the liberation theological procedure that “faith and politics are interlaced”. This goes without saying for the base communities that have obviously had at least as strong a

963 Libanio engages in an insider’s apologetic: even if the socio-political language was predominant, everything was “involved in the ‘semantics of the faith’”: “Talvez seja essa diferença da linguagem que pode causar a impressão de que predominou no Encontro um discurso sociológico, político e não religioso, teológico. De fato, se se fizesse um levantamento estatístico dos termos, do vocabulário, das encenações, talvez o universo semântico sócio-político dominasse. Mas seria uma falsa leitura. Pois para as bases tal universo semântico está sempre envolvido pela ‘semântica da fé’, pela perspectiva da Palavra de Deus.” Ibid., 506.
964 “Fala-se mesmo de manipulação política, de politização da fé e das liturgias.” Ibid., 497.
965 Libanio remarks, perhaps in an ironical manner: “Pode ser realmente que o simples fato da entrada do simbolismo social – sinais, gestos, representações, cartazes, textos, palavras de ordem, etc. – seja perturbador para muita gente.” Ibid., 497.
966 “Portanto, o fundamental na liturgia com respeito à entrada do social é a atmosfera de fé, de experiência de Deus, de oração que deve envolver tudo. Portanto o sentido dessa presença do social é provocar a confiança em Deus, o louvor a Deus, a gratidão a Deus pelas vitórias, a esperança n’Ele nas lutas, a confissão das covardias, e tantos outros sentimentos estritamente religiosos e litúrgicos. A partir dessa perspectiva, o mal-estar poderá ser evitado e, se surgir, superado.” Ibid., 498.
political as a religious role. He continues in the same sentence, in a rather non-liberationist manner, that “in the field of theoretical reflections they remain in the difference of their autonomies”.967 If the autonomy is neglected, there are practical consequences for the liturgy: church meetings become an occasion for spreading “certain political messages” (certos recados políticos) as he repeated three years later, this time in a sharper tone.968

The difference between faith and politics is also evident in that liturgy and faith-talk are something very symbolic and alive to the Brazilian population. As Libanio wrote in his 1986 article, the symbolic expressions of the poor are descriptive and narrative in character, and they translate the daily events of the people into symbols.969 Because there is such a closeness between the symbols and the reality (o real), no explanation is needed. Things are different in the “educated” liturgy, however. The symbols have been purified and stylized up to the point that they only convey some “elaborate theological contents” that are very far from the daily lives of the people. This has led to the adoption of parallel symbols in popular Catholicism without the presence of the priest. Sometimes it is a question of personal devotions to the patron saint in the church, but only after the “official” service.970

Libanio seemed to have a completely different concept of religious language, as “performative” and real-symbolic language.971 This was in line with those who

967 “Aí de fato as duas dimensões – fé e política – se entrelaçam, enquanto que no campo das reflexões teóricas são retidas na diferença de suas autonomias.” Ibid., 498.
969 “Merece também uma reflexão de modo especial dos liturgistas a diferença do manuseio do universo simbólico por parte do povo e por parte dos liturgos. Predomina na expressões simbólicas populares o gênero mais descriptivo, narrativo. Os símbolos são uma tradução, para esse nível, dos acontecimentos da vida do povo. Há uma proximidade muito grande entre os símbolos e o real, de tal modo que o papel explicativo sobra. Nas liturgias ‘letradas’ aconteceu um processo mais depurado, antigo, de modo que os símbolos se estilizaram a tal ponto que se distanciaram muito de nossa experiência diária e escaparam frequentemente à nossa compreensão. Mais. Muitas vezes eles traduzem ideias, conteúdos teológicos elaborados, com os quais mantém uma vinculação não imediata nem facilmente percebida.” Ibid., 498. Emphasis added.
970 “Notava um monge de São Paulo como na Sexta-feira santa o povo começava a chegar e enchia a Igreja depois que terminava a liturgia oficial. Aí então ele estava livre para suas devoções.” PSCP, 66.
971 In the discussion on Karl Rahner’s theology, and especially after the new edition of Hörer des Wortes by J. B. Metz, there was an obvious losing sight of the Realsymbol in Rahner’s thought, which was criticized by T. Mannermaa. He was particularly critical of the interpretation given by E. Simons (Simons 1966). See Mannermaa 1970, esp. p. 208, where he defends God’s word as a
later criticized liberation theology for ending up in a desperate duality of reality and meaning.\textsuperscript{972} It had largely neglected the performative character of religious language because the methodology was built on an epistemological dualism of the object and the subject. As argued above, the roots lie both in the neo-scholasticism of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, which was affected by the scientific thinking of the age, and also in the very “scholastic” scientific Marxism of the 1960’s and 1970’s represented by the Althusserian school.

Althusser was keen on the distinction between the real object and the knowledge of it; thus knowledge could not be made dependent on practice. Academic studies have pointed to the fundamentally theoretical nature of his system.\textsuperscript{973} If we extend this to the question of religious language, we realize that no performative language could be based on Althusserian theory. As Libanio gave his criticism of the “theoretical” nature of the erudite Catholic liturgy, he was also criticizing any theory that specialists wanted to impose on the people from outside. People would simply not accept their religious happenings turning into political consciousness-raising events. “Worship cannot be turned into a means for

\textsuperscript{“constitutive sign, not a representative sign” (konstitutives Zeichen, nicht nachträgliches Zeichen), using the same word as Libanio does in \textit{TdL}, 176.}

\textsuperscript{972} According to Vítor Westhelle, the problem lies in the excessively “hermeneutic” character of liberation theology, which would do away with performative religious language: “It is precisely this method that claims priority for praxis that ironically confines religion to hermeneutics, theorizes the sacred, secularizes religious experiences, and empties spirituality. For hermeneutics, something, a sign or an event, means something else elsewhere. In the religious practice of faith there is an immediacy experienced between the event or the sign and its meaning. For the believer, the religious language is performative (it does what it says and says what it does). Faith reduced to the condition of the possibility for judgment and action of an individual or group is thus presented to consciousness purified of its objective religious components. The result is the so-called ‘migration of concisences’ that describes the phenomenon by which persons whose political awareness has been raised within base Christian communities and who have moved into militancy in secular political and trade union organizations, looking back, consider the faith expressions of the community to be social awareness at a childish level.” Westhelle 1995, 41.

\textsuperscript{973} Marx warned in his Feuerbach theses against too theoretical concepts that are detached from practice because the distance between reality and theory would end up in scholasticism: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.” (Marx 1845; translation according to Majumdar 1995, 97.) Althusser, who – contrary to what we might think on the basis of liberation theology and its emphasis on praxis – was the farthest removed from Gramsci and other “practical” Marxists, was of a different opinion: “Althusser specifically rejects Marxist philosophies of praxis, interpreting, instead, the criterion of practice in a narrow light as the post-facto search for a factual guarantee of truth.” (Majumdar 1995, 98.) Majumdar (1995, 95) pays attention to how this affected Althusser’s choice of sources: “Mao’s text \textit{On Practice} did not find the same favor with Althusser as his \textit{On Contradiction}, precisely because of its emphasis on the primacy of practice, in the sense of real practical activity, and the notion that knowledge begins with experience, based on this practical activity.” Thus, Althusser was not a pragmatist, and this also had its repercussions on liberation theology.
something else”, was a similar criticism voiced later by José Comblin in his well-known book *Called for Freedom*.\(^{974}\)

In 1978, Libanio wrote an article about Catholic popular theology that was translated for the wider public in Europe. The French version gives some idea of how he wanted the world to understand the situation in the base communities.\(^{975}\) One striking feature is his criticism of the dissertation of Clodovis Boff, which was written in the Francophone area. Boff’s division into “religious discourse” and “theological discourse” was not tenable. He had in fact wanted to draw nothing less than a “line of demarcation” between the two, which he in turn distinguished from the “object” of faith and theology, or the salvation.\(^{976}\) Obviously, Libanio was not very fond of the many divisions that only hoisted theology and faith to the superstructural (“superestrutural”) level, in quotation marks though it was.

He criticized the idea that anything that was not epistemologically processed and “scientific” could not have the name of theology\(^{977}\), arguing that as Christ’s mystical and salvific presence penetrated all of human history, so it was also

\(^{974}\) José Comblin is very strict about this: “In the midst of the problems and anxieties of daily life or public life, churches become, as it were, a bit of paradise on earth, a presence of heaven on earth. Anyone not seeking that does not go to worship. It was a mistake to introduce political consciousness-raising into the liturgy. For those present that meant touching on a taboo, and hence creating a climate of anxiety. For many it amounted to imposing the kind of ideas from which they wanted to be delivered. They said, ‘We’re here to forget our everyday anxieties, and to look for peace and love. But they only talk to us about struggles, they only show us our miseries, we’re all too familiar with them, and that is just what we want to forget for a few moments.’ Religious and liturgical acts are of a specific nature and should be respected. **Worship cannot be turned into a means for something else**, like political consciousness-raising. That is how many people were alienated from liberation movements. An attempt was made to force the movements on people at the wrong time. The people who come to worship – on the whole no more than 5% of the baptized, and, on the outskirts of the cities, 1% or 2% – are the very people who are least likely to accept a political discourse in that setting. That is why CEBs have stagnated and only bring together a minority of practicing Catholics. […] Mixing worship and public life is completely out of place; few people accept it.” Comblin 1998a, 211–212. Emphasis added.

