

**AT THE CROSSROADS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:
AN EASTERN-EUROPEAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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In memory of
Professor Len D. Hulley

In gratitude for his commitment
to truth and justice
and for his gift to encourage
and nurture hope in others

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Abstract

The present work examines the crossroads of social transformation from the contextual standpoint of the "Second World" – a political and socioeconomic term descriptively pointing to the unique location of the Former Eastern-European Block countries – *in between worlds*. The work involves in a dialogue some of the major trends within the contemporary Eastern-European philosophical environment: dichotomized between Neo-Marxism and Neo-Freudianism on the one hand, and Postmodernism on the other.

While examining the most significant elements between the dialectical paradigms for social change of the above theories (and their ethical foundations), the text strives towards a theological paradigmatic formulation for an authentic social transformation that draws its dialectical content and passion from the hopeful eschatological vision of Christ and the Kingdom as an embodiment of the Christian alternative for human emancipation and liberation. In light of this, the work attempts to establish the following thesis: the radical Christian *praxis* of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom in light of the Cross is the Church's alternative to contemporary philosophies and initiatives for social transformation. This praxis affirms the revolutionary, history-shaping force which makes Christianity relevant to the problems of Modernity and Postmodernity through its self-identification with the Crucified God. It marks the moment of conception of an authentic, liberating, life-giving, transforming hope as a source of humanization and redemption of social order.

Christianity is concerned with the birth and formation of a new socio-political reality – the Kingdom of God, and its embodiment on earth (through the Holy Spirit) in

a new ethnos: the Church, the Body of Christ, the communion of the saints. Therefore, it is the Church's calling and obligation to exemplify the reality of the Kingdom, being a living extension of the living Christ and thus, the incarnation of the eschatological future of the world and its hopeful horizon in the midst of the present.

Recognizing the vital need for a relevant Christian response to the spiritual demands of the Post-modern human being and his/her desacralized, pluralistic socio-political context, the work concludes with a conceptual outline offering a strategy for the Church in the Postmodern setting.

Key Terms: Social Transformation, Marxism, Esoteric Marxism, Neo-Freudianism, Eschatological Hope, The New Humanity, Social Despair and Transcendence, Dialectic of Liberation, Spiritual Revolution, Political Theology of the Cross, The Praxis of the Kingdom, Modernity, Postmodernity, Postmodern Ethics, Post-modern Self, Cyber-space, Virtual Reality, Generation X, Strategies of the Church

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Introduction

The present work is shaped by the theological, philosophical and sociological crossroads of the “Second World” – a political and socio-economic term, employed to describe the so-called countries of the former Eastern-European Block, reflecting their unique location – *in between worlds*.

Caught between the anxiety and uncertainty of transition, these countries face the challenge to emerge from behind the Iron Curtain’s decades of isolation and to reinvent themselves as functional and organic partakers within the globalizing market economy of the European Community. In the process of strategizing this metamorphosis they experience a critical level of self-encounter – a dangerous interface between their demythologized societal content and limitations, and their long-suppressed contrast passions and longings (both poetically inspiring and hellishly frightening). These nations were suddenly forced to awake for the shocking reality and tragism of their own capacity for ethnic hatred, escalating crime and violence, and drastic socio-economic inequality. They found themselves reduced from a former military superpower and a world-dominating political factor to undesired paupers knocking at the doors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Today they struggle with the despair produced by the trivialization of the Communist utopia (evoked by their own political elite) and the end of the hope for an earthly paradise described by the ideologists and the poets of the revolutions. Their once youthful enthusiasm which watered with blood, sweat and self-sacrificial devotion “the foundations” of Communist reality, is replaced today by suicidal hopelessness and

claustrophobic disorientation within the shrinking demarcations of the familiar world. While the philosophy of ethnic cleansing and religious intolerance are being employed as instruments of “therapeutic” diversion and a resource for managing the social discontent of the impoverished population, society feels crucified between the nostalgia for the security of the past and the glamorization of the “unlimited” prosperity of the West. The pursuit of prosperity has caused the mass exodus of most of the intellectual and professional human resources of these countries, as well as of their young people – the incarnated future of their nations. Futureless and barren, they seek to trade their remnants for an insignificant piece of the future of the Western World.

Aware of the acute need for a sound “new” ideology for social transformation to usher in an energizing hope to the despairing Eastern-European reality, the philosophical context of this part of the world is consumed with experimental re-reading of old theories and reinvention of some cornerstone themes of the Modern era (e.g. Marxism in both its Classic and esoteric forms, as well as Neo-Freudianism). Yet, realizing the immanent advent of Postmodernism within its social reality, the contemporary Eastern-European philosophy takes note of its content and diverse expressions in this part of the world.

Reflecting on this distinct duality of the Second World’s philosophical climate, the present work seeks to offer a theological alternative for social transformation, while dialoguing with some of the fundamental themes of the above-mentioned theories.

In light of that, the text will attempt to establish the following thesis: the radical Christian *praxis* of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom in the light of the Cross is

the Church's alternative to the contemporary philosophies and initiatives for social transformation.

This praxis affirms the revolutionary, history-shaping force which makes Christianity relevant to the problems of modernity through its self-identification with the Crucified God. The Cross marks the moment of conception of an authentic, liberating, life-giving, transforming hope as a source of humanization and redemption of social order.

Christianity is concerned with the birth and formation of a new socio-political reality - a new kingdom, a new *polis* (the City of God) and its embodiment on earth in a new ethnos: the Church, the Body of Christ, the communion of the saints in which God remains "with us" through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is the Church's calling and obligation to exemplify the reality of the Kingdom, being a living extension of the living Christ, and thus the incarnation of the eschatological future of the world and its hopeful horizon in the midst of the present human existence.

The development of this thesis will have its point of departure in chapter I (entitled *Towards Philosophy and Dialectic of Social Change*) in a study of the most significant elements within the dialectical paradigms for social change in Marxism, Freudianism and their contemporary theoretical derivations (Esoteric Marxism, Neo-Freudianism). In light of this, the argument will develop its resources out of a dialogical involvement of thematically relevant trends within the philosophical thought of Karl Marx, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. It will attempt to explore the categories of *hope, transcendence* and the *new humanity* in the light of these

philosophies and in contrast to the Christian vision of Christ and the Kingdom, as a foundation for the formulation of an authentic social transformation.

In the following section (chapter II) entitled *Dialectic of Liberation*, the study will discuss the nature of social despair and alienation, freedom and justice, evaluating them in the sphere of the dialogue between the Christian paradigm of liberation and that of the Marxist revolutionary theory (in relation to its ethical foundations). The work will bring into focus the Eastern-European context of theological reflection in relation to some aspects of Political Theology, (and the idea of the Spiritual Revolution) by engaging Nicolai Berdyaev's philosophical thoughts in a dialogue about the social significance and resonance of the revolutionary process. The chapter will conclude with a reflection on the Political Theology of the Cross in relation to the eschatological hope of the Kingdom as an embodiment of the Christian alternative for human emancipation and liberation.

Chapter III will investigate *The Drive Towards Social Transformation in the Postmodern World* and will attempt to trace a trajectory to the future in examining the specifics of Postmodernity as a presupposition for focusing, in the following chapter IV, on the social relevance of the Church to the existential needs and spiritual demands of the post-modern human being and his/her desacralized, pluralistic socio-political context. The text gains its basic insights on Postmodernism by reflecting on the thought of various representatives of the diverse stages of the Postmodern paradigm: e.g. Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Julia Kristeva, Emanuel Levinas, Edith Wyschogrod, James H. Olthis, etc. The chapter will focus on developing an understanding of the *Postmodern Self* and the concept of "The

Other” – as a *Focal Point of Postmodern Ethics*. It will explore the Postmodern perception of truth, history, time and space as prerequisites of identifying the cornerstones of the challenging *Cyber-construct of the Virtual Postmodern World* and its agenda for social transformation.

Finally, in chapter IV the present work will transition towards an attempt to outline a *Strategy for the Church in the Postmodern Setting*. It will begin with a critical alternative to the Postmodern ideological foundations for social transformation through a theological reflection on the Christian view of truth, time, space and history. In light of that, it will emphasize the calling of the Church to incarnate the Word of God (Jesus Christ) as the only dimension of consistent (trans-epochal and trans-cultural) relevance to human content and existence (Matthew 24:35). Further, the chapter will include a brief sociological reflection on Generation X as the first truly Postmodern generation, and employ the conclusions as a resource for strategizing the development of an authentic and adequate response of the Church in her pursuit for relevance to the future of the world. The text will interface the Church’s Postmodern challenge with a reflection upon the contemporary identity-crisis of the Christian community with its struggle in seeking a balance between Institutionalization and Charisma, between the will for unity and the drive towards denominational separatism and the domestication of the Gospel. The final section of the chapter presents a summary of its conclusions which serve also as a dialectical closure for the exposition of the thesis’s development.

Chapter 1

Towards Philosophy and Dialectic of Social Change

In his famous book, *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler formulates the following definition of change: "the future which invades" the present.¹ In the logic of this statement we may go beyond Toffler and draw the conclusion that the authenticity of the change will be determined by the authenticity and the truthfulness of the invading future. The truth, which is the integrating center of this future, becomes the source of inspiration around which the present gravitates in the process of receiving its shape, definition and content. It is a formation and reformation process of creativity and vision in which the present gradually grows into the future traveling toward the horizon of its full consummation and incarnation.

At the point of "change," the present is pregnant with the future which grows to its fulfillment. Translated into its social dimension, this philosophical concept marks the complex human presence in its various aspects and inter-relatedness as the bearer and materialization of the constant need for striving after, and achieving of social change. This is a striving after and longing for a future.

An initial element of the dialectic of change is the generating of social discontent which is often preceded by social despair due to a sense of alienation. The present as

such is immanently limited and finite. It is constantly challenged by the self-realization of its limitations in light of the vaster, alien content of the future. The seeds which the future sows into the present bring forth the fruits of its criticism, reconstruction and reformation. Thus, the future becomes the perpetual constructive critique of both the social momentum and the resentment of change which defines the present. It has the potential to become the reality, which is foundational for the formation of a "revolutionary situation," and to present the ideological principle necessary for the accumulation of a human revolutionary force which expresses its social discontent in a revolutionary action.²

In spite of this trend toward generating constructive social critique, the alienation and despair can be dangerously irresponsible toward the future and thus, may present points of disconnectedness and corruption of the transformation-relationship between the present and future. The end result might be characterized by an absence of social affirmation and initiative, and devaluation of human presence which reflects to some degree the genesis of each dehumanizing order (i.e. oppressive, dictatorial, tyrannical).

Deprived of meaningful human presence, the social perception of reality becomes disintegrated, chaotic and violent. Further, it loses its self-therapeutic and self-perpetuating resources (encapsulated in the "*koinonia*"- social dimensions). It becomes ill, traumatic, disformed and reaches anarchy and/or chronic apathy with "manic depressive" swings of socially destructive magnitude.

¹ A. Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 1.

²The terminology used in this present study relating to revolutionary praxis (as will become clear further in the body of the research) does not reflect strictly Marxist content and should not be understood only in light of Marx's formulation.

What can reconstruct the moment of despair into a transforming moment towards growth and self-realization is the formulation and generation of hope, which reaches deeply into the future and traces an avenue towards its horizon.

In light of this exposition, the present chapter will focus on some of the most significant elements (namely: social despair in relation to transcendence, the transforming hope as an instrument of change and the New Humanity as a factor in the process of the formation of the future) within the dialectic of social transformation and present an overview of their understanding by some of the predominant contemporary philosophies of social change in comparison to the fundamentals of the Christian position.