\(^{975}\) Théologie populaire: légitimité et existence. Lumière et Vie 140 (1978), 85-100.

\(^{976}\) Libanio (ibid., 95 n. 14) refers to the passage that begins like this: “§ 10. A DIFERENÇA TEOLÓGICA. No capítulo anterior tínhamos colocado o estatuto teo-ônico da Salvação (=S) enquanto objeto da Fé (=F) e da Teologia (=T), em oposição à Consciência deste objeto, representada pela Fé e pela Teologia. Neste plano mais fundamental, a Fé e a Teologia permaneciam ainda na indistinção, no seio de uma unidade geral, que se poderia dizer ‘superestrutural’, pois se trata aí das formas conscientes de apropriação da Salvação. Queremos agora traçar uma linha de demarcação entre Fé e Teologia a fim de colocar uma diferença no interior desta unidade geral.” C. Boff, *TP*, 201.

\(^{977}\) “En première lieu, la possibilité d’une théologie issue d’une Eglise populaire vient mettre en question l’exclusivité du discours théologique actuel, de type technico-herméneutique. La théologie a élaboré progressivement son statut épistémologique, scientifique, de manière que tout ce qui ne cadre pas avec lui, ne puisse recevoir le nom de théologie. Peut-être nous faut-il revoir un tel processus.” Théologie populaire, 94.
present in popular churches (Eglises populaires). These small communities had their own worship and sometimes even their own saints, apart from the officially canonized ones. It was enough to live a Christian life, and no books or texts were needed. He reminded his readers of the psychological fact that there were mechanisms of transmission that were not strictly verbal and that the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of those who believed. The hermeneutics at work was more existential than theoretical, and incorporated feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and lived values. If somebody wanted to systematize this, it would inevitably lead to a reductive understanding of people’s beliefs – unsystematic as they are. Libanio also made a biblical point: God had chosen the small ones rather than the wise and the powerful to hear his voice.

All these narrative arguments amount to a criticism of liberation theology as an academic enterprise. Yet Libanio also criticized popular Catholicism, at much the same time. In is O problema da salvação no catolicismo do povo (‘The problem of salvation in the Catholicism of the people’) he suggests that there are many problems that will stop people from becoming true Catholics. His listing of these problems in PSCP makes the reader wonder if he was criticizing or giving a neutral assessment of the popular religion. Namely:

Even if it seems paradoxical, this extreme brand of Catholicism, with an enormous number of rites and devotional gestures, includes an element of perceiving the fragility of the human mediation, which is mostly Protestant in character. [...] Even the promise [made to the saint], which could approach magic, includes this element of free transcendence as it puts an

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979 Libanio mentions the case in a Boa Vista community of an illiterate man who was declared a patriarch: “Dans l’une de ces célébrations, la communauté de base de Boa Vista (Etat de Espírito Santo) fait diffuser une image avec la photographie d’Alberto Torres. C’est un homme simple, père d’une nombreuse lignée, qui a laissé des marques de son cheminement. Il n’a rien écrit, seule une vie vertueuse a marqué son existence de patriarche. C’est pourquoi le texte se termine ainsi: ‘le peuple de la communauté le rend présent. Nous le proclamons notre Patriarche’. Acte ecclésial de très grande pureté et pauvreté, si nous le comparons aux canonisations officielles. Mais significatif pour ce peuple.” Ibid., 98.

980 Ibid., 100.

981 “L’herméneutique se fait davantage sous un mode existenciel que sous un mode théorique. Le contact avec la tradition de l’Eglise est de nature intuitive, il se fait plus par une compréhension globale que par des déductions rationnelles. La transmission se réalise au moyen de sentiments, de croyances, d’attitudes et de valeurs profondément vécues par les personnes dans leur milieu d’existence. De tel éléments ne se systématisent pas nécessairement de manière rationnelle et logique, mais il imprègnent les personnes en profondeur. C’est pourquoi le niveau de verbalisation, en ce qui concerne de telles croyances, est réduit dans un premier moment; non systématisé, il n’atteint pas un niveau satisfaisant de cohérence ordonnée.” Ibid., 87.

982 “C’est la volonté de Dieu que chaque homme et en particulier et très spécialement les pauvres, les petits, participent aux mystères cachés aux sages et aux puissants (Lc 10,21; Mt 11,25–27).” Ibid., 89–90.
extreme emphasis on faith. Its non-realization is almost always attributed to the lack of faith. There is a super-realization of the faith in the power of the saint. “Only the faith saves.” This is very close to the “sola fides” of the Protestant churches. It also makes us think of the miracle stories in the Gospels, in which Jesus untiringly asks people to have faith.\footnote{PSCP, 60.}

The attraction that people felt toward this kind of faith-religiosity could be accounted for by the fact that Brazilians were not only “exuberant and passionate” but also that, in anthropological terms, they had a “tragic feeling of existence”.\footnote{Ref. to E. Pin, Elementos para uma sociologia do catolicismo latino-americano. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1966, 52.} Nevertheless, it seems somehow that the people have not found an adequate answer to the tragic side of life in the Church, which too easily represents the “law” (lei), leading the people to legalism. It is “the law that tells people to go to mass, but the devotion centers on the saint”.\footnote{PSCP, 66.} Yet, Libanio seemed to be suggesting that the same law could help people deal with their sin. In other words, he did not accept the idea that only faith saved because the true reality of salvation was in love. Faith was only the light that illuminated the love. The church had to help people overcome their misunderstandings.\footnote{The foundations of Libanio’s pastoral teaching are in the scholastic fides caritate formata doctrine: “Na nossa pastoral teríamos que aproveitar o duplo elemento de religião e lei, tentando mostrar como a Igreja católica realiza ambos. Ela não é só lei, como o catolicismo popular tende a pensar. É lei, enquanto muitas de suas prescrições têm uma origem divina e indicam-nos o caminho a seguir na linha da caridade. É a fé que salva, é o amor que salva. A lei da Igreja é na linha da fé, como luz para esclarecer o amor. Em última análise, é o amor que salva. Este está mais próximo da religião. Mas a religião deve ser esclarecida. O puro espontaneísmo ignoraria que o coração
If narrative theology is to become really narrative, we need to ask if this is enough. Certainly a pastoral work that aims to “clear” up people’s misunderstandings cannot be very successful. Neither will an evangelization succeed that does not take the tragic, sinful side of life seriously. The article written by Francisco Taborda in 1987, “Métodos teológicos na América Latina”, is worth mentioning here. He presents five methodological models, the first three being: liberation theological, namely the “liberation of theology” model of Juan Luis Segundo, the “theology of the political” model of Clodovis Boff, and the Central American model of “theology as a hermeneutics of faith in the social categories”.

It is interesting that Taborda, a fellow Jesuit, puts Libanio in the fourth and the fifth categories: the fourth is “a systematical and critical reflection on popular religion”, and the fifth is simply “narrative theology”. His article on the 1986 Interecclesial meeting is categorized as narrative theology – rightly so because, as mentioned, he does refer to “narrative” theology. In explaining the fourth category Taborda describes at greater length the way Libanio sought to bridge spontaneous, popular theology and academic theology in his article “Articulação entre teologia e pastoral” This would be a practical example of the “exchange of knowledge” (troca de saberes) advocated by C. Boff.

Libanio’s article describes how the see–judge–act methodology could also be used in academic theology, starting with an analysis of the reality of the people. However, the more students progress in their studies, the more they will make concrete pastoral experiences part of their theology. To make this possible they should write two reports. The first one at the end of the second semester is of a practical and pastoral nature, but the second one at the end of the fifth semester
should be “a strictly theological reflection”. In order to enhance the didactic value of this lengthy article, Libanio gives three examples of these reports.

The last one was prepared by Afonso Tadeu Murad who later wrote *Introdução à teologia* with Libanio. It deals with “the popular concept of sin” and shows how preoccupied people are with sin and sinful acts and thoughts. In particular, it takes up the role of women. It is they who both speak of sin to their children and suffer from social prejudices based on sexual sin. It is only the Virgin Mary who meets the ideal of femininity, taking care of children and denying herself the pleasure. Murad’s second main point was to show indirectly how the increasing number of conversions to Pentecostalism caused Catholics and Catholic schools to review their theology. The Protestant “sects” had become extremely seductive to the “sinful” Brazilian people, who feared hell and wanted to be saved. They had experienced God’s saving activity in having been healed, having found a job and in living a happy family life. However, this “popular soteriology” was not enough to overcome the fear of God the Father who was severe and punishing. Those who wanted to be certain of their salvation would therefore end up joining a Pentecostal church. In Catholicism, the “miracle-working Lord” (*o Senhor milagreiro*) was emphasized more but Jesus’ forgiveness of sins had been

991 “O segundo relatório deve ser preparado entre o 3º e 5º semestre, pois deverá ser entregue no final do 5º semestre. A sua natureza já é bem diferente. Sobre o dado analizado no primeiro relatório [...] ele fará uma reflexão estrictamente teológica. Nesse momento, ele mostrará sua capacidade crítico-teológica.” Articulação entre teologia e pastoral, 327.


993 Afonso Tadeu Murad, “A concepção popular do pecado”. Ibid., 344–352.

994 “A mulher, a sexualidade do pecado: Já vimos que a mulher é a grande transmissora da moral religiosa, cujo eixo é o pecado. Mais do que emissora, a mulher é a primeira vítima desta concepção. Enquanto que socialmente o homem ideal nas classes populares é aquele que tem muita potência sexual, agressividade e busca do prazer, a mulher ideal é aquela que tem muitos filhos e cuida do lar. O prazer sexual é desviado para a maternidade. A mulher pura e ideal é aquela que não foi manchada pelas relações sexuais, incontaminada pelo pecado. Neste contexto a Virgem Maria é o modelo exemplar de mulher: a que cuida do filho e não tem direito ao prazer.” Ibid., 350–351 (the part by Murad).

995 Murad seems to put much more blame on the Catholic church, which had perpetuated “the fear of the Lord”, than the people themselves, unlike Libanio ten years earlier. After giving the characteristics of the “soteriologia popular”, Murad continues: “A segunda dimensão da salvação é a recompensa eterna, o céu. A salvação definitiva será no além. Acontece que há no meio do povo um grande medo ‘de ir para o inferno’. ‘As pessoas tem muito medo de não ser salvo.’ Muita gente se sente cheia de pecados, e portanto incapaz de ‘ser salva’. Neste contexto, mostram-se extremamente sedutoras as propostas das seitas protestantes, que dão a certeza da salvação para os que nelas ingressam. A atual pregação e prática da Igreja Católica ao ignorar quase completamente este dado favorece que tal estado de angústia se perpetue no seio das camadas populares. [...] Qual é a idéia de Deus que está por detrás da visão popular de pecado? A primeira vista diríamos: Um Deus Pai, extremamente severo e castigador.” Ibid., 347.
forgotten. Here again, the Pentecostals were ready with an answer. The rest is history: hardly anywhere in the world has Pentecostal expansion been as rapid as in Brazil and many other Latin American countries.

Murad’s report (within Libanio’s article) thus shows that Libanio most certainly had turned to “narrative” theology by 1987, and this was how Taborda interpreted his thinking. In other words, the kind of liberation theology promoted in Clodovis Boff’s dissertation TP, for example, was not Libanio’s ipsissima vox. Later on, he took more distance from Clodovis Boff’s methodology.

In TdL, Libanio had pointed out the mixture of ethics and science in Marxism. Many people considered religious criticism to be the key problem in Marxist analysis because religion was regarded as false consciousness. He argued at this was not an original thought of Marx and came from Feuerbach, although Marx preached that societal change would help overcome religious alienation. Thus, on the analytical level, the “ethical scream” (grito ético) was already

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996 Jesus is not nearly as important in popular Catholicism as God the Father: “A figura predominante do Deus Pai deixa um pequeno espaço para Jesus Cristo. Quase não se faz referência ao perdão que vem de Jesus. A força do Senhor milagreiro é maior que a de perdoar os pecados. Aqui também muitas seitas protestantes encontram seu ponto de inserção. Sua pregação penitencial centrada em ‘Jesus que perdoa e salva’ soa como boa nova para muitos.” Ibid., 348.

997 In my article written in Finnish I pointed to the fact that the number of Brazilian Pentecostals had doubled in the last decade of the previous century/millennium (Raunu 2004, 206). Libanio mentions the same fact and explains the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostals by the fact that they generate a whole new existential stance in their followers: “Os evangélicos reinterpretam toda sua vida, até então sem sentido, massacratada por tantos sofrimentos físicos, psíquicos e espirituais, como uma verdadeira conversão para o Deus que os acolhe e salva. Com isso, criam uma identidade clara num mundo fragmentado e fragmentante.” RIM, 210 (statistics on p. 209). For a more detailed presentation of the way Pentecostal churches make people “feel like people” (sentir-se gente), cf. Projeto pastoral “Construir a Esperança”. PerTeol 24 n. 62 (1992), 77-94, 89–92.

998 Libanio refers to the specific traits of Karl Marx’s thinking when he mentions the Marxian criticism of religion. He also refers to the Feuerbachian foundation of this criticism, i.e. to the idea of religion as the false consciousness: “A crítica ideológica da religião no marxismo se faz a partir do ponto de vista filosófico, político e econômico. Mas o que caracteriza especificamente a ‘análise marxista’ é encontrar nas condições materiais reais a causa do caráter alienante e projetivo da religião (tema já muito trabalhado antes de Marx, especialmente por L. Feuerbach). Vale da religião o mesmo esquema teórico interpretativo do ‘fetichismo da mercadoria’ na sociedade capitalista. Tal fetichismo não se origina da e na consciência, mas é gerado pela própria realidade capitalista. Por isso não se supera tal fetichismo pela via da ‘conscientização’, mas somente mudando as reais relações capitalistas que o geram. Assim a religião é uma falsa consciência gerada pela ‘miséria da realidade’: é uma imagem invertida da própria consciência do indivíduo, porque a realidade está invertida [...] A religião vive da e na miséria do povo. Uma vez superada tal miséria, desaparece a religião.” TdL, 188. We could compare this critical view with Libanio’s former, Althusserian view of ideology as a merely “social fact” (SDP, 56; n. 581).
present. In one sense it was based on social analysis and gave Marxism a “seductive” character.  

He also criticizes the scientistic idea that there may be some social knowledge that is value-free. There is no such value-free science that would be chosen, starting from an Archimedic ethical point:

Epistemology poses another tricky question. How is it possible to theoretically defend the choice of “scientific instruments” starting from a non-scientific or ethical and ideological criterion of option? Liberation theology chooses the dialectical [i.e. Marxist] instruments because of its option for the poor. Does that not mean a confusion of the order of the real with the order of the wished-for? Can some theory – e.g., functionalist analysis – be simply disposed of, by the force of an option, when the theory purports to explain the reality and the option aims to implant an ideal and to defend a value?  

What Libanio, in fact, criticizes is the separation of theory and ethical practice. This is the same problem that he faced in the base communities: their practice was not taken into account when the theoreticians of liberation preached. When it comes to “choosing Marxist analysis”, one is confronted with the dilemma of supposedly objective science that one, however, has to choose on ethical grounds. Instead of this separation, he suggests the idea of the scientist as an ethical scientist, regardless of the fact that ethics and science are two separate things.

If the aim is to unite ethics and science, the outcome is ambiguous. Libanio goes on to stress the separation between the theologian and the social scientist: the theologian “must not judge” (julgar) the results of social science, but must trust the correctness of it, based on scientific discourse. Here is another distinction: liberation theological “judging” does not mean that the scientific results can be scientifically judged: a theologian can only make a judgment (juízo) on the ethical values on which any social science is based. Some sciences are ethically “open to choice” (permitem a escolha): it is only the “syntax” of the science that a

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1000 “Outra questão espinhosa pode ser levantada pela epistemologia, ao perguntar-se como se justifica teoricamente escolher um ‘instrumental científico’ a partir de critério não-científico, mas ético, ideológico da opção. Pois a TdL escolhe o instrumento dialético por causa de sua opção pelos pobres. Tal não significaria confundir a ordem do real com a ordem do desejo? Pode-se descartar sem mais uma teoria – por exemplo, a análise funcionalista – por força de uma opção, quando aquela teoria quer explicar a realidade e a opção quer implantar um ideal, defender um valor?” TdL, 191.

1001 “No caso, tanto o instrumento científico sócio-analítico como a ética têm suas regras próprias [...] Mas por outro lado, o cientista é o homem ético que elabora o instrumental científico e vive segundo valores éticos.” TdL, 191.
theologian cannot attain, and he or she will again be interested in the “pragmatic” side of science. Once more, the systematization goes very far. It is as though there were three layers in social science: the “values” on the bottom, the “syntax” or the scientific discourse itself in the middle, and the “pragmatical” upper layer.\textsuperscript{1002} Did he not claim, however, that there was no “value-free” science, and would this not apply precisely to its theoretical, “syntactic” content?