Social Despair and Transcendence

Social Despair is generated out of the claustrophobic sense of finitude within the context of a present reality controlled by institutional structures which have the claim to represent the end (to be the *telos*) of history, and therefore to be the only alternative for future social order. This despair may originate in various spheres and dimensions of the complex social existence: economic, political, cultural, ecological, juridical, etc. However, it is always based on the ultimate fear of alienation: from the possibility of a personal and corporate future beyond the present frame of reference, from the potential for self-development and self-fulfillment, and from personal and communal meaning; alienation from life, per se.³

³ Traditionally, philosophy identifies the 19th century as the era of transition from the epoch of optimism to the realms of despair. According to C. Stephen Evens, "the

Social stratification establishes the structure of the status quo, which defines the hermeneutical principles for interpreting categories such as justice, peace, equality, emancipation, freedom, etc., as well as the frame of their social appropriation. Their contextual relevance logically depends on the question whose rationale they happen to embody.

Social Despair is a cry for the humanization of society. It is an urgency for liberation from its alienating factors, and thus for social transformation of the immediate reality. It is a drive towards the transcendence of the present moment. It confronts two alternatives: death (gradual extermination within the boundaries of a given socium) or

transitional movement of modern thought to despair" (which he perceives as an underlying theme of existentialism) is perhaps best illuminated through a comparison of the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Sartre. See Existentialism: The Philosophy of Despair and the Quest for Hope (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 17. This is a despair generated after an encounter with a universe deprived from ultimate meaning, destination and transcendence, due to "the death of God" triumphantly proclaimed by Nietzsche who was preoccupied with inventing historical space for the Super-man. Faced with his/her mortality and finitude, the human being questioned its own presence (or absence) in the world trapped in disutopia. With the loss of God, humanity faced the void of irretrievably losing the future. It consequently lost its moral compass and sank in the agony of lonely struggles to maintain personal coherency and ethos in the midst of a realm of un navigated "complete freedom," trying to reconcile its claims for infinity with the burdens of finite consequences to concrete moral decisions. At the dawn of the 20th century humanity found itself crucified between aloneness and identity diffusion without a point of self-transcendence toward hope for optimistic prognosis for social survival. See also Kiril Neshev, Philosophies of Moral (Sofia: Filvest, 1997), pp. 23-69. From a socio-political and religious point of view, however, the conviction of the present work is that social despair is not a historical phenomenon associated with a particular transition in world-views and philosophical trends. It is a trans-historical, trans-generational encounter with lack of transcendence, and thus with finitude and impossibility for a beyondness and a future. Therefore, social despair is generated at the edge of the clash with the void (the abyss which swallows humanness and questions its meaning and possibility) as its unleashed powers of control through fear and uncertainty leave human life hopeless to bridge the void and arrive at the horizon of new historical possibilities. See also Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Despair is an encounter with the end (and thus also with death as the ultimate symbol of the end); "...to be sick unto death is to be unable to die, yet not as if there were hope for life..." p. 18 .

breaking through the finitude and its impossibilities into the *prehended* existence of the Beyond, into the infinity of the future.⁴

The inbreaking of Transcendence into the present is the only way out of despair. It confronts the void and traces the bridge beyond the finitude of human existence, beyond the impossibility and the fatalistic ends. Transcendence must be embraced in its immanence as the cosmically animating principle of reality in order to be able to overcome the horror of the void and transform the moment of social despair into a dialectical transition toward the horizon of hope. It must be tangibly present and experientiable in order to generate the authentic, transforming hope necessary to overcome the reality of despair and to trace a path to a meaningful future.⁵

Most of the existing philosophies for social transformation attempt to formulate and introduce an utopia, the spirit of which serves as a transcendence principle, motivating evolutionary or revolutionary action for transformation of the existing political order. However, these social utopias as a rule lack an authentic immanent presence.

⁴ The Peasant Wars throughout the Middle Ages deserve a note here with their chiliastic motivations for social resistance and political rebellion against the status quo for the sake of materialization of the hope of God's Kingdom on earth. Their revolutionary pathos, illuminated and inspired by eschatological vision, could be considered an example of reaching beyond social despair through hope into the promise of the future. Along the same line of thought, however, it could be speculated that all social revolutions (conducted for the sake of the humanization of reality through emancipation of humanity and its liberation unto itself) can be viewed as a transformational outcome of a politically redeemed social despair (through its channeling into a politically structured discontent and further evolving into a revolutionary resource for social transformation).

⁵ In his book, The Future of Creation, Jürgen Moltmann remarks: "...'future of history' must be a qualitatively new one. The future can only be identified with transcendence if in using the word future we are thinking about an alteration in the conditions of history itself. It is only if conflicts which cause us to experience present reality as history are abolished that the future has anything to do with transcendence." (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1979), p. 15.

Thus, they are abstract, ghostly ideals for human prosperity within a cynically dehumanizing present reality.

For *Marxism*, this utopia was freedom from the world of private property (and thus from exploitation) in which the new self-fulfilled humanity would establish technological control over the powers of nature in the name of one harmonious social idea - Communism - the future "heaven on earth" in which labor is not a necessity for survival but a conscious, responsible contribution of the new self toward the common good. Marxism reduces the idea of Transcendence to human self-invention and self-development, and improvement through active, productive labor. It limits its possibilities within the evolution of matter, defining social interpretations through the frame of Historical Materialism. Transcendence is contained in this constant evolutionary process of "becoming" (being an intrinsic, immanent characteristic of the material economic self) a process which identifies the absolute future as a constantly expanding horizon of the evolutionary metamorphosis of future humanity. The atheistic presentation of this ideal portrays the idea of God as the fully actualized new humanity (which is the historical creator of an anthropomorphic deity) raised up as the ethical and ideological embodiment of humanity's own aspirations. Thus, God does not yet completely "exist," for the new humanity is not yet a completed reality.

The complex Marxist understanding of alienation is fundamental for the ideological demand and maintenance of the above-described utopic vision, supplying the resource for social motivation for transformation from the stage of despair to its therapeutic transcendence.

Within the workout of Marx's vision of social transformation, alienation is rather ambiguous and paradoxical in its dialectical function and potential content. On the one hand, it embodies the product of the regressive, dehumanizing energies driving society towards its compulsive self-destruction in a savage competition for accumulation of wealth (proportionate to its loss of meaning, moral and communal consciousness). For Marx, this alienation is rooted in the capitalist mode of production, based on exploitation of the workers as a source of wealth for the industrial owner. In the process of his/her labor, the worker is alienated from the means of production as well as from the fruit of the labor (which are both a property of the capitalist-owner). In light of that, private property is defined as *alienated labor*⁶, or as Marx sums it up: "Capital is not only accumulated labor...Capital is power of command over labor and its products...Capital is stored up labor."⁷ This labor is dehumanizing for it alienates the worker from nature, from him/herself and from inter-human fellowship.⁸ If human life is designed for creative activity, then the routine sequence of industrial labor alienates the worker from his/her personal human destiny (from his/her nature) transforming the human being into a commodity (a mere means for production). Thus, the exploited labor deprives the individual from a sense of self-fulfillment, for it is not a product of free, creative impulse, but an ultimatum for survival.⁹ In all of the above, as well as in the fact that the final product of human labor is ultimately removed from the worker, lays a profound sense of

⁶ K Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, translated by T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill Books Company, 1956), p. 68.

⁷ K. Marx, *Early Writings*, translated by T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 75, 85.

⁸ Gregory Baum. *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 30.

⁹ K. Marx. *Selected Writings in Sociology*, p. 170.

estrangement and alienation from oneself and his/her social meaning, degrading him/her into a disposable component of the industrial machine.

Marx views the complete alienation as capable of producing a false consciousness (and a false sense of transcendence) which diverts the attention of the oppressed away from the source of their oppression and disintegrates the revolutionary energies (and transformative discontent) of the working masses. He regards religion as such a force of diversion, as well as being a product of despair and alienation itself. According to him, religion numbs the masses toward their social misery by serving as an apologetic for the existing social order while offering an introverted escape from its painful hopeless reality into the dreams for justice in the other-worldly life to come – a promise which offers nothing more than an eternal illusion. As Marx states in the introduction of his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, for him religion

“...is the *opium* of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its conditions is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.”¹⁰

Alongside its negative content, however, alienation presents the initial condition in which the transformative possibility for transcendence of the present socio-economic order is being generated and induced. As alienation dislocates the workers from the dominant social centers for human self-integration and self-identification, it presses them towards the socio-political and economic margins, thus providing them with a

¹⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, On Religion. (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 42

more objective viewpoint over their human condition and those responsible for its social order. Therefore, paradoxically, in the very process of marginalization, the working class gains its sense of awareness about social injustices and their institutional maintenance. From the margins, the proletariat acquires a sober perspective on its enslavement within the present social construct with all of its dehumanizing mechanisms, and develops a revolutionary consciousness, which empowers it for a transforming action. The margins are the cradle of the proletariat, which becomes the social engine of historical transcendence. Enlightened about its condition and empowered by the clarity of vision (the escalating discontent produced by it), the proletariat emerges out of its immediate historical context ready to take control over its destiny as the social class of the future. The revolutionary drive towards this future is motivated by the ideological conviction that the emancipation of the working class includes "the emancipation of humanity as a whole."¹¹ By virtue of its location at the social margins, the proletariat is generated and affirmed as the embodiment of the liberating future as its prophetic fulfillment (since prophecy "is possible only among the alienated"¹²). This is why in Marxism only the oppressed and marginalized working class can be the bearer of the revolutionary impulse necessary for overcoming the establishment with its unjust social order. For only the proletariat is perceived as having the true consciousness and prophetic charisma necessary to transform the capitalist reality, ushering the society into its historical alternative.

The Marxist dogmatic on the historical content and destiny of the proletariat (as being both the bridge to and the composition of the future) justifies the socio-political

¹¹ Ibid., p. 177.

¹² Gregory Baum, p. 31.

annihilation of the present (in the context of the proletarian revolution) together with its political and economic stratification, disposing of the ruling class and its ideological foundations by exterminating it (and/or repressively dislocating it at the margins of the new social order).

To summarize the above exposition, it seems that in Marxism both social despair and the possibility of its transcendence are associated with the idea of alienation. On the one hand it presents the dialectical outcome of the historical process of differentiation of labor (and class development).¹³ On the other hand, it contains by virtue of its very nature the hope for its transcendence through its natural evolutionary ontogenesis and resources for development of revolutionary consciousness and corresponding action.

Along this line of thought, *Esoteric Marxism* develops further the philosophical foundation of Marxist revolutionary praxis, emphasizing the teleological and eschatological character of Dialectical Materialism. It revises orthodox Marxism through the mediation of utopian categories (reflecting the young Marx and his Hegelian passions) and, by the employment of Judeo-Christian metaphors (as in Bloch's *Das Princip Hoffnung*), brings forward the view of Transcendence as "the experience of that which is not yet fully come into being."¹⁴ Esoteric Marxism focuses on the inter-openness of possibilities for progressive human development in which history is kept open-ended and the human being is also open to the possibilities of the world even as

¹³ Г. С. Батищев, *Деятельностная Сущность Человека как Философии*, pp. 73-145 in *Проблема Человека в Современной Философии*, edited by И. Ф. Бакалина (Bakalina), and others (Москва: Наука, 1969), p. 117.