Understanding the tension between social-scientific liberation theology and the focus on the poor is no easy task. Like Taborda, the Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo made an effort to systematize liberation theology. He simply argued in 1985 that it had two stages (or phases).\textsuperscript{1003} The first evolved in the universities in the 1960’s, and relied heavily on social-scientific analysis.\textsuperscript{1004} The second was the popular phase,\textsuperscript{1005} evident in the 1980’s works of the major liberation theologians, the Boff brothers and Gustavo Gutiérrez in particular. The problem of the theologian turning “to the people” was that he or she necessarily remained somewhat critical. A profound conversion to the masses would mean denying the properly theological and intellectual interests of the educated classes.

In my opinion, it is possible to understand Libanio’s production from this perspective. There are strong narrative and even “popular” elements. Sometimes they run counter to the liberation-theological discourse. We are faced with statements that call for a closer link between theology and life, for example.
Conversely, there is also a strong tendency toward distinguishing between social
science and theological discernment, which would lead back to the “first stage” of
liberation theology. As to choosing this social science on ethical grounds, his
expressions in TdL seem to point in two directions. A theologian needs to make an
ethical choice of social science, but there is certainly “terrible difficulty” in
trying to bring ethical and scientific logic together, as there was with Marxism. In
sum, it could be argued that in the late 1980’s Libanio walked the thin line
between intellectual, social-scientific liberation theology and its popular
corrective. The corrective was there because liberation theology had experienced
its first “crisis” as early as the mid-1970’s when the revolutionary fervor had
diminished.

1006 It was Libanio’s criticism of Marx that ethical and scientific (analytic) logic could not easily be
united. TdL, 189, quoted in n. 881.
1007 “Dado este contexto, consideramos por ejemplo, la crisis de mediados de la década del ’70 en
la teología de la liberación en América Latina y el consiguiente cambio o etapa desde la primera a
la segunda.” Segundo 1985, 14. Carlos Mesters (1975, 1161) contrasted the radical theology of the
“theologians” with the “mystics” in the mid-1970’s, arguing: “Aquí también se coloca a tensão
pessoal entre o ‘teólogo’ e o ‘místico’. O teólogo, mesmo que critique e desmonte a instituição, está
mais do lado da lógica e da instituição do que do lado do carisma.” In all this, Segundo sided more
with the intellectuals and Mesters with the Brazilian communities – but both shared the intuition of
a cultural gap.
7.3. A new interpretation of praxis

Libanio’s *Teologia da libertação* made a four-fold distinction of praxis. As late as in 1996, in his *Introdução à teologia*, he maintained that liberation theology began with the questions it raised concerning the interpretation of the revelation – even if the practical social sciences would later be interpreted in the light of the divine revelation. The question of “praxis as a criterion” was widely debated in liberation theology. \(^{1008}\) Libanio and Murad maintained in IT that praxis as orthopraxis was “a true criterion”:

Their practice judges – not as the only criterion – but as a true criterion of whether the theological task has been well executed or not. [...] The famous criterion of “orthopraxis” is assumed, only it must be understood not as mere practical efficiency, but also, and in a special manner, as the conservation of the faith in this practice. \(^{1009}\)

Something happened after *Introdução à teologia*: Clodovis Boff’s *Teoria do método teológico* was published in 1998. Boff broke away from taking praxis as the starting point: “To put the praxis in the beginning is a mania of the Prometheic modernity”, and “a cultural fixation”. \(^{1010}\) Ten years earlier he had maintained, together with Leonardo, that “Theology is always a second step; the first is the ‘faith that makes its power felt through love’ (Gal. 5:6). Theology (not the theologian) comes afterward; liberating practice comes first.” \(^{1011}\)

It was now even more important for C. Boff to preserve the radical theocentric focus of all Christian discourse against the anthropocentric danger. Echoing Paul Tillich, he called for a “theonomous” theology. All serious discourse must be a search for the truth, and its practical consequences are secondary.

\(^{1008}\) Gutiérrez’ main work *TL* emphasized praxis as the starting point. J. L. Segundo (1975, 44; quoted in Vuola 1997, 52) referred to the “priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy” in the same way as L. Boff (1988b, 233–234), and C. Boff (*TP*, 335–353) devoted a whole chapter to the question of “Praxis as a criterion of truth” (A práxis como critério de verdade). On the discussion of the Marxist roots of “praxis as a criterion”, see n. 794; on Kolakowski’s criticism, see n. 7.

\(^{1009}\) “A prática deles [dos interessados nas práticas pastorais e sociais] julga – não como único – mas como verdadeiro critério, se a tarefa teológica foi bem executada ou não. [...] Assume-se o célebre critério da ‘ortopráxis’, somente que esta não deve ser entendida unicamente como eficiência prática, mas também, e de modo especial, como conservação da fé nessa prática.” *IT*, 185. Libanio deals with the question of praxis in IT on pp. 184–186, but apart from this remark, it still remains in the four-fold line of “da, para a, na, pela práxis” of *TdL*.

\(^{1010}\) “Pôr a práxis no começo é uma mania da modernidade prometéica, é uma fixação cultural: fixação na idéia do ‘saber-poder’, quer se exprima no ativismo barato, quer no pragmatismo técnico, quer ainda no praxismo histórico.” C. Boff 1998, 399. Of these three, political liberation theology obviously belongs to the third, historicist category.

\(^{1011}\) Boff & Boff 1987, 23.
Theoretical contemplation has “the immediate primacy” (\textit{a primazia imediata})\textsuperscript{1012}, for “It is only after really knowing the truth that one can ask how to make the truth”. Human reason is first of all, reason that seeks the truth (\textit{razão veritativa}), and only afterward is it instrumental reason.\textsuperscript{1013} This was not only the turning upside down of Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach, it was also the logical conclusion of the Thomist idea of theology as “more speculative than practical” which Libanio and Murad had also implied in \textit{IT}.\textsuperscript{1014}

The liberation theological “primacy of praxis” could not have been more vigorously refuted – and it was refuted by its greatest theoretician Clodovis Boff. The hybrid mixture of scholasticism and Marxism now gave way to essential, realist Thomism. One could be “contemplative in action”, but the emphasis was strongly on the “contemplative” side rather than on the action. This must have had an effect on how Libanio reconsidered the praxis. Two years passed between \textit{Introdução à teologia} and Clodovis Boff’s new \textit{Teoria do método teológico} (1996–1998).\textsuperscript{1015} After another two years, Libanio would publish his \textit{Eu creio, nós cremos}. What had changed?

Libanio’s recent teaching on praxis features in two places in \textit{Eu creio, nós cremos}, and corresponds almost literally to the formulations he wrote in the photocopied study manual \textit{Fé cristã (FC)} for the Jesuit faculty in 1996. He mentions the difference between orthopraxis and orthodoxy. “Orthodoxy” should

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\textsuperscript{1012} “Por que a primazia imediata da contemplação teórica? Qual é aqui o interesse em se afirmar a finalidade imediatamente teórica da teologia? É, em primeiro lugar, para guardar firme a ótica \textit{teocêntrica} radical de todo o discurso cristão, contra todo o perigo de antropocentrismo. A teologia é teônoma, como o é toda a vida cristã. Não é Deus que deve se submeter à medida de nosso pensar e operar, mas ao contrário. Depois, é simplesmente para conscientizar-se de que a primeira preocupação de todo discurso sêrio é a busca da verdade. É fazer justiça às coisas em sua constituição essencial. É obediência ao ser. É docilidade ao real. Trata-se aqui de uma postura intelectual de base ontológica, feita de desprendimento intelectual e de gratuidade metafísica. Só depois é que vem a questão da prática.” C. Boff 1998, 398.

\textsuperscript{1013} “Ou seja, só depois de \textit{conhecer} realmente a verdade, é que se pode perguntar como \textit{fazer} a verdade. A razão é, em primeiro lugar, razão veritativa e só depois razão instrumental. De resto, se a teologia é uma questão prática, é porque é antes ainda uma questão de verdade.” C. Boff 1998, 398–399.

\textsuperscript{1014} C. Boff (1998, 398) mentions this Thomist “\textit{magis speculative quam practica}” (\textit{S. Th.} I, q. 1, a. 4) idea, and explains: “Nesse sentido, é mais contemplação do que ação, é mais receber do que dar, é mais \textit{pathos} do que praxis.” He seems to criticize the much-used theme introduced by Jerónimo Nadal, \textit{contemplativus in actione}, or perhaps he only re-interprets it and puts the emphasis on the first part. Libanio’s implicit use of the Thomist idea is evident in \textit{IT}, 108; see n. 959.

\textsuperscript{1015} It was during these years that the scathing criticism of liberation theology given by José Comblin in his \textit{Called for Freedom} (Port. \textit{Cristãos rumo ao século XXI: nova caminhada da libertação}, 1996) stirred the consciousness of many Brazilian Christians. Comblin criticizes the concept of praxis from the historical perspective. There is no “single or unified process” of history, or historical praxis, which the conscious “vanguard” would make the people adhere to. “There are many historic subjects but they do not make up a single grand subject.” Comblin 1998a, 195–196.
not be referred to merely as *recta doctrina* as it is in Western churches. It is more than a mere “abstract synthesis” and empty logic in a negative sense, and in a positive sense it is rather the actualization of Jesus’ message in practical life and a means of evangelization, having no value in itself.\(^{1016}\) The term “orthopraxis” also has a negative and a positive connotation. It is negative if it means that “political-ideological human action” determines everything in people’s lives\(^ {1017}\), but in a positive sense it implies charity and the “evangelical option for the poor”. The “ortho” is determined not by the theory of Marxist politics, but by the “experience that one has in the light of the revelation”.\(^ {1018}\) In other words, the revelation – i.e. doctrine – gives the criterion of the praxis. There is no human activity that does not have its own intelligence and reflection. Libanio is obviously following Edward Schillebeeckx in asking what the “ortho” of the praxis is.\(^ {1019}\)

He was not alone in his new perspective on praxis. One only has to take a close look at the new preface and the many remarks that the founder of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, inserted into his main work in 1990.\(^ {1020}\) His book *La...
verdad os hará libres also contains many corrections to the “starting with praxis” idea of liberation theology as he seeks to conserve “the circularity and mutuality of orthodoxy and orthopraxis”. What now characterizes his concept of theology is the idea that it has its “ultimate criteria” that come from the depositum fidei of the Church, “from the revealed truth and not from the praxis itself”. He stresses that he did not mean that theology as “a critical reflection on the praxis” should replace theology as wisdom and as rational knowledge in the first place – it rather presupposes them. It is precisely the critical perspective that makes rational knowledge necessary. The depositum fidei in itself is not enough either – one needs the wisdom and the spirituality. This could be condensed in the following terms: there can be no criticism without a tradition to criticize. Likewise, every tradition needs criticism and self-criticism to prevent it from mummifying.

Libanio, in his systematic manner, formulates the question of the relation between praxis and faith:

Practice is the source of questions to faith. It is a creative moment of a new penetration of faith and knowledge. Because of that, it is also a source (fonte) of theology. Practice is also a criterion – not the only, or exclusive, or ultimate one – of the faith. It is a critical instance. Matthew 25 gives us the exact meaning of such an affirmation. In Latin America, faith is lived out in practice, in commitment, in the struggle for “liberation” in a situation of domination.

Two things attract attention here. First of all, the word “praxis” has been replaced by the less ideological “practice”. However, because the word “praxis”

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1021 “El asunto es saber mantener la circularidad y la mutua alimentación de la ortodoxia y la ortopraxis.” Gutiérrez 1990c, 131.
1022 “La teología es en primer lugar, claro está, una inteligencia iluminada por la fe, los criterios últimos de verdad le vienen del ‘depositum fidei’. Pero reflexionamos siempre marcados por las realidades que vivimos, y por los cuestionamientos que ellas nos plantean; además, en el caso del discurso teológico se trata de tener una referencia a la fe vivida en y por la Iglesia en el momento histórico que atraviesa.” Gutiérrez 1990c, 144.
1023 “Los criterios últimos vienen de la verdad revelada que acogemos en la fe y no de la praxis misma.” Gutiérrez 1990c, 127.
1024 “La teología como reflexión crítica de la praxis histórica a la luz de la Palabra, no sólo no reemplaza las otras funciones de la teología como sabiduría y como saber racional, sino las supone y necesita.” (TL 38). No hay pues una absorción de estas dos tareas en la reflexión crítica de la praxis a la luz de la fe. Precisamente la perspectiva crítica hace necesario el saber racional; y la luz de la fe, que recibimos en la Iglesia, en lo que se llama ‘el depósito de la fe’, requiere mucho de un acercamiento del tipo de la sabiduría y espiritualidad.” Gutiérrez 1990c, 130 n. 36. The citation proves that Gutiérrez wanted (1986) to stress that he was closer to Jürgen Habermas’s interpretation of critical social theory than to Herbert Marcuse’s futuristic criticality. Habermas considered it important to have a tradition to criticize – precisely as Gutiérrez argues.
has its own history in liberation theology, it is also given due treatment later, over 16 pages. This passage is from the beginning of the large compendium in which Libanio deals with the practical aspect of faith. He seems to be introducing a two-fold distinction in place of the mechanical four-fold distinction of different types of relationship between praxis and faith. These two dimensions of praxis are simply

1. praxis as the starting point, but in the sense that it is “a source of questions” to faith (theology as critical reflection on the basis of praxis), and

2. praxis as the critical instance of faith (ethical post hoc verification of the genuineness of the faith).

It is very easy to see how this second classification matches the traditional Catholic ethic. According to Libanio, faith has two dimensions, that of union with God and that of the “informed” aspect of charity (fides caritate formata). As union with God and the “minimum for the salvation of a human being”, faith in its ultimate radicalness means “an act of commitment to an Absolute”. This is the first level, that of duty (dever), but it is a kind of super-value above all others that we can choose to adopt by ourselves. By accepting or refusing to believe in God, we ultimately make a choice concerning our salvation. As union with God, faith is the beginning of the beatific vision (inchoatio visionis), which has a “supercreatural intentionality”.

1027 “Em sua última radicalidade e realidade, a fé é um ato de entrega a um Absoluto apreendido no mínimo sob a forma de um valor que se impõe à nossa consciência. É o nível fundamental, mínimo para a realização e salvação do ser humano. Em tal nível, a pessoa se compromete com aquele ou aquilo que em sua consciência, em seu horizonte cultural é captado como um valor vinculante por si mesmo e não criado por nosso arbitrio. A realidade de tal valor, mesmo sob formas misturadas de erro, ignorância e imperfeição, é, de certo modo, apreendida em sua última verdade, e a ela o ser humano se entrega. É essa parcela da Verdade Primeira, que nós na fé chamamos de Deus, que atrai e ilumina a pessoa, possibilitando que sua liberdade lhe dé adesão. Nesse momento, joga-se a salvação da pessoa, pela realização do ato da fé ou sua rejeição.” ECNC, 266–267; FC, 39.

Emphasis added.

1028 “A fé é ‘inchoatio visionis’, ie., início da vida definitiva de comunhão amorosa imediata com a Trindade. A fé é o início de um infinito mergulhar-se em Deus para dentro da eternidade. [...] A fé já tem a intencionalidade supracreatural, que eleva a faculdade humana ao nível do conhecimento de Deus, como ele é, que se plenifica na visão.” FC, 24. Cf ECNC, 167, in which he does not mention “intencionalidade supracreatural”, but refers to an “elevation” of the faith: “O ato de fé é elevado por Deus de nossa condição puramente natural para uma intencionalidade que termina nele mesmo enquanto dom gratuito e eterno. [...] Chamou-nos, em seu próprio Filho, a uma intimidade única, pessoal, supracriatural, da qual a fé é o início.”
Yet, Libanio maintains that faith will only save the human being who possesses the other theological virtues of hope and charity. Hope as mere knowledge will not save anyone, and it is charity that is the “fundamental condition” for joining in God’s project in history. By participating in this project, one is saved. This appears to contradict what appeared 20 pages previously, that one may believe and thus be related to the “linking value” (valor vinculante), or the super-value of the Absolute.

Which is more important, then, faith or charity (love)? Libanio seems to want it both ways:

1. Faith is the “radical commitment” and it is the “minimum” criterion for human salvation. It links one with the “linking value” of the Absolute, God.

2. Charity is the “fundamental” and only way of joining God’s project, and it saves the human being.

Libanio deals with St. Paul’s theology of the saving faith in ECNC very briefly, in six lines. Later he once again takes up Pauline theology in a longer passage, although the emphasis is on the interaction between faith and charity, and on the fact that “only faith that works through love is important”, as St. Paul states in Gal. 5:6. People are saved “by faith in Jesus which is transformed into charity, into practice”. In this way, charity and practice (praxis) become parallel: praxis (which grows from faith) saves. The passage ends on a rather un-Pauline note: “Therefore, faith is active (operativa). St. James regards it as dead without works (James 2:14).”