¹⁴ William. A. Johnson, *The Search for Transcendence: A Theological Analysis of Non-theological Attempts to Define Transcendence*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), p. 85.

the world remains open for the possibilities of humanity driven by the "hunger"¹⁵ for the *novum*, for transcendence, and for the hope of its "becoming."

In Bloch's argument of the "spiritual interiority" of the proletarian revolution,¹⁶ we see his attempt to present Marxism as an indivisible part of the eschatological religious development of the Western traditions, and thus to propose the redemption of religion in its becoming the practice of the theory of Marxism.¹⁷ Further, the eschatological goal of Esoteric Marxism could be defined as: "humanization of nature" and "naturalization of man."¹⁸

Esoteric Marxism represents the so-called 'warm current' evident in the beginnings of Marxism." For Bloch, its utopic vision of a humanized future stands "unquestionably rooted in the originally Christian ground-plan for the Kingdom of freedom,"¹⁹ while on the other hand, the "cold current" remains locked within the

¹⁵ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986), pp. 9-79. Bloch develops his concept of hunger as a fundamental drive alongside (and against) Freud's libido and as a force against deprecation per se. Hunger works itself out as a rudimentary catalyst for enacting the principle of hope.

¹⁶ For Bloch the meaning of a true revolution cannot be expressed in the realignment of social and economic forces. Thus he steps beyond Marx's economic determinism by arguing that: "...history is polyrhythmic creation in which not only social and self-discovery of still hidden social man, but also the artistic, religious, metaphysical self-discovery of the secret, transcendental man is a consciousness of being, a new depth-relation of being." E. Bloch, *Aktualität und Utopie. Zu Lukacs Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* quoted in Paul Braines' *Bloch Magic*, *Continuum* 7, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 623.

¹⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Man on His Own* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 39-40. In his book *The Coming of God*, Jürgen Moltmann reflects on Bloch's renaissance of Messianic thinking by making the following statement about his eschatological accommodations within historical materialism: "Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* did not look for redemption from history; it aimed at the consummation of history in the eternal Kingdom, a consummation which had not yet taken place but which – as he believed – had not yet been finally thwarted either." (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 33.

¹⁸ As Bloch concludes (*The Principle of Hope*, p. 286): "...the totality of the Eleventh Thesis (of Marx) testifies: socialized humanity, allied with nature that is mediated with it, is the reconstruction of the world into a homeland."

¹⁹ E. Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, transl. by J. T. Swann (New York: Harper and Harper, 1972), pp. 268-269.

scientific reflections of historical materialism. Stretching beyond the classical Marxist economic determinism within the dogmatic structure of historical materialism, Bloch introduces a dimension of transcendentalism which he identifies as “*concrete Utopia*.”

This is an Utopia, which is “the concrete realization, at least” of Utopia per se:

“Far from being contradiction in terms concrete Utopia is firmest of handholds, and by no means only where the propaganda and implementation of socialism is concerned. The whole *surplus force* of culture finds its salvation there, and these forces are becoming more and more relevant to us all the time – above all, the wealth of artistic allegories and religious symbols, whose day is not yet done when the ideology which bore them disappears.”²⁰

Thus, Bloch’s concrete Utopia is the *regnum humanum* – the teleological content of all previous utopias, the ultimate realm of human freedom and therefore of actualization of personal humanness, the homeland of the truly emerged and integrated human individuality in a transformed world as an outcome of a morally navigated historical process. Therefore:

“...It follows that man everywhere is still living in prehistory, and that all things are still in the stage prior to the just and true creation of the world. The true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end.”²¹

Bloch’s Marxism is essentially humanist in nature and content. For him the revolutionary process must focus its resources above all on the actualization of the fullness of human potential, liberated from “the dehumanization of the capitalist society.”²² According to Bloch, the humanist interpretation of Marxism is the only one

²⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

²¹ Ibid., p. 36.

²² John Joseph Marsden, Marxian and Christian Utopianism: Toward a Socialist Political Theology (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), p. 93.

authentically consistent with Marx's philosophical intent.²³ Attempting to reconcile the "early" and "later" Marx, he emphasizes the continuity of "the model of a humanism that concerns itself with action,"²⁴ and thus, brings into focus "the ethical dimension of socialism."²⁵ Being faithful to Marxism, this Utopia presupposes class struggle and revolutionary activity, since for Bloch Utopianism does not contradict, but rather enhances historical materialism.²⁶ It is pregnant with enthusiasm and world-transforming revolutionary passion; it takes on the challenge to expand humanity's capacity to dream and hope for itself and its future.

Yet, in order to present a philosophical legitimization of his eschatological determination, Bloch departs from Marx by employing the Aristotelian concept of "*entelechy*," insisting that "the matter itself is in a process of development"²⁷ and thus attempting to provide an ontological basis for his utopian construct.

This Utopia radiates within the present the yet unrealized future of humanity and nature. It becomes a lighthouse which illuminates the road of humanity's journey towards its true "radical identity" which emerges from beyond the end of history and thus shades a "searching Utopian light on the problem of alienation and its possible

²³ E. Bloch, On Karl Marx, transl. by J. Maxwell (New York: Herder, 1971), pp. 21, 23.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 18-20. In On Karl Marx (p. 21), Bloch discusses philanthropism enlightened by and oriented towards the struggles of the oppressed and exploited, in a crusade for "true knowledge," and identifies it as an "indispensable factor in socialism."

²⁵ Marsden, p. 93.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁷ Ibid. Also E. Bloch, A Philosophy of the Future, translated by J. Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 96, 138; D. Gross, Ernst Bloch: The Dialectic of Hope in D. Howard and K. Klare, The Unknown Dimension (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 121ff.; W. Hudson, The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 99ff.; Эрнст Блох, Тюбингенское Введение в Философию (Екатеринбург: Издательство Уральского Университета, 1997), pp. 224-226.

cure.”²⁸ The construct of Bloch’s Utopia finds its shape in the poetic expressions of mystical fantasies, dreams and longings for an ultimate self-reunion (of meaning, essence and completion) in celebration of freedom from all alienation, through simply being free to become one-self and at home in the “opening-up of the cosmos.”²⁹

The radiation of this Utopia in the midst of the present challenges it towards a permanent transcendence of its socio-political conditions “through an orientation towards the object of hope,”³⁰ which promises a Sabbath for all who suffer, and an open future for the ones enslaved in the economic impossibilities of the present.

The presence of this Utopia within human existence is instrumental for the formation of the *Not-Yet-Consciousness* demanded by the future for the sake of its realization. It inspires the daydreaming that evokes the driving images of the revolutionary transformation of reality. But the power of these images is embodied (in their concreteness) in the fact that they are not fiction, for they are “attracted and illuminated by a real future place: by the realm of freedom.”³¹

For Bloch, the *concrete Utopia* shines at

“ the point of contact between dreams and life, without which dreams only yield abstract utopia, life only triviality...The very power of the truth of Marxism consists in the fact that it has driven the cloud in our dreams further forward, but has not extinguished the pillar of fire in those dreams, rather strengthen it with concreteness.”³²

²⁸ E. Bloch, *Atheism and Christianity*, p. 270.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, transl. by M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 30.

³¹ E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 143.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

In light of this *concrete Utopia* Bloch identifies his eschatological terminology of the *Front*, *Novum* and *Ultimum*. Since the utopic content is a real historical possibility it demands to be approached with an attitude of “militant optimism” translated into a “concretely mediated action.”³³ The category *Front* designates the place where *militant optimism* can find its actualization through “materially comprehended hope.”³⁴ The *Novum* marks the open-ended horizon of utopia with its entire realm of possibility. It is also associated with the sense of renewal – “tested and processed out in the progressive newness of history.” The dialectical content of the emerging of the totality of newness is further described by the category *Ultimum*. This is a *Novum* that “really triumphs by means of its total leap towards the newness that is ending or identity.”³⁵

We can finally sum up the content of Bloch’s utopic transcendentalism (its motivation and vision) through the following statement:

“A *Humanum* free from alienation, and a World into which it could fit – a world as yet still undiscovered, but already somehow sensed: both these things are definitively present in the experiment of the Future, the experiment of the World.”³⁶

Neo-Freudianism, elaborating on the philosophical development of Esoteric Marxism, tries to bring a sense of social transcendence within the orthodox Freudian pessimism and thus, a hope for the humanizing society within the classical anti-social interpretations of Freudianism. Both Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown usher into the Marxist presuppositions of “Scientific Socialism” (in relation to the political revolution

³³ Ibid., p. 199.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 202-203.

³⁶ E. Bloch, *Atheism and Christianity*, p. 273.

against human alienation) the Freudian sense of social pathology as a reflection of psychic contents. They emphasize the primacy of the consciousness in social change, contrary to the Marxist understanding that the social being determines consciousness. The "political fight" remains at the center of the social evolutionary transformation, in the midst of which the idea of empirical historical transcendence towards a different form of society is introduced; on the other hand Christian transcendence is viewed as being out of this world towards another world.³⁷

However, Marcuse vigorously differentiates himself from the revisionists of Freud and Neo-Freudianism as a School (represented by such names as Erich Fromm, Clara Thompson, Harry Stack Sullivan, Karen Horney, etc.). Their main pretense, according to Marcuse, is "that their psychoanalysis is in itself a critique of society."³⁸

The above named revisionists lead by Fromm insist that the "total personality" (including his/her inter-human social relationships) and not just the biological structure, must be a subject of psychoanalysis.³⁹ While the concepts of Freud are predominantly relativistic and thus do not contain ethic per se (except his own ethic), Fromm attempts to resurrect the values of idealistic ethics and to integrate them as norms for effective human realization in the totally alienated society (dominated by capitalistic market-relations). Thus, the revisionists try to bring a sense of transcendence within the conflict between the individual and civilization, and a possibility for human happiness stretching

³⁷Marcuse, Varieties of Humanism , Center Magazine (June 1968).

³⁸Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (Sofia: Printing House "Hristo Botev," 1993), p. 269.

³⁹Fromm, Man for Himself (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications Inc., 1947) p. 50; Harry Stack Sullivan, Concepts of Modern Psychiatry (Washington: William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation, 1947), p. 48

humanity beyond the repressive function of the Freudian society and the *Thanatos* instincts of its members.

Fromm's focus on ethics is inseparable from his interpretation and therapeutic application of psychological and social theory. He perceives the problematics of the human being as generated in the "specific kind of relatedness of the individual towards the world and to him(her)self."⁴⁰ Thus, the human "nature...passions and anxieties are a cultural product " as

"...man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we can call history."⁴¹

In light of that, Fromm concludes that the "most beautiful as well as the most ugly inclinations" of the human being "are not a part of a fixed and biologically given nature, but result from the social process which creates" humanity.⁴² Therefore, since in the formative relationship with a particular cultural context some of "the best potentialities of the individual remain repressed...the problem of therapy is to help the patient become" him/herself.⁴³

As the human cultural evolution in Western society brought the individual to a self-awareness as a separate entity, humanity found itself overwhelmed by a sense of isolation and aloneness, and raptured by the longing to return to the "earlier feeling of

⁴⁰ Patrick Mullahy, Oedipus-Myth and Complex (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), p. 241, quoted by Clara Thompson in Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1950), p.204, Thompson compares Fromm and Sullivan stating that in difference of Fromm, Sullivan sees human beings' problem "as a problem of interpersonal relations."

⁴¹ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (Moscow: Progress, 1990), p. 21.

⁴² Ibid, p. 20.