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1030 Continuing his thoughts on the Absolute, Libanio thus refers to the “linking value”: “Numa leitura teológica, descobre-se nesse valor vinculante da vida uma manifestação do designio salvífico universal de Deus que se revela a todas as pessoas no meio em que vivem. É a relação do nível do dever com o nível teologal. Pode-se avançar ainda mais. O designio salvífico de Deus Pai encontra em Jesus Cristo sua manifestação maior.” ECNC, 267. Emphasis added.

1031 ECNC, 272.

1032 “Aparece frequentemente em são Paulo essa profunda ligação entre a fé e a caridade. Ao falar da fé, desliza rapidamente para a caridade. E vice-versa. Para o que crê, não importa pertencer ou não à exterioridade institucional judaica, mas ter uma fé que age pelo amor (Gl 5,6). A eficácia salvífica não lhe vem pelo quadro judaico religioso, como um privilégio de hereditariedade, mas pela fé em Jesus que se transforma em caridade, em prática. [...] Na perseguição, a fé e a constância se casam (2 Ts 1,4). Portanto, a fé é operativa. Tiago a vê morta sem obras (Tg 2,14).” ECNC, 288; FC, 52.
Libanio’s theology thus has a Tridentinian emphasis, and this impression is confirmed by how he says that faith is only the “conscious” side of charity. It is charity that is the true reality of salvation. There is, again, a scholastic distinction between “the real” and “consciousness of the real”, this time applied to the domain of faith and love. Libanio puts it this way:

Charity is the level of reality. Faith is the [level] of consciousness. Nothing of the human can be lived without a minimum of consciousness and freedom. Therefore the saving reality – charity – cannot be lived without a minimum of consciousness – of faith. Inasmuch as consciousness is necessary for living in the reality, in the same measure faith is necessary for charity, and consequently for salvation.1033

He lists the various ways in which orthopraxis and orthodoxy complement each other:

- In Greek thinking, “praxis” means intransitive action that has its meaning in itself, such as prayer and dance. On the other hand, building a bridge is transitive action, “poiesis”. This means that praxis has a subjective side to it.1034
- Paul warned of the righteousness of the Pharisees. He did not deny good works, but he called for a true conversion experience of faith, and true practice.1035
- The order of St. Benedict advocated praying and working (ora et labora).1036
- Praxis is the locus of formulating a doctrine. An active Christian may ask if his or her doctrinal reflection really has been helpful. It is a situation that is parallel to the kerygmatic theology of the 1920’s and 1930’s as the sermon was the occasion for verifying the catechesis and the seminar teaching.1037

Libanio’s new thinking on praxis includes a warning. The tension between faith and praxis will remain, but liberation today happens “through the mediation

1033 “Essa participação tem níveis e graus de realidade e de consciência. O nível de realidade é a caridade. O de consciência é a fé. Nada de humano pode ser vivido sem um mínimo de consciência e liberdade. Portanto, a realidade salvífica – a caridade – não pode ser vivida sem um mínimo de consciência – de fé. Na medida em que a consciência é necessária para se viver a realidade, nessa mesma medida a fé é necessária para a caridade e, por consequência, para a salvação.” ECNC, 287–288; FC, 52.
1034 ECNC, 451; FC, 25.
1035 ECNC, 452; FC, 25. Here Libanio follows the discoveries of modern exegesis (Sanders, Räisänen, et al.).
1036 ECNC, 452; FC, 25.
1037 ECNC, 459; FC, 29.
of consensus, democracy and communicative action”. In full agreement with the new reflections expressed by Gutiérrez and Clodovis Boff, he maintains that “the praxis cannot be the absolute, nor the ultimate, nor the exclusive, nor the only criterion of the doctrine”. This is so because the Christian faith necessarily has a dimension of gratuity: God reveals himself to the human being, and the human being receives God. This is irreducible to the praxis even though faith has its practical consequences. The old revolutionary discourse is not helpful at a time when decisions need to be made together:

As the real socialism fell it became evident that the liberation was not constructed based on some kind of voluntarism dictated from abroad (ditados de fora), nor on technocracies or illuminated groups that had the key to history. Neither was it built on historical subjects who were natural-born propagandists, nor on dogmatic and ready-made analyses. Liberation is a process in construction, which will only be made viable in dialogue and in the ecumenism of all the spheres and groups of society.

Libanio maintains that the church has two basic emphases: on the dogmatic and on pastoral work and service. To a certain degree they alternate – and they have to. He was of the opinion that the Church of Brazil had been emphasizing the social aspect over the previous few years. Nevertheless in 1996 he could sense how the point of gravity was shifting from the ideas of social service put forward in Vatican II, Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) to doctrine. He argues that it is necessary to try to reach a balance when the church is threatened by unilateral interpretations.


1039 “Portanto, a práxis não pode ser o critério nem absoluto, nem último, nem exclusivo, nem único da doutrina. Pois nesse caso a doutrina se deturparia totalmente, se perverteria. Já não seria doutrina cristã revelada, mas uma pura criação da inteligência humana. Por isso, o último critério de juízo de uma doutrina não pode ser a práxis, a eficácia transformadora da realidade. Nem tampouco se pode aceitar que o homem se defina totalmente e radicalmente pela práxis, negando-se-lhe a relação transcendental com Deus, sua qualidade de dom. A fé cristã tem uma dimensão necessária de gratuidade, da parte de Deus que se revela e do homem que o acolhe. Tal realidade é irreductível à práxis, embora naturalmente traga conseqüências para ela.” ECNC, 459; FC, 28–29. Emphasis added.

1040 “Com a queda do socialismo real, evidenciou-se que a libertação não se constrói à base de voluntarismos ditados de fora, nem de tecnocracias ou grupos iluminados detentores da chave da história, nem tampouco à base de sujeitos históricos protagonistas natos ou de análises dogmáticas e já totalmente articuladas. A libertação é um processo em construção que só no diálogo, no ecumenismo de todas as esferas e grupos de sociedade, se viabiliza.” ECNC, 459.

1041 “A Igreja do Brasil, ao olhar para sua presença no momento histórico em que vivemos e ao considerar a qualidade de sua atuação no passado, tem privilegiado a prática social em sua pastoral.” ECNC, 462.

1042 “Outro critério pastoral pode ser o de balancear a situação. Assim se uma Igreja particular percebe que no seu seio a linha da ortodoxia ou da ortopraxis se está impondo de maneira hipertrofiada, cabe-lhe chamar atenção para o pólo negligenciado. Freqüentemente acontece...
reality, but the doctrinal crisis also needed a response. In this sense the question of praxis fixes the destiny of the church. It is necessary to ask continuously how the understanding and the working out of the faith can remain in balance. It is not a question of the relationship between faith and works in the dogmatic sense.

How do Libanio’s old and the new concepts of praxis fit together? In fact, he has presented them both at the same time in an international article: “Praxis/Orthopraxis” appeared in the Dictionary of Third World Theologies in 2000. He still lists the four ways in which liberation theologians employ the term:

Liberation theologians are bound to praxis in four ways: they take material from praxis for their reflection; they offer the results to those engaged in praxis; they allow themselves to be criticized by praxis; and they build their theology while being involved in a concrete praxis.1043

To be sure, there is no mention about “the struggle (luta) of the collective poor”.1044 Furthermore, he refers to Gutiérrez in maintaining that “[l]iberation theology stresses orthopraxis not to eliminate orthodoxy. [...] Rather, the intent is to achieve a balanced relationship between right belief and right action [...].” This comes from Gutiérrez’s post-1986 production, and it is rather easy to find a clear reference to his new thinking.1045

Libanio refers in the article not to Gutiérrez’ earlier TL, but to the 15th Anniversary edition of 1988 in which there is the long foreword “Expanding the View” and the new additional footnotes (the notes a), b), c)... that correspond to the 14th Spanish version of 1990. In contrast, he mentions Clodovis Boff’s original dissertation Theology and Praxis (translation of TP).

Thus Libanio’s did his best in this article to reach a balance between his older and newer expressions. He makes a distinction between “practice” and “praxis”, and puts forward a rather liberationist argument:

1044 “Neste sentido, ela [a TdL] interpreta as Escrituras cristãs com a finalidade de iluminar a práxis de cristãos na luta pela libertação do pobre coletivo.” TdL, 163; on the same page: “[A TdL] compromete-se com grupos de base, com comunidades eclesiais populares, com movimentos e lutas do povo.”
1045 Cf. the new interpretation by Clodovis Boff. The praxis does not play the role of the “determining instance”: “Com efeito, vejamos como G. Gutiérrez define a teologia da libertação: ‘É a reflexão crítica da práxis à luz da Palavra.’ Ora, que vemos aí? Que a práxis histórica aparece não no papel de instância determinante, mas no de tema ou matéria-prima da teologia.” C. Boff 1998, 121. This is a shining example of the versatility of the liberation theological discourse: in the 1970’s, it was acceptable to stress the fact that one started with the praxis. When things got hot, one could then say that the praxis was nothing but the raw material for Gutiérrez in the first place.
Liberation theology considers all human praxis to be the object of its reflection in the light of revelation.\textsuperscript{1046}

This comes partly from the multi-faceted legacy of Althusserianism, according to which “praxis” is the totality of different “practices”. Libanio also maintains that there is a hierarchy between the two terms.\textsuperscript{1047} One thing he does not mention here – or in any of this writing since 1996 – is that theology should be based upon the social sciences. He rather explains the different kinds of social practice: conservative, reformist and revolutionary practice. Here the distinction between “praxis” and “practice” helps because he thus implies that revolutionary practice \textit{qua} practice cannot be all of human praxis.

Libanio uses scholastic terminology but his understanding of praxis is based on the pragmatic orthopraxis model in that “theory corresponds to faith, and praxis to charity”. Praxis is, however, “an integral part of faith, insofar as it is an expression of Christian activity in the pursuit of justice, solidarity, and charity”.\textsuperscript{1048} In the same \textit{Dictionary}, Clodovis Boff also referred to faith that is informed (\textit{formata}) by love and its good works.\textsuperscript{1049}

It should be pointed out that the orthopraxis model is a modern interpretation of the practical spirituality of the Jesuit tradition. The words may come from liberationist social critique, but at the core is Catholic spirituality. Gustavo Gutiérrez showed his respect for the \textit{in actione contemplativus} thinking of Ignatian spirituality in his \textit{Teología de la liberación}.\textsuperscript{1050} Putting an equal emphasis on action and contemplation was what liberation theology was all about.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1046} Praxis/Orthopraxis, 172.
\textsuperscript{1047} A distinction is made between praxis and practice. Practice refers to action in a particular sector of human life, such as educational practice, while praxis is made up of the entirety of human practices in the social realm.” Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{1048} “Liberation theology views historic and liberating praxis in relation to the oppression of the poor. In theological terms, theory corresponds to faith, and praxis to charity. In this sense, praxis is an integral part of faith, insofar as it is an expression of Christian activity in the pursuit of justice, solidarity, and charity.” Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{1049} The practical dimension is the \textit{fides formata}, that is, faith informed by love and its works. It is only when it is practiced that faith becomes truly intelligible. If faith sheds light on praxis, praxis likewise sheds light on faith by means of dialectical return. The theologies of the South have highlighted the practical or liberating dimension of faith.” C. Boff 2000, 198. Cf. Libanio’s Jesuit idea of love that has been made conscious (\textit{charitas discreta}), ECNC, 290. The opposite, negative pole is \textit{fides informis}, ECNC, 155.
\textsuperscript{1050} Gutiérrez emphasized the \textit{in actione contemplativus} expression, which originally comes from Jerónimo Nadal. He suggests that the medieval preaching and beggar orders with their “contemplata aliis tradere” practices were only a “transition” to Ignatian spirituality (\textit{TL}, 27–28).
\end{footnotesize}
8. Conclusion

This was a study of the “mediated immediacy” in J. B. Libanio’s production. The word “mediation” stands for the empirical and ethical, and “immediacy” for the mystical and theological. A study of Libanio’s theology is necessarily a study of liberation theology as well. He balances the necessity of practical mediation with the reality of religious experience. He has been considered a liberation theologian, but he has related to it in different ways. He moved from a criticism of revolutionary theology to promoting a mild version of it in the late 1970’s. Later he once more expressed his concern about the excesses of politicization.

Having worked as a professor of fundamental theology, Libanio has sought an adequate answer to the problem of science and faith. Human knowledge in neo-scholasticism is considered to be a formal understanding of the “matter” or the essence (essentia) of a certain science. This is different in theology because God cannot be known as a scientific object. Thomism developed the concept of “virtual revelation”, according to which revelation can bring about the formal consideration of any subject matter that is relevant to theology. We are thus faced with the absolute maximization of theological content in material terms.

Liberation theology, which was developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Clodovis Boff in particular, was no exception to neo-scholastic epistemology. Gutiérrez considered historical praxis the “first step” (acto primero) for which theology provided a “second-step” (acto segundo) understanding in formal terms. The first and second steps or acts correspond to each other as matter and form. Clodovis Boff made a strong systemic effort to see theology as a hermeneutic understanding of the matter that was produced by the social sciences. In this sense, he tried to reconcile the results of Marxist sociology with their contextual theological interpretation.

As mentioned, Libanio follows this logic in his Spiritual Discernment and Politics, which was originally published in 1977: faith does not create reality, it only gives “meaning”. However, he has not quite accepted an absolutely formal understanding of theological knowledge. His fundamental theology wavers between the classical idea of the possibility to discern God’s voice and the
Thomist–Tridentian (and modern) skeptical approach. What makes the tension particularly interesting is his background: as a Jesuit he would have to accept spiritual discernment, yet as a follower of the Tridentian Council he would have to be critical of the Protestant or charismatic emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Some expressions therefore remain ambiguous.

Libanio and the studies that concern his production are introduced at the beginning of this work, and chapter two then gives the background to liberation theology. Neo-scholastic philosophy was very strong at the University of Louvain when Gustavo Gutiérrez and Clodovis Boff studied there. Socially-minded Catholics were also strongly influenced by Jacques Maritain’s philosophy. Maritain is frequently seen as the father of Christian Democratic parties. However, in Brazil his *Humanisme intégral* was interpreted in a way that helped Christians to liberate themselves from the yoke of the conservative Church and to be involved in politics. This meant that a “Lutheran” solution first helped them to become politically involved. However, both the theology of revolution in the 1960’s and the liberation theology of the 1970’s brought a new theologization of politics. The liberation theological method reflects this as a theoretical justification for starting with a “Marxist analysis”, or Marxism as a science.

Given the central role, even the “primacy” of the social analytic mediation (MSA) in Clodovis Boff’s liberation theological method, one needs to see the content of Louis Althusser’s Marxism. Althusser’s close colleague Étienne Balibar clearly stated that Marxism as historical materialism was “a science of history”, and it was this concept of scientific Marxism that was accepted in liberation theology. One could argue that no other kind of Marxism would have provided as good a link between scholasticism and political science.

In considering Marxist scientific mediation one could start with the world and its social praxis. In this model, theological interpretations are seen as the hermeneutic mediation (MH) that comes afterwards. In other words, one starts with the analytical explanation and continues with the hermeneutic understanding. This begs the question of whether one is doing justice to either the analytical (the philosophy of language, logical positivism) or the hermeneutic tradition. The latter does not allow “scientific” information in the natural scientific mold to be taken as the starting point: this would be methodological monism. In fact, “explanation”
and “understanding” refer to two different types of science, the natural and the human, or the sciences and the arts.

One could thus say that there is an inherent mind–body dualism in the liberation theological method. It starts with the objective, the scientific and the empirical, which is the “first step”, and gives it a theological interpretation in the “second step”. The subject-matter derived of the concrete world is understood through the formal information that comes from theology. Speaking of the “primacy” of the sociological is problematic, however. Is Christianity, then, a secondary instance to the ultimate reality of economic or sociological determinism in the orthodox Marxist manner? Or should a secular science be taken as an ancilla theologiae and a prolegomenon of theology? Clodovis Boff seems to advocate both, so that both logical positivists and neo-Thomists can find something familiar in his dissertation Teologia e prática.

Libanio further systematizes liberation theological methodology. He qualifies Clodovis Boff’s three-step model in suggesting that God’s word has ontological priority, whereas social praxis has only epistemological priority. This does not resolve the key issue, however. It is difficult to maintain that the “level” of epistemology is different from that of ontology: if we speak of different types of knowledge, we necessarily speak of different objects as well.

Libanio’s philosophy makes use of certain classical presuppositions, but it also finds support in hermeneutics. He maintains that it is possible to have different interpretations or “readings” of the world. One reading could be sociological, another theological and ethical. These are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement each other. This is the tension I have described in section 4.3. Libanio was familiar with the systematic thinking in 1970’s liberation theology according to which one “first analyzes, then interprets”, which corresponds to the succession of MSA and MH. However, he seemed to prefer the idea that there were simply different “readings” (leituras) of the world, none of which had primacy over any other. In this he worked out his own criticism of the Marxist criticism of religion.

One could try to make a strong systematic point about Libanio’s hermeneutics, and suggest that he supports the idea of a “one and only reality” and the strict unity of creation and redemption. His thinking is indeed based on a de Lubac type of position, but his book Spiritual Discernment and Politics seems to
convey a much more “monistic” thinking, at least in translation, than he in fact represents. There is a union of the orders of creation and redemption, but by no means a sameness. It would perhaps be better to speak of holism, rather than monism, in this respect. Thus the philosophical concepts of dualism, monism and holism are all relevant to the question of what liberation theology was and how Libanio interpreted it.