⁴³ Thompson, p. 204.

solidarity with others."⁴⁴ Paradoxically, the freedom to be oneself is linked with the covenantal bond (moral self-identification) with a community. The absence of personal ties with a particular set of group values and symbols is identified by Fromm in terms of moral loneliness or moral eremitism.⁴⁵

The nature of the human being is understood as an interrelatedness of two imperative spheres: that of the necessity to meet one's philosophical needs and the necessity to escape from moral alienation (and aloneness). This is why the fear of moral isolation drives and motivates the patterns of human behavior and presupposes the need of harmonization between the individual and his/her cultural context.⁴⁶

In light of the above, the goal of therapy, for Fromm, is not so much to facilitate the person's cultural adjustment, but to develop "a sense of integrity and respect for his/her true self" as fundamental for developing genuine respect and appreciation of others.⁴⁷

For Fromm, the point of transcendence and transformational overcoming of the present socio-political entrapment is the human being itself. His thought affirms the conviction that the mechanisms of the dialectic of transformation are provided by the fact that in all societies there exists a conflict between the survivalist interests of the social formations and "the general human interest in development and salvation"⁴⁸ of

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 206.

⁴⁵ E. Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29. Explaining the main idea of his book Escape from Freedom, Fromm points out that: the human being grows beyond his/her initial unity with nature and the rest of humanity and becomes individual, and as this process advances he/she faces the alternative to reunite with the world in spontaneity of love and creative labor, or to find self-support through relationships with this world which destroy his/her freedom and individuality.

⁴⁷ Thompson, p. 210.

⁴⁸ Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm: A Series of Interviews (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 102.

the human being and his/her complete unfolding. This is a conflict of consciousness induced by entering a stage of "awareness" - a moment of illumination by the truth about one's social condition, which overcomes the flow of social determinism (e.g. economic forces, irrational passions, etc.) freeing the individual to achieve an optimal freedom as a human being – freedom which unleashes the creative potentials for personal social transformation.⁴⁹ In the spirit of the Enlightenment's humanistic ethics, he affirms that the eschatological vision of society is the human being itself with its autonomy and reason. Thus, disclaiming the social adequacy of Freud's "*homo psychologicus*" and Marx's "*homo economicus*," Fromm appeals for a "return to the great tradition of humanistic ethics which looked at man in his psycho-spiritual totality, believing that man's aim is *to be himself* and that the condition for attaining this goal is that man be *for himself*."⁵⁰

Herbert Marcuse critiques these developments in Neo-Freudianism as an escape from psychoanalysis into internalized ethics and religion. For him, Freud's terms of happiness and freedom are socially critical at a higher degree, for they are materialistic and thus express protest against the spiritualization of the human need.⁵¹

However, throughout his writings within the early sixties we can discern Marcuse's personal struggle to reconcile the Marxist revolutionary theory with the infrastructural and social evolution of the technologically advanced capitalist production. Within the tones of his routine theoretical confidence we can sense the shadow of political apathy and philosophical despair.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

⁵⁰ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications Inc., 1947), p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 275, 282.

In an attempt to construct a rational foundation needed to supply a theoretical reconciliation within the components of his philosophical enterprise, Marcuse focuses on Historical Materialism as a point of critical transcendence to the contemporary society, and as a fundamental methodology for investigating its "roots...and used unused or abused capabilities for improving the human condition."⁵²

Thus, the transcending point in society (towards its humanizing transformation) is introduced as a set of possibilities intrinsic to its structural capacity and material content, since: "the possibilities must be within the reach of the respective society; they must be definable goals of practice."⁵³

He explores the social resonance of technological progress and especially automation as a possibility for fulfillment of Marx's vision of Socialism as a human invention in which the individual's freedom is realized as freedom from (heavy) labor while increasing "the free time" and quality of life, as all receive according to their personal needs. In this context, Marcuse states: "...automation is more than quantitative growth of mechanization - that is a challenge of the basic productive forces."⁵⁴ This statement can be interpreted as an attempt to bridge Hegelian logic and Marxist social theory with the need of their redemptive contextualization within the Capitalist society, as he brings forth the notion that technological progress and its "liberating" consequences introduce the radical transition to a new form of production and therefore to a new social order (in accordance with the conventional conclusions of

⁵² Herbert Marcuse. One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. x.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xi. Marcuse also notes that the terms "transcendence" and "transcendent" appear in his work in an "empirical, critical sense: they designate tendencies in theory and practice which in a given society "overshoot" the established universe of discourse and action toward its historical alternatives (real possibilities)."

Historical Materialism). In the same spirit, Marcuse summarizes and affirms his philosophical fascinations with technological advancement as a foundation and provision for qualitative social change:

“Indeed, society must first create the material prerequisites of freedom for all its members before it can be a free society; it must first *create* the wealth before being able to *distribute* it according to the freely developing needs of the individual; it must first enable its slaves to learn and see and think before they know what is going on and what they themselves can do to change it.”⁵⁵

Therefore, for Marcuse (in light of the Marxist tradition) the dialectic of social change can be summarized as a historical dialectical process, based on critical social reflection involving a conscious “recognition and seizure of the liberating potentialities”⁵⁶ within a particular historical project. The freedom of consciousness in the process of historical negation (within the context of transforming historical succession) provides the dimension of transcendence within which humanity is liberated to embrace the view of historical rationality. Yet, in his attempt to harmonize revolutionary radicalism and evolutionary reason (logic), Marcuse notes that this freedom is experienced only “in the struggle against the established society.”⁵⁷ This is a struggle produced from the conflict between historical rationality and the irrationality born out of quantitative social change, which inevitably induces a qualitative change that encounters the inadequacies of the established institutions and demands their transformation.

Following this line of thought, however, Marcuse enters into a vicious cycle of affirmation of social possibilities and negation of the society which supplies them as an

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

exodus towards self-transcendence. For example, his praises of technological progress and its humanizing outcomes are mixed with the disclaiming of their tranquilizing effect on the revolutionary potential of the workers and the termination of their consciousness and imagination towards a radical social change, as their dreams and self-identification with the future gravitate toward middle-class values and social arguments. This internal theoretical conflict ultimately brings Marcuse to a helpless and hopeless conclusion:

“The critical theory of society possesses no concepts, which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and gave their life to the great refusal.”⁵⁸

This statement of confessed despair and intellectual alienation raises a legitimate question about the transformational content and potential of Marcuse’s philosophical reflection, since its hopeless negativism is obviously incapable of consolidating the inspirational horizon of hope demanded by each authentically transforming social action. His theory is apolitical, for it hesitates to self-engage in a political action which to outline a platform for transition from the present to the future. It rather presents an apologetic for the fruitless and inadequate reintegration of Marxist social theory within the Capitalist market economy as an attempt for their harmonization and mutual humanization.

In a similar manner of self-reinvention, *Neo-Communism* tries to bind together the concepts of the materialistic market-economy and the theoretical frame of Historical

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

Materialism, presenting itself as the new panacea for the socio-economic disaster and political despair of the Eastern-European countries, as well as the rest of the countries in the second and third world context. The presence of capitalistic elements (mostly in the form of unscrupulous savage competition for survival on the market) and their historical longevity is offered as the bridge of transcendence from the past (the fall of Communist Utopia) into a possible but uncertain future of economic emancipation for the impoverished masses through incorporation of Socialistic patterns of redistribution of wealth within the capitalist modes of production.

At the same time, in its transatlantic enthusiasm, *Democratic Capitalism* declares its claim of historically proven status as the only "possibly working" social arrangement; proclaiming the new era of reconciliation between private property, market monopolism and the dream for economic equality and justice.

All of the above mentioned theories are deficient in offering an authentic transcendence, due to their arrogant claim to embody the end of history and its ethical absolutes. They deprive humanity of a political alternative to their programmatic argument for the historical progress. Thus, they assassinate the possibilities for prophetic imagination,⁵⁹ which is capable of generating an adequate social response for confronting each socio-political system with a permanent constructive challenge in critical reflection and examination of its political motives and economic ambitions.

⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann coined this term as a title of his work within which he presents the reader with an inspiring account of the content and impact of an authentic prophetic imagination, as an expression of an alternative critical consciousness against the bureaucratic, static, triumphalistic religion and the political status quo (with its imperial consciousness) associated with it. For further exploration of the theme see W. Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1978)

In the philosophical alternative of the Christian vision for social transformation, the political nature of Christ's advent begins to surface from the point of *incarnation of the transcendence* in which the Son of God becomes *the Way* on which humanity walks over the void, over the finitude, over the despair and nothingness, to the future hopeful horizon of its self-realization in eternity. In the act of incarnation, Christ becomes the embodiment of the truth about humanity and the standard of humanness. In the fact of His crucifixion and resurrection, He is risen as the beginning of the *New Humanity* and its future - restored and elevated at the right hand of the Father.

In Christ, transcendence to the existing political orders and their social outcomes becomes visible and possible. The Cross marked the possibility (and eventual establishment) of the end of all existing socio-political regimes and exposed their finitude and destiny. The resurrection affirmed the hope for the inbreaking of a just *novum* within the present reality. The passion of Christ became a passion for life and thus marked the birth of the *new life* and of the newly transformed humanity, which embodied the *novum* of the Kingdom's socio-political alternative for social transformation by becoming its actively present extension in the midst of this world.

Thus, the New World was born on earth through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of God Himself. It was an act of Trinitarian creation in Trinitarian presence, of inbreaking of the socio-political reality of God's Kingdom.

In this light, the Pentecostal event further marked the appropriation and affirmation of that reality within the Church. Pentecost proclaimed the creation of the Body of Christ, animated and moved by the Holy Spirit and thus, becoming a "living organism": a living extension of the living Christ on earth, an incarnated present Christ

embodying the *praxis* of the Kingdom through the power and presence of the Spirit. Therefore, on Pentecost, eschatology entered into the corporate human history in a way which shaped it in the light of the historically-transcendent vision of the Kingdom. It started to prepare the road for the soon return of God from beyond the ends of history in the process of the establishment of His cosmic rule. The powerful political alternative of Pentecost offered transcendence to all ethnic, racial, socio-political and cultural prejudices, endowing in the baptism with the Holy Spirit (and its evidence - glossolalia, for example) the anti-Babel paradigm for liberation of the alienated, antagonized humanity and its restoration to a new wholeness - a new *socium* - the community of the King.

The Spirit joined the members, making the Body organically possible in its oneness. Thus the Kingdom became relational, personal, inter-human in its presence - a truthful social reality in which the image of God is born by the whole Body because the individual members are liberated to recognize this image in one another. This reality presented a provocative challenge towards all political constructs in history standing on the presumption that the image of God is not equally present in all humanity, and thus justifying such social pathologies as exploitation, slavery, ethnic cleansing, colonization, poverty, oppression and their various contemporary metamorphoses in the historical triumphalism of human civilization (i.e. the holocaust, abortion, illiteracy, neocolonialism of third-world countries, political religions and other instruments for manipulating and managing of social discontent which secure the maintenance of the status quo and keep the social outcasts at an appropriate distance within their hopeless ghettos).

The incarnation of transcendence challenges the thoughts of the finite self and the finite community, calling them not merely towards the opening of their social limits in the sense of tolerance, pacifism and lack of prejudice, but also demanding extension of themselves into others. In this sense, the incarnation of transcendence is the medium which transforms a human being into an intentional and active social presence energized for social action.