The classic example of holistic thinking is in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s idea of three kinds of liberation. The same word “liberation” refers to three, interconnected levels, the social, the psycho-historical and the theological. This implies that the sociological language of liberation is “dis-univocized” or expanded to mean the personal realities of existence and of faith. A critical question therefore needs to be asked: if we first speak of “only one reality” and its various readings, is it meaningful then to speak of “three realities” or levels of reality, for which one then employs the same kind of language? This was a problem with liberation theology from the beginning: only “one reality” was postulated, yet one would be hard pressed to find reasons to use “one language” as well. One obviously cannot do both, because either one makes different interpretations (readings) of the one reality, or one dis-univocizes the one language (that of “liberation”) to mean the multiple realities. Libanio’s production makes this terminological ambiguity very visible.

Another key philosophical issue is the idea of Hegel’s philosophy as a “rational circulation” between the totality and its parts. This would make it possible to find further justification for a classical gratia naturam non tollit model of grace and nature. In other words, the “mediation” stands for nature, and “immediacy” for God’s grace. This is obvious in H. C. de Lima Vaz’s hermeneutic and “circular” interpretation, which makes Hegel into a defender of human subjectivity. This interpretation helped him to formulate the humanist Catholicism that later gave rise to liberation theology in much more Marxist terms. In fact, one could even ask if this “Hegel” was so close to the much-in-vogue young Marx and to traditional Roman Catholic theology that it secretly helped him to adopt Marx’s ideas in the turbulent 1960’s. In supporting this circular reading of vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit, Libanio wanted to broaden the philosophical basis of Thomist theology. As illustrated, however, his strong teleological thinking is in contrast to hermeneutic circularity. God’s action in the world and his will need to
be discerned in a way that also gives room to human subjectivity. The mediation and the immediacy are not easily balanced.

A question that specifically concerns liberation theology is that of “selecting” a certain scientific approach. This is rather easy to follow in Libanio’s production. It first appears in *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*, in which he supports it, his reasons being two-fold. On the one hand, the science that explains the historical context the best should be selected: Marxist sociology. This was Marxism in its structural, Althusserian–Harneckerian form, which was in fashion in Latin America in the 1970’s. On the other hand, Libanio also maintains that no social science can be absolutely neutral. This is a Habermasian idea that contradicts the Althusserian ideal of objective Marxist science, however. Thus, Libanio’s version of liberation theology engages in both objectivistic and transformational discourse at the same time: the morally “good” science needs to be chosen. He later criticized this idea and suggested in his *Teologia da libertação*, which was published in 1987, that the mixing of science and ethics simply was not warranted. Conversely, he also claimed that a theologian was “not competent” to say anything about social scientific procedure *qua* science but only to discern it in ethical terms. This makes it hard to see the point of *TdL*. In any case, it casts a deep shadow on the liberation-theological method.

Libanio’s ethical contribution is nevertheless very strong. He supports a holistic interpretation of the classical *fides caritate formata* principle: faith must be verified in good works. Obviously, “bad faith” does not lead to a good life. He engages in heavy criticism of the Lutheran faith-trust, which he considers anti-intellectual and ethically passive. Instead, he refers to texts such as Matthew 25 and James’s epistle, which have been a hard nut for Lutheran theology to crack.

In a certain way Libanio nevertheless incorporates modern Protestant thinking into his own theology. It is a question of Paul Tillich’s theory of correlation, and even the so-called Protestant principle. Libanio works out his idea of revelation at great length, particularly in *Teologia da revelação*, which is a thick book with a lot of different themes. One of his focal points is a modern, hermeneutic adaptation of the neo-scholastic virtual revelation, or revelation in the second degree. Revelation is at work when we apply God’s historical revelation to the present-day context. It is a “theologizable” or “revealable” reality for us. The final revelation in Christ helps us to understand God’s will today. In a broad sense,
Libanio even refers to a “continuous” or “maximal” revelation, but he qualifies this in kenotic terms. God’s will often leads us to its very opposite, and his presence needs to be discerned where people suffer the most.

As far as the dialectical “Protestant principle” is concerned, Libanio most often mentions it in the words of Oscar Cullmann: God’s Kingdom has “already” come, but it is “not yet” fully realized. There is a slight difference from Cullmann’s original emphasis, however. It was important to Cullmann to stress that God’s victory in Christ was a definite, historical “D-Day” which nevertheless has not yet been consummated as an eschatological “V-Day”. Libanio, Gutiérrez and Juan Alfaro see this as more of an idealistic kind of dialectic: it is coming but not yet fully manifest. Christ is more an ontological “center” than a chronological “middle”. In spite of the difference of words, Libanio seems to assign to God’s Kingdom precisely the same meaning of an eschatological reserve as the more dialectical political theology of Jürgen Moltmann, J. B. Metz and others. People are asked to promote the values of the Kingdom. Yet no human achievement will ever be final – God’s Kingdom will not appear in any human society. This is the importance of the “not yet” emphasis.

Another key to Libanio’s thinking is the concept of orthopraxis which was originally introduced by Edward Schillebeeckx. This concerns the practical application of faith, and is also a holistic, pragmatic category in the late Wittgenstein sense. We only know what faith is when we look at people who have faith. Faith is always worked out in practical deeds – in ethics. The prefix “ortho” reflects the necessity of faith as both fides qua and fides quae. It is the theological and ethical state of awareness, but it also contains an element of belief and ethical normativity. Thus, it is a profoundly dialectical term.

The question of “mediated immediacy” in Libanio’s production needs to be considered from this perspective. The mediation of praxis is the mediation of love, which is both human and divine. It is caritas that informs faith. However, faith in its mystical immediacy also needs to inform charity. It does not constitute ethics but it helps the ethical person to discern God’s will in any given situation. It is in this sense that Libanio’s faith ethics has strong roots in Jesuit spirituality, which emphasizes Christian life as the following of Jesus, as imitatio Christi. It is orthopraxis, and it combines the dimensions of contemplation and action, of faith and charity.
9. Abbreviations

CC  *Crer e crescer* (1999)
CCR  *A consciência crítica dos religiosos* (1973)
CEB  comunidade eclesial de base (base ecclesial community)
CEBI  Centro de Estudos Bíblicos
CNBB  Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil
CpS  Cristianos por el Socialismo
CRB  Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil
DE  *Discernimento espiritual* (1977)
DGI  Dirección General de Inteligencia (Cuban intelligence agency)
DH  *Deus e os homens* (1990)
diamat  dialectical materialism
DocP  *Documento de Puebla* 1979
DV  *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II, www.vatican.va)
EC  *Escatologia cristã* [1985, Libanio’s part on pp. 19–245.]
ECNC  *Eu creio, nós cremos* (2000)
EL  *Evangelização e libertação* (1975)
EPF  *O eterno problema da fé* (1973)
FC  *Fé cristã* (1995, unprinted study copy)
FP  *Fé e política* (1985)
GS  *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II, www.vatican.va)
histmat  historical materialism
IC  *Igreja contemporânea* (2000)
JEC  Juventude Estudantil Católica (part of Catholic Action)
JUC  Juventude Universitária Católica (part of Catholic Action)
LN  Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>liberation theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MiS</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (“Stasi”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>hermeneutic mediation (“the second step”, to judge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>practical mediation (to act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>socio-analytical mediation (“the first step”, to see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Paul VI, Octogesima adveniens (1971, <a href="http://www.vatican.va">www.vatican.va</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF</td>
<td>Olhando para o futuro (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCB</td>
<td>Partido Comunista do Brasil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>Partido Comunista de Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDC</td>
<td>Partido Democrata Cristão</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PerTeol</td>
<td>Perspectiva Teológica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POF</td>
<td>Pecado e opção fundamental (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Pastoral numa sociedade de conflitos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSCP</td>
<td>O problema da salvação no catolicismo do povo (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUCRS</td>
<td>Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (Porto Alegre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCCA</td>
<td>Qual o caminho entre o crer e o amar? (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QP</td>
<td>O que é pastoral (1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIM</td>
<td>A religião no início do milênio (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Spiritual Discernment and Politics (1982, = DP, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp.</td>
<td>Spanish [also Esp.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TdR</td>
<td>Teologia da revelação a partir da modernidade (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>teología de la liberación [TL = Gustavo Gutiérrez’s book 1971]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL (1990)</td>
<td>Teologia de la liberación 141990, new version with Gustavo Gutiérrez’s “retractatio” (preface and secondary footnotes with letters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Clodovis Boff, Teologia e prática (1978). Version used is of 1993 which is the same except for the self-critical preface. When the new preface is mentioned, the reference is “C. Boff 1993”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>UEC</td>
<td>Utopia e esperança cristã (1989)</td>
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<td>VRTP</td>
<td>Vida religiosa e testemunho público (1971)</td>
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