In his book, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*,⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann speaks about the need of *ecological theology*. Congruent with the present discussion, our understanding of this term relates to the cosmic mandate and concern of the visible Body of Christ with creation in its complexity of inter-related natural and social dimensions. It implies a concern for the harmonization and humanization of the relationship between (and within) nature and human civilization by expressing an active, reconstructing, responsible grace through offering the socio-political alternative of the Kingdom's *praxis*, embodied in a real, concrete, contrast community.⁶¹

⁶⁰ J. Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁶¹ Yet, here it is worthy to mention Milan Opočensky's view of ecological theology with its distinct intuitive assertions. In his reflection on the interrelatedness between Christian Eschatology and Social Transformation, Opočensky insists on the conviction that "the process of transformation of the world has begun" through the renewal which flows out of the Kingdom of God (since God *is* and He *rules*). Eschatology and Social Transformation: The Legacy of the First Reformation. *Brethren Life and Thought*, vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 97-98. In considering the vocation of the followers of Christ to become God's co-workers in the process of humanization of the world, he identifies three major areas which demand immediate intervention, namely: global economic justice, peacemaking and integrity of creation (p. 98). Opočensky concludes his theological discourse by the following provoking statement: "Regarding our environment, we are invited to make a transition from exploitation to cooperation. In the future also the transformation of the world will be necessary. But it should happen in the context of cooperation and communication, not of exploitation and plunder... Theology points to eschatological (ultimate) reconciliation of humans and nature. In the eschatological perspective, even the Eucharist can be seen as a symbol and model of a cooperative attitude toward the environment. Christ has fellowshipped with us at the

The transforming and liberating power of the cosmic Kingdom thus mediated is translated in its potency for reintegration and restoration in Christ of the alienated human beings in relation both to nature and society, as well as to the sense of their historical transcendence into eternity, in human self-realization. This is an act of integration into a community which therapeutically liberates the person from his/her self-alienating compulsions and transforms the being into an integral, organismic part of the whole, thus presenting the sense of a unique, unsubstitutable presence of distinct individuality.

In the Post-Iron Curtain, Post-Underground era of social globalization, the Eastern European Church (as is often true also for her Western sisters) remains predominantly oriented towards the contemplative inwardness of religion, based on the claim of personal experience with God where He meets with us on an individual level in the temple of our inner-self. Unfortunately, this line of religious argument traced historically the avenues which marked the sectarian, separatistic, anti-social thinking of the various contemporary Christian "ghettos" around the world and furnished the basics for a critical negating sociological dissection of Christianity. And while the Christians keep themselves busy with transmitting to the next generations the "secret hand shakes" for penetrating the high gates of the ghetto, the post-modern human being confesses his/her need of transcendence in a desperate attempt to sense the presence of the divine and to translate its dimension to his/her cultural context and self-understanding; hungry for a touch by the divine, for a tangible communion with the One

table on which the elements of our environment have their place – bread and wine as the peaks of human culture after the Neolithic revolution." (p. 100).

in the presence of Whom eternity becomes a present event, a rapturing reality which transforms and liberates the self towards its fulfillment.

The internalized experience of faith is valid in its finitude. The world, however, needs the authentic infinity of immanent transcendence as an exodus out of the human invention of hell on earth, into the "already" (of the not fully yet) Kingdom; embracing its authentic hope for social transformation, and thus making the future real.

The Transforming Hope

In light of the philosophical understanding of social transformation presented in the introduction of this chapter, the authentic hope becomes the bridge on which the future arrives into the present in order to overwhelm it with meaning and presence and to validate the labor pains of its birth.

Hope must reflect a concrete and personified self-understanding, and a personal "telos" which incarnates the most intimate and hidden dreams for self-fulfillment and thus, for human completeness and content, for peace with oneself and the surrounding world, for harmony and fullness, for rest...for Sabbath.

The transforming hope has to be sacred in order to bring to pass the incarnation of the future. It has to be transcendent in source and immanent in adequacy and application to the present reality.⁶² It has to contain the capacity of change in itself not

⁶²Dermot A. Lane, in his discourse on Political Theology, concludes that: "The concreteness of political activity needs to be nourished by a transcendental orientation if it is to be viable. Equally, the grace of transcendence needs to be incarnated in

just ideologically (and thus idealistically) but objectively, realistically. Therefore hope has to be truthful and thus, practicable.⁶³ In light of this practicability, the concept of social transformation comes out of the sphere of abstractions into a materialized reality within the "community of hope." The ones who employ this hope as their existential praxis become the *avant-garde* of change, the incarnation of the future in the midst of the present, a present extension of the future social order. As hope becomes their lifestyle and the hopeful truth their central motive, they (the community of hope) prophesy against the social disformities and corruption of the present. They scandalize the existing human systems by exposing their systematic inadequacies and challenge them by living out the new social possibilities (creating a new social context which reflects their hope).

On the edge of its social praxis, hope becomes a force for social transformation. Thereby, it affirms its potential to consecrate the world and thus to redeem its purpose and end. In social context, this means redemption of humanity in its personal and interpersonal dimensions - it means the humanization of society.

The transforming hope does not offer a solution to a concrete social problem. It does not just deal with treating the symptoms. Rather, it recognizes the need of a radical therapy addressing the cause itself.⁶⁴

personal, social and political world." Dermot A. Lane, Foundations for Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 18.

⁶³In his book Religion, Revolution and the Future (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 138, Jürgen Moltmann discussing that "the new criterion of theology and of faith is to be found in praxis" states: "Truth must be practicable. Unless it contains initiative for transformation of the world, it becomes a myth of the existing world."

⁶⁴Leslie A. Muray, An Introduction of the Process Understanding of Science, Society and the Self: A Philosophy of Modern Humanity (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), p. 43. The author states: "If communities in which we live shape us profoundly, if the social institutions of which we are part are also part of us, the organization of our

The transforming hope is revolutionary in the sense that it does not find its genesis in the present (for if it was in the present, that would suggest an evolutionary character) but in the future. The revolutionary power of hope is exactly in the "otherness" of its genesis. This is what generates its prophetic criticism of the present. Its objective perspective is nurtured by the essence of the future horizon and therefore stands free from the prejudices and logistics maintaining the system's status quo. It also underlies the captivating poeticism and vivid romanticism of its ideals; their dramatic definition characterizes the personal devotion of the revolutionaries, for only the truthful hope is worth living and dying for.

The prophetic hope is the cry for social justice and harmony of the future generations of the young and the ones who are yet unborn, the ones for whom we

communities and social institutions is of paramount importance. If the self is a social-relational self, it is not enough to change individuals for social change to occur: social structures need to be changed as well."

See also John C. Cort, Christian Socialism: An Informal History (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 37ff. The author challenges the Church towards social involvement in intentional transformation of the structures, which stand behind the immediate conditions of oppression and injustice.

Also Stephen Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). The author argues that Christian ethics are grounded in God's Act of grace and as such they demand a Christian response through social action in grace. He comments: "if every time the Good Samaritan went down that road from Jerusalem to Jericho he found people wounded and did nothing about the bandits, would his love be perfect? Spontaneous, simple love, follows the dictates of its own concerns for the formal structures of society." (pp. 57-58)

Oliver O'Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), p. 58. In difference to the previous authors, O'Donovan focuses not so much on the immediate agenda of Christian praxis for social transformation, but on the reflection of Christian ethics as dependent upon the resurrection of Jesus as a foundation of the Christian commitment to the meaningfulness of history as the stage on which mankind's salvation has been written. " 'Salvation history' means change and innovation; it means that God can do a 'new thing'." (p. 42) In light of this concept of historical determination, O'Donovan makes the statement: "A hope which envisions the transformation of existing natural structures cannot consistently attack or repudiate those structures. Yet, the 'conservatism' includes a sense of distance, which springs from a sharp awareness of how much the institutions need redemption and how transitory is their present form." (p. 58)

envision and desire the future. This is the reason why the cultural/artistic avant-garde often is fully appreciated by the future generations, for art is a reflection of the society's status - of its discontent, despair, passion and hope for change, and of its desperate need for a contrast future. Prophetic art is politically incorrect and inconvenient, and so is the transforming hope. It is often labeled as liberal and deconstructive, for it goes against the status quo, but the ones who are pregnant with it define it as liberating. It liberates from the fear of political inadequacy. It disclaims "the secret handshakes" and pulls down the walls of the ghettos. In its light (the light of the future), the oppressed clearly see their chains and the oppressors find their shame exposed. The transforming hope carries an objective judgment, for the truthful future is just and the present stands in its court.

Through the authentic hope, the future becomes the hermeneutical principle of the present and of life per se. Therefore, the future becomes sacred. It becomes the religion of the ones who embrace it, for which hope points the way. The truth which it proclaims is the one of nature, history, humanity and their *telos*. This is the truth which defines and incarnates the meaning of social justice and questions the religious clichés of the existing social order.

In his *Esoteric Marxism* Bloch sees transforming hope as hope in the open possibility, in the indestructibility of the core human existence. However, ontologically the *novum* remains locked within the human potential for self-development and self-fulfillment. Hope, in its open-ended horizon, rests upon the presumption of the eternalization of matter and its evolutionary potential.

The human remains completely oriented towards the future within the materialistic concept of the openness of the world. This hope is fed by the utopian imagination, but its future is grasped only at the edge of the present, for it is produced by the affections and aspirations of the present condition of humanity.⁶⁵

Bloch's transforming hope is expressed in "hoping for the beyond" of history, in the midst of the historical dimension. It is shaped in the tradition of the revolutionary Christian social utopianism of the Middle Ages and its chiliasm which challenged the Church's claims on eternity – the traditions of the Hussites, the Anabaptists, Thomas Münzer, the Diggers, etc.⁶⁶ This hope is an active anticipation of the future; the act of intense expectancy which mediates the images of the future (and its ethical content) into the self-consciousness of the individual, thus initiating the process of its transformation in the light of the utopic *telos* – "The building of the commonwealth of freedom."⁶⁷

Illuminated by this politically determined hope, the process of social transformation is not an act of resuscitation of something (lost) from the past; it does not accommodate nostalgic sentiments. It is rather a radical orientation towards the future as it consists of a progressive involvement in the *Novum*. Or, in light of reflection over its dialectism: it is the way of coming to terms with the beginning which lies in the

⁶⁵Ernst Bloch, Man on His Own (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), and The Principle of Hope, p. 146. Bloch states: "Therefore: the *act-content* of hope is, as a consciously illuminated, knowingly elucidated content, the *positive utopian function*; the historical content of hope, first represented in ideas, encyclopedically explored in real judgments, is human culture referred to its concrete utopian horizon."

⁶⁶E. Bloch, Man on His Own, pp. 135-137.

⁶⁷E. Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 42, and Geist der Utopie (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964), p. 308.

principle construct of the Novum (which becomes in turn “the presentation of the beginning”).⁶⁸

No doubt, Bloch’s Esoteric Marxism has influenced significantly the theoretical developments of contemporary Christian theology (especially in regards to Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology of Hope and the scope of Liberation Theology). Bloch himself was aware of the possibility for “cooperation” and a dialogue between a praxis-devoted Christianity and Marxism, thus throwing the challenge:

“When Christians are really concerned with the emancipation of those who labor and are heavy laden, and when Marxists retain the depths of the Kingdom of Freedom as the real content of revolutionary consciousness on the road to becoming the substance, the alliance between revolution and Christianity founded in the Peasant Wars may live again – this time with success.”⁶⁹

In comparison to classical Marxism, Bloch’s future is deeply individual, as is his hope, for it goes far beyond the aim for establishment of a classless society. It envisions a humanized identity for each and every one who is in the midst of oppression, rejection, exploitation and suffering; in other words - the one in need of a future. However, this future and the eschatological metaphors which energize it remain as categories of the scientifically predictable historical process and lack the sense of objectivity to its context.

In contrast to the esoteric self-envisioned future and its hopeful motivation, Classical *Marxism* expresses its transforming hope in global social and communal

⁶⁸ Walter H. Capps, Time Invades the Cathedral: Tensions in the School of Hope (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 29-30, 32.

⁶⁹ E. Bloch, Atheism in Christianity, p. 272.

categories: classless society, new humanity with a new conscience, the end of the state, the end of religion.⁷⁰ These are the ultimate hopes of the Communist utopia - these are its presuppositions for a just future of emancipated humanity.

The Communist Manifesto is perhaps the most synthesized expression of the Marxist hope and vision for Social transformation. Its sweeping radicalism and rapturing passion, however, find their source far away from the partisan ambitions and their institutionalized political agendas. The Manifesto's hopes, seem to be strangely conflicting with our average associations with Communism, namely: totalitarian oppression; faceless, disillusioned and despaired masses marching at the annual celebration of the Proletarian Revolution in front of almost mummified dictators; concentration camps – serving as extermination and quarantine centers for the occasional inbreaks of dissident thought and protest; secret police and unquestionable control over the minds of the people through fear; anti-western propaganda about military threats coming from behind the Iron Curtain, etc.

The Communist Manifesto stands outside the inertia of the triumphalistic, self-sufficient political status quo, for it drives its critical content from the context of a marginalized, politically-uncorrupted, youthful discontent with its transcendent dreams for social transformation and reckless boldness to question and challenge the validity of the existing order.⁷¹ It stands in the tradition of the high German Romanticism overshadowed by the inspiration of the French Revolution's radicalism and liberalism. It

⁷⁰Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Washington Squire Press, 1964), p. 94.

⁷¹ Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto, while being in their late twenties – still sufficiently unknown and unestablished in the philosophical circles. Francis B, Randall, Introduction to The Communist Manifesto (New York: Washington Squire Press, 1964), pp. 7-8.

presents a poetization of the revolutionary power of the oppressed in their striving towards socio-economic emancipation and social justice. It offers its vision with the innocence of youthful extremism and enthusiasm common for the Left Hegelianism in the mid-eighteen-hundreds. It appears that the Manifesto's highly romantic sense of social order is responsible (to a higher extent than the later classical form of Marxism) for the subsequent historical glamorization of the ethical and emotional foundations of the socialist movement.

The Communist Manifesto proclaims over the misery of the savagely exploited working class (alienated and despaired in the midst of their dehumanized conditions) its new destiny of political power called to transform the world. It gives them the hope of a tangible future, by locating its content and coming to being in the very nature of the proletariat. It restores their dignity by affirming their right and capacity for radical participation in the historical process of social "evolution," as being an indispensable part of its destination.

The Manifesto is packed with energy for transformational revolutionary activism. On the one hand, it finds its direct expression in the immediate medium of social transformation, namely the proletarian revolution inspired and motivated by the communist hope (the revolution of the economically oppressed and alienated), which liquidates the source of all evil, namely, private property. After repressing and eliminating all reactionistic opposition, it establishes a communal ethos with a reproductive pattern of social conscience, finding its self-fulfillment in the placing of the society's common good above personal interests.

On the other hand, the intense revolutionary activism is translated into the creative praxis which is destined to materialize the Communist Utopia – the kingdom of equality and freedom in which the human being establishes lordship over the inter-human socio-economic relations and their outcome. In other words, in Marx's hopeful vision of the world's redeemed future, Socialism (or/and Communism) are portrayed as the epoch of liberation from the irrational socio-historical powers which predetermine and direct humanity's destiny; the era when human existence will be actively shaped and controlled by the self-conscious collective human mind.⁷²

The Communist Manifesto focuses upon the need for development and organization of the proletariat as a class with a distinct revolutionary conscience, formed and animated by the transforming hope (utopia) of the future, and thus empowered to accomplish its incarnation into the present through its initiation by a radical change of social order and a consequent process of evolution into its full harmonizing capacity. Marx and Engels express this hope in the following statement:

“ ... if, by means of a revolution, it (the proletariat) makes itself the ruling class and, as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”⁷³

⁷² K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2: *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath* (Moscow: International Fund “Cultural Initiative” and Soros Foundation USA, 1992), p. 232.

⁷³ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 94.

Unfortunately, in its historical realizations in Eastern Europe and Asia, this political vision for the future developed an oppressive and tyrannical system for assassination of any affirmation of individual human values and their prophetic critique of the dehumanizing nature of the totalitarian Communist regime. The Communist hope proved to be faceless, anonymous, and abstract in its process of institutional consummation. It failed to provide a foundation (and mechanism) for accomplishing and sustaining its self-authentication. It rather trivialized its utopic passions through their politization, domestication and partisan corruption. It left humanity exposed and unsheltered from the disillusionment of the regression of its hopes and dreams for the future, into a dehumanizing nightmare. This utopia chained generations of Eastern-Europeans to the impossibility of transcending their socio-economic entrapment by totalitarianism, bringing them to apathy and despair.

Herbert Marcuse integrates this Marxist utopic hope for a new conscience developed through a political revolution with the hopeless Freudian dialectic of antagonism between the individual and society. The result is the hope for anti-neurotic harmonization between the self and the repressive civilization (affirmed as humanity itself, as an embodiment of human progress). He points to the incompatibility between theory and therapy existing in the very nature of psychoanalysis (about which Freud himself was aware), formulating it in the following manner: psychoanalytical therapy confesses that the psychological disorders in the separate individual are produced and maintained by the disorders of his/her civilization, while psychoanalytical therapy is directed towards the healing of the individual, so that he/she may continue to function as a part of the sick civilization (without giving him/herself completely to it). The

receiving of the principle of reality as the end of psychotherapy, means acceptance of the civilizational institutionalization by the individual, and thus, submission of her/his instinctive needs (especially of the sexual) to the institutionalized social norms.⁷⁴ Marcuse remarks that: "In Freud's theory the civilization appears as established in a contradiction to the premier instincts and the pleasure principle. However, the later one survives in the *id* and the *ego* has to constantly fight for its personal timeless past and forbidden future."⁷⁵

Obviously, in Freud and Marcuse, since there is not a possibility for a different future, there is no hope for recomposition and transformation of the social institutions and their political aspirations. Marcuse (by embracing Freud) enters into a conflict with his Marxist convictions about the revolutionary transition to a new political self-consciousness, for the Freudian paradigm buries all future in the past and all hope is reduced to a striving for a personal equilibrium in the present.

Perhaps, Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation*, published not too long after the French students' rebellion in May-June of 1968, represents one of the few moments of overcoming the predominantly despairing nuances of his theoretical constructs. Inspired by the social radicalism and simplistic freshness of the youthful discontent, as well as by the students' unhesitant employment of "revolutionary" action, Marcuse writes with admiration about this militant French youth:

"They have again raised a specter (and this time a specter which haunts not only the bourgeoisie but all exploitative bureaucracies): the specter of a revolution which subordinates the development of productive forces and higher standards of living to requirements of

⁷⁴Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1993), p. 254.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

creating solidarity for human species, for abolishing poverty and misery beyond all national frontiers and shapes of interest, for the attainment of peace. In one word: they have taken the idea of revolution out of the continuum of repression and placed it into its authentic dimension: that of liberation.”⁷⁶

In this work Marcuse experiments with “utopian speculations” as revitalizing possibilities for the conventional applications of critical social theory, while giving a new content and definition of utopia as: “...that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies,” yet being an actual possibility “inherent in the technical and technological forces of advanced capitalism and socialism.”⁷⁷ Standing upon the dialectical patterns of Marxist philosophy, he envisions the advent of a “free” society characterized by the fact that “the growth of well-being turns into an essentially new quality of life,” and humanity itself becomes the context of this qualitative change as it must first occur in “the needs, in the infrastructure” of the human being itself as a “dimension of the infrastructure of society.”⁷⁸ This image of qualitatively transformed humanity is juxtaposed to the Capitalist technological prosperity which binds the individual “libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form”⁷⁹, and mediates (through the idea of intrinsic infinity of possibility for further technological advancement) the contra-revolutionary “biological” need of survival as a part of the system through the survival of the system itself. Yet, in spite of the excitement with which Marcuse celebrates his illumination about the New Humanity as a precondition for social change, his essay lacks the cohesive and accomplished nature of a programmatic of

⁷⁶ Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Pree, 1969), p. ix-x.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

transforming hope, for the hope and its future remain trapped within statistically and scientifically argued possibilities, as it remains deprived from an external source of self-transcendence.

In difference of Marcuse, the *Neo-Freudianism* of Fromm, Sullivan and Thompson attempts to move the psychoanalytical emphasis "from the past to the present"⁸⁰ and from the biological development (and fixation with it, which leads Freud to focus on the filogenetical and ontogenetical past of the individual) to the cultural level of a dialogical equilibrium between the person and his/her social context.⁸¹ Their revisionistic hope is formulated in the highest goal of psychotherapy, namely: the optimal development of the personality and the realization of its unique individuality.

The concept of therapeutic and transforming hope holds a significant position in Fromm's social psychology. He defines hope as a "state of being" which is "paradoxical" in nature. Hope is:

"...neither positive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tiered reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime...Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born."⁸²

This hope is focused upon discerning alternatives to dehumanization through

⁸⁰Thompson, Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development (New York: Hermitage House, 1951), pp. 15, 182.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸²Erich Fromm, The Revolution of Hope: Towards a Humanization of Technology (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 9.

examining the possibilities for a constructive strategy for the humanization of the Technological Society “in such a way that it serves the purpose of the individual’s well-being and growth” or in other words – his/her “life-process.”⁸³ This process assumes a continuity and affirmation of the central elements of the Second Industrial Revolution and rejects radicalism and revolutionary extremism as sabotaging the idea of authentic humanization. Here, Fromm demonstrates a discontinuity with Marx’s classical revolutionary theory reducing the issue of necessity for social awareness to the internalization of truth and a consequent freedom of choice, and transferring it to the Marxist vision of the Socialist future with the claim that it was perceived by Marx as a domain of “freedom and individualism.”⁸⁴ Such an interpretation, however, misreads the Marxist utopia in which the harmonization of the holistic human future depends on the unification of consciousness (and thus of purpose and vision). The element of individuality is strictly materialistic - related to the natural physical needs of the separate human being, but it does not necessarily refer to his/her character and psycho-spiritual composition. Perhaps this uncontextualized rereading of Marx by Fromm can be viewed as a critical example for the methodology of the Neo-Freudianism in its quest towards the redemptive socialization of the traditional Freudian psychoanalytical theory.

⁸³ Fromm boldly outlines concrete steps which must facilitate this process of humanization, namely: “1) Planning which includes the system Man and which is based on norms which follow from the examination of the optimal functioning of the human being. 2) Activation of the individual by methods of grass-roots activity and responsibility, by changing the present methods of alienated bureaucracy into one of humanistic management. 3) Changing of consumption patterns in the direction of consumption that contributes to activation and discourages “passivation.” 4) The emergence of new forms of psycho-spiritual orientation and devotion, which are equivalent to the religious systems of the past.” *Ibid.*, p. 98-99.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

In spite of its claims, the Neo-Freudist hope does not envision a radical transformation of the global *socium* of the individual. It is reduced to the maintenance of the person's harmonization with her/his present frame of social reference. It expresses emphatic resentment toward the social bureaucracies, yet does not suggest a transformation of the systems which are responsible for their invention and maintenance. Thus, the claim of Neo-Freudianism, that their theoretical model embodies a permanent critique of the social reality, is illegitimate. It rather embodies its hopeless negation since, as noted earlier, the constructive social critique must be characterized by a distinct prophetic imagination which offers a hopeful paradigm for the humanizing change of revisioned social structures.

In difference to the above-mentioned theoretical attempts for the formulation of transforming hope, the Christian vision brings forth the eschatological hope of the Kingdom as a constructive, prophetic social critique that offers a practicable, authentic alternative to the existing political system and objective cultural foundations. It is capable of bridging the present and walking into the future, since its origin extends beyond human history in the very nature and character of God. The powerful flow of this hope out of its transcendent ontogenesis becomes, at the same time, evident and authenticated in the present moment through its immanent practicability.

The other theories for social transformation disclaim the Christian hope as inadequate precisely on the basis of its eschatological nature, which points to its origin. They critique the fact that it proclaims a political order which is "out of this world" and therefore is irrelevant and utopically unachievable. Further, on the basis of these claims, they develop their critique of the Church as socially irrelevant and retrograde,

listing the heavy historical record proving its repressive and regressive essence, anti-social institutional clichés, and amoral religious apologetics for atrocities against humanity.⁸⁵

Here, we have to remind ourselves again that the Church's institutions are not the Kingdom, and indeed, historically, they often fail to represent it on earth. The Church's institutions are not the Body of Christ, which carries the mandate to embody the eschatological reality of the Kingdom and its *praxis* as a lighthouse for humanity, toward its future. The church-institutions do not represent the socio-political system of the Kingdom, and thus are not the absolute environment of the reign of God. They are "this-worldly" in their pyramidal archetype, serving the needs of political guidelines and thus fragmenting rather than uniting the global Body of Christ.

Reflecting on the eschatological praxis of the early Christian communities and emphasizing, in light of it, the need of the redemption of an acute eschatological awareness as a point of initiation of redemption of ecclesiastical constructs, Amedeo Molnar remarks:

"...The hope in Christ's return signifies reunification of the antichrist, reunification of Christianity transformed into its opposite. If the Christian community should again become the eschatological remnant of those who wait in hopeful anticipation, then it must break with the post-Constantinian development. In view of the coming of the Lord, the world must not be allowed to remain the old world."⁸⁶

⁸⁵In his book, Religion and the Making of Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 54, Professor Charles Davis distinguishes between: cosmic religion (birthed by the cognitive), political religion (birthed by the normative) and contemplative religion (birthed by the expressive). After seeing in Aquinas the perfect example of the cosmic mode of Christian religion, he gradually builds an argument in support of its social irrelevance to our secular contemporaries.

⁸⁶ Amedeo Molnar, Hussitism, or Bohemian Reformation. Brethren Life and Thought XXXV, 1990, p. 14. See also Molnar, A Challenge to Constantianism (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1976), p. 58.

The Christian affirmation of the providential rule of God over history - His stepping into the historical process *pro nobis*, His becoming "God with us" in Christ's advent and transforming the circles and cycles of the historical process into an exodus to eternity - is the starting point for an appropriate response against the accusations for historical irrelevance of the Christian hope. In this light, we can see the existence of hope as rooted in the past and the present (as well as in the future) and therefore as containing the recognition of the goodness in creation and humanity: a hope with distinct optimism, founded on the historical experience of God's grace. This is why this hope is foreign to the notion of discontinuity between present and future. It strives to insure the inbreaking of the eschatological moment within the present by seeking its personal and communal incarnation. It affirms the embodiment of the Kingdom in the midst of this world not as a part of this world, but as its contrast alternative in its full authentic possibility.⁸⁷

Therefore, the authentic Christian hope is foreign to eschatological escapism, apocalyptic apathy and social separatism. It is an appeal (and inspiration) for transforming social action in the context of the *praxis* of the Kingdom.

Christian eschatology is a transforming hope, and its apocalyptic dimension is the spark of the endless creative potential of God in His sovereign rule. The idea of the Apocalypse brings forth the prehending of the *novum* in its unpredictable, surprising dimensions, in the fact that God has stored for us in our future something absolutely

⁸⁷ In his book, Jesus and Community (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), Gerhard Lohfink argues that: "...church as contrast-society cannot be achieved by investing a greater amount of moral energy than other movements...Discipleship of Jesus in no way

new, unseen and unheard. It is optimistic and hopeful, for it flows from the very nature of God and therefore cannot conflict with its justice, love and grace. The Apocalypse becomes a hope, for the end means a possibility of a new beginning. It means a chance for the transformation of reality.

Further, the Christian hope is always social, concrete, and non-abstract because it is a hope for the transformation of a concrete socio-political reality. This ultimate hope is for the emancipation of the entire world (in, through, and for God), which assumes both its potential for change and its need of change. It assumes the extension of God's grace and the need of the consecration of the world (as in the 4th century Eastern-Orthodox ideal), but not through the State, for it is not the Kingdom.⁸⁸

Evidently, this hope presupposes transcendence and social relevance (not in the sense of Gauchet's understanding of society as given prior to human agency and thus as being unchangeable).⁸⁹ This is transcendence that has its social relevance in the fact that there is a moral standard which stands beyond the end of history, and which guarantees justice for the victims of the savage, selfish, and greedy socio-political

begins by being asked to live more heroically than others... It rather begins with a super-abundant gift...the arrival of the reign of God... in Jesus." (p. 179).

⁸⁸ Walter Rausenbusch states in A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: Mac Millan, 1918): "The Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God." (p. 142). "The Kingdom of God is the Christian transfiguration of the social order." (p. 145). To this John Stott objects by affirming: "But the Kingdom of God is not Christianized society. It is the divine rule in the lives of those who acknowledge Christ." Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1985), p. 26. The author builds up an argument upon the social challenge of the gospel of the Kingdom (as actualized in the life of the believers through their entering in the Messianic eschatological community) for the intentional socio-political involvement of all Christians in their immediate context.

⁸⁹ Marcel Gauchet, Le Désenchantement du Monde: Un Histoire Politique de la Religion (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

systems contained in the historical process. This is transcendence which makes the *novum* possible, for it stretches human existence beyond the claims of all tyrannical social orders (namely, that they are the end of history).⁹⁰

Christian hope, as delegated to and revealed in the authentic Body of Christ, presupposes also social action versus social indifference. This social action is directed towards political, cultural, and economic emancipation. It is directed towards liberation for the better, hopeful, more-human future for it flows from the liberating grace of God's saving provision for humanity in Christ. Thus, the dialectic of liberation (which is the thematic focus of chapter two) becomes the focal point within the process of social transformation and a hermeneutical principle of its passion.

Before addressing the theme of liberation, however, we have to direct our attention to one more element within the philosophical construct of the dialectic of social transformation, which represents one ultimate goal in its anthropological frame of reference. This is the vision of the *New Humanity* within the various theories for social transformation.

⁹⁰ For example, both Marxism (thus also Communism) and Capitalism, "despite their vast disagreements, claim to be rationally certain theories of inevitable historical progress." See Thomas Finger, Modernity, Postmodernity – What in the World are They?, *Transformation*, vol. 10, No. 4 (October/December, 1993), p. 23. This rationale gives them the foundation for their claim for possession rights upon the future (and the embodiment of this future per se), thus justifying their militant, colonizational attitude toward it.

The New Humanity: Its Essence and Formation

The ideal of the New Humanity runs parallel to the hope for the realization of the future of humanity. In most of the philosophical constructs offering a dialectic for social transformation, "new" as a term does not indicate the alienation and substitution of something "old" with something different in origin and essence. It rather represents the fully realized and developed potential and nature of humanity, present as an organically integrated factor in the totality of the *novum*, and the inbreaking horizon of infinite future. "New," as a part of this vision, is a symbol of an accomplishment of the process of the progressive growth of humanity into its fullness of social meaning and humanizing therapeutical presence within the world; as a guarantor of the world's continuity and harmonization in the embrace of its natural environment, which has been recultivated and redeemed from the abuses of human civilization. Both Christianity and Marxism envision the New Social Reality of the world's future in relation to the formation and existence of the New Humanity: destined to indwell the future with a meaningful, humanizing, and creative presence, affirming and reflecting the very essence of the New Social Order and thus representing its incarnation. This New Humanity is the dialectical outcome of a creative dimension of the redemptive process, having its point of origination in the New Life. Philosophically, the New Life is the lived-out new social reality embodied in the separate individual as well as the global human community.

For Marxism, the material reality (as the only objectively existing and thus fundamental reality) is the foundation for the formation of the socio-political self and its

consciousness. It is therefore the basis for the historical development and existence of society per se.

In Marxism, the birth of the New Life stands in the context of the political revolution and is associated, as such, with the apocalyptic, violent, and radical moment of aborting the "old" social system and conceiving the "new." It is a critical negation of the historical factors which formed and established the old political and economic order and demands its complete and final extermination. The New Humanity, however, is not born in the revolutionary event. The New Life becomes the necessary environment which establishes the frame of reference and social standard for the cultivation of the new social being. Therefore, a significant ontological problem exists in Marxism in relation to its idea of the formation of the New Humanity. Since it is not born in the revolution, it is not the one which provokes the development of social transformation. It belongs to the utopian future as a phenomenon but, at the same time, it is seen as the necessary presupposition for the existence and realization of the utopian social order, which is the environment for the achieving of an adequate consciousness for the future in each separate individual. Yet, the human being is viewed in Marxism as an evolutionary product of its own creative labor activity (the ontogenesis of which remains unclear).

Marx's dogmatic about the ultimate emancipation of humanity is indispensable from his premise about the initial creation of the world by the human being.⁹¹ Therefore, the human being is capable of transforming the world, exactly because he/she is its maker.⁹²

⁹¹ Shalomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx (Cambridge: The University Press, 1971), p.65.

The human being in Marxism is an outcome of its circumstances, and therefore, according to the presuppositions of Historical Materialism, the New Humanity is a product of New Circumstances. However, the human being is also the vehicle and accomplisher of social change. In seeking to define who are the ones capable to accomplish this task, Marx seems to argue for the need of the creation of a class – not determined by material economic conditions – which is to be entrusted with the role of universal emancipator. This idea, however, contradicts the very foundations of historical dialectism which Marx employs for the development of his comprehensive theory of Political Economy.⁹³

In Marxism, the nature, formation and evolutionary self-expression of the individual (as a social species) depends on the material conditions determining his/her mode of production. Productive labor is what creates humanity, distinguishing it from the animal world. It is :

“...a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord states, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature...by thus acting on the extended world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.”⁹⁴

In the process of dialectical transition from one mode of production to another, humanity is being shaped by history, while at the same time, history is stamped

⁹² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 58.

⁹³ Ibid., and Thesis III on Feuerbach in On Religion (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 70. Marx concludes that: “The coincidence of changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice.” This is, therefore, a conscious practice which disposes with the conventional outcome of the historical process by inducing its radical disruption and redirection.

⁹⁴K. Marx, Das Kapital, vol. I (Moscow, 1959), pp. 177-178.

(authored) by humanity. This is a process of continual mutual creation of humanity and history – a historical development as a “constant anthropogenesis.”⁹⁵

Ernst Bloch's understanding of the *eschaton* as the "home of identity" stands in line with Marx's teleology. Bloch's vision of human self-integration in personal essence, in social context, and in the natural environment, echoes Marx's vision of Communism where, "...society is perfect oneness of essence between man and nature, the true resurrection of nature, the complete naturalization of man and the complete humanization of nature."⁹⁶ Bloch's claim (in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*) points to Marx's economic utopia, in which labor is conditioned not by the need of survival, but by the individual consciousness which is oriented toward the common good.

Bloch tries to build a dialectical bridge between Historical Materialism and eschatological Messianic utopism through the idea of continual expansion of matter. This allows his future to remain open-ended, inhabited only by its own impulses for infinite expansion – a never-ending self-extension into its beyondness. For the sake of hope, which is empowered for social transformation (and as an infinite resource of a hopeful expectation of the *novum*), this radically open future is dramatically available and invitingly unoccupied, drawing humanity to step into it and through that to reunite with its own essence. Thus, the beginning of humanity is in its telos, in the same way in which “even the end of Christ was His beginning.”⁹⁷

In this comprehension of the future the new and the process of renewal (the *novum* and the *renovacio*) are inter-connected in a cyclical motion as the renewal draws

⁹⁵ Shlomo Avinery, p. 85.

⁹⁶ K. Marx, *Frühschriften* (Stuttgart: Kroners Taschenausgabe, 1953), p. 235.

⁹⁷ W. A. Johnson, *The Search for Transcendence*, p. 100.

its inspiration and revolutionary potential from the utopic glimpse of the *novum*, and the *novum* itself marks the genesis of the true essence of humanity and nature.⁹⁸

In spite of its eschatological esoteric overtones, Bloch's thought remains faithful to Basic Marxist axioms within the foundations of Historical Materialism. Thus, humanity is a self-inventing and self-perpetuating historical process; the project of the human being and its community is a continual evolutionary self-transformation through the revolutionary invasion of the present by the future. However, in contrast to Marx, Bloch does not see the completion of this project as a classless, economically emancipated society of equality and justice. For him, the principle of hope provides humanity with the *perpetum mobile* which drives the vehicle of history toward real objective possibility placed within the historical process, but yet, remaining infinitely open-ended (with a content and character that fights any notion of absolutism and definity). The ultimate essence (and form) of humanity remains infinitely transcendent to the historically located *humanum* at any given moment (past, present and future). Yet the future encapsulates the home of human identity, the *regnum humanum*⁹⁹, which illuminates the path of humanity towards its sacred *telos*. The final historical project for Bloch is not the City of God; it is a "human city." It is not a city built by the Church (for she domesticates God within her political presence, and thus evacuates Him from the future), nor by the state (which is preoccupied with its monologues about the polis and the monumental bureaucracies which secure its immortality and resistance against any

⁹⁸ E. Bloch, Man on His Own, p. 83.

⁹⁹ See W. A. Johnson, The Search for Transcendence, p. 85. This Kingdom is not yet actualized and as David Gross remarks, for Bloch "Religious man is the man who hopes into the future with confidence not because of a certainty of what will occur but because of what is yet to be accomplished." A Review of Man on His Own. *Continuum* 7, No 4 (Winter, 1970).

change and decay of its systems). It is a city envisioned in the spirit of Joachim di Fiore (A. D. 1200) – a brotherhood celebrating the penetration of history by the liberated democracy of the accessible and tangible *novum* on earth.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in light of the traditional Marxist critique of religion, Bloch insists on his atheistic passion, for the sake of the authentic revolutionary content of the Historical Jesus – as being the fulfillment of the Messianic promise of the new age – thus presenting the authentic content of the Communist revolution.¹⁰¹ Or as Jürgen Moltmann puts it: “It is an atheism for the sake of God...”¹⁰²

In Bloch’s thought the hypostatic God presents a chasm between humanity and its final self-fulfillment in essence and character. The future should be vacant for the successful migration and occupation by humanity.¹⁰³ Thus, disposing of God, Bloch’s eschatologically-determined ontology remains essentially Marxist and evolutionary, containing its lack of ultimate ontological resolution (since humanity still reinvents itself through productive labor, which in turn does not have a clear ontological explanation,

¹⁰⁰ Bloch, Man on His Own, p. 126ff, 132. “*Socialis vita sanctorum* is a historic – utopian transcendence, because unlike St. Paul’s, it is back on earth.”

¹⁰¹ Bloch, Atheism in Christianity, p.58. Also Man on His Own, p. 79, 80.

¹⁰² J. Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, p. 39. Moltmann comments: “ In this esoteric Marxism, atheism is meaningful only to the extent that it can help to liberate man to self-fulfillment and aid him in his own formation of human history.” (p. 31)

¹⁰³ Bloch affirms Feuerbach’s thought on the “divided-self” and on his alienation theories of religion. For the human being “...is divided against him[her]self: at one moment he[she] is a limited individual and at the next he[she] is unlimited and divinized, set over and against him[her]self as an alienated Self, as God. Both the division and alienation must be repealed.” In Atheism and Christianity, p. 59.

See also Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology, ch.2: *Religion as Product of Alienation: The Young Marx*, pp.21-40 (New York: Paulist press, 1975). Also K. Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1947), and especially Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, pp. 197-199.

while at the same time his new humanity is initiated by utopic visions, daydreaming and creative imagination).¹⁰⁴

Attempting to preserve the scientific claims of Historical Materialism, Marcuse assures their existence within the pessimistic Freudian model, proclaiming the impossibility for a New Human future, a new human civilization, and a new humanity per se. The Freudian theory develops from the surface of the accomplished and harmonized individual in relation to his/her formative sources and potentials; from the illusionary equilibrium of the "mature" individual and his/her public existence, to the negating of its foundations. This regressive dialectical movement (materialized in the conflict between the *id* and the *super-ego*) is a central point of the Freudian critique of civilization.

The Neo-Freudian revision of this inner-regressive orientation transposes the emphasis from the biological organism to the holistic view of personality and thus, from the purely materialistic foundations to the idealistic values. In his attempt to reinforce the validity of Freudianism within the context of the survivalist struggle of the technological society, Erich Fromm reinterprets classical Freudian formulations as trying to demonstrate that intentional ethical content is not foreign to them. For example, he speculates with Freud's analysis of libido-development by arguing that:

"Although Freud did not refer to ethical values explicitly, there is an implicit connection: the pregenital orientations, characteristic of the development, greedy and stingy attitudes, are ethically inferior to the genital, that is productive, mature character. Freud's characterology

¹⁰⁴ Bloch, The Principle of Hope, p. 1376. Bloch states: "But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: the homeland."

thus implies that virtue is the natural aim of man's development...to Freud health and virtue are the same."¹⁰⁵

For Fromm the biggest problem of psychoanalysis is the establishment of psychology as a natural science and its discontinuity with philosophy and ethics, since personality cannot be understood unless perceived from the standpoint of human totality.¹⁰⁶

In light of all the above, Fromm can define the New Humanity as being enlightened and aware of the truth about itself and its context, the truth that sets it free to be itself and to belong to itself. However, it seems that the "so enlightened" human being is not capable of embodying a strategy for a radical transformation of his/her extended socium, for humanity remains an object of the evolutionary process which is rooted in its "adaptability" and in "certain indestructible qualities of...nature" which compel it never to cease searching for external conditions better corresponding to its internal needs.¹⁰⁷

Still, in the midst of this process, the pessimism in the conflict between the individual and his/her civilization remains present. As Fromm points out, the "adjusted" (harmonized) personality is condemned for its betrayal of the *super-ego* and thus, of human values. It stands open for internal instability and emptiness (for personal *void*), in spite of its contextualizational triumph. The more positive alternative is the individual

¹⁰⁵ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 45.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 32. Obviously Fromm is developing a dialectic of transformation based on the mutually impacting evolution of humanity and its environment, thus bringing a notion of Marxist social overtone to his philosophy of the global humanization of society. On the process of achieving a stage of awareness, see also E. Fromm, The Art of Being (Sofia: Kibea, 1999), p. 54-67.

who achieves internal wholeness and integration in spite of his/her less successful social establishment in the frame of the existing status quo.¹⁰⁸

In his critique of the Neo-Freudistic revisionism, Marcuse concludes that the realization of "one better future" is possible, but it requires more than reconstruction and sanctification of the market economy (delivering it from its negative characteristics such as unscrupulous competition, etc.). It presupposes a fundamental change, "both in the structures of the instincts" as well as in those of the culture and its institutions.¹⁰⁹ In this statement, he unites the Freudian theoretical presuppositions with the conviction of the transforming potential within the Marxist revolutionary argument.

In his *Essay on Liberation*, the New Humanity appears in a manner echoing Marx's view of human self-invention and perpetual transformation (evolution) of consciousness through the dialectical process of transition from one mode of production to another. Thus, the technological achievements (and especially *automation* as noted earlier) become the mode of production which shapes and brings forth the New Human being with his/her liberated conscience and imagination capable of dreaming of, and practically generating the necessary social change. However, it is not clear if this transformation of Humanity will induce the dawn of new mode of production, and if so, how will it differ from the present (in light of the presuppositions of Historical Materialism); or is the present prosperous stage of science and technology the ultimate context of social evolvement - somehow misappropriated and misused in a perverted

¹⁰⁸Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 75.

¹⁰⁹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 281.

dehumanizing way, in service of contra revolutionary, retrograde structures for maintenance of the status quo.

For Marcuse, human freedom depends on technological progress and advancement of science, as well as on qualitatively sufficient production of material goods available for redistribution. Yet, when all that is placed under the control of the New Humanity, it will somehow be reconstructed according to the new human *sensibility*, and as he concludes: "The one could speak of technology of liberation, product of a scientific imagination free to project and design the forms of human universe without exploitation and toil."¹¹⁰ This sensibility is exercised by human beings who have developed "an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, ugliness."¹¹¹ It will oppose injustice and misery on a global scale and would shape the further evolution of the standard of living.¹¹² On the background of this poetized vision, Marcuse declares his allegiance to the Marxist philosophy by insisting that any radical social transformation "still depends on the class which constitutes the human base of the process of production," namely the industrial working class, and that this transformation is indispensable from a radical form of political (social) rebellion, as well as a moral opposition against

"...the hypocritical, aggressive values and goals, against the blasphemous religion of this society, against everything it takes seriously, everything it professes while violating what it professes."¹¹³

Further, according to Marcuse, the revolutionary forces (or the New Humanity)

¹¹⁰ Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation, p. 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21ff.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 23-24.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

"emerge in the process of change itself; the translation of the potential into the actual is the work of political practice."¹¹⁴ Obviously, he is attempting to reconcile the radicalism of the Marxist revolutionary practice with the sense of evolutionary emerging of the new revolutionary subject out of the technological comforts of the contemporary capitalistic democracies.

The theoretical profile of this attempt is overwhelmed by the sense of dichotomy between the present and the future which it contains. The ontogenesis of the New Humanity remains ambiguous¹¹⁵ and the inspiring idea of the social change achieved by it stands programmatically confusing and utopically distant. Further, as in Marx, it is also hard to find in Marcuse, within the labor-free (as a necessity) future, a logical sequence to Historical Materialism's axiom that humanity creates (and re-creates) itself through productive labor.

In contrast to Marxism and Freudianism, in Christianity the New Humanity originates at the point of conception of the New Life, and Christ is raised as the immanent archetype of both realities; for He is the life per se, as well as the Second (new) Adam. Therefore, it is not the result of an act of self-invention and does not imply the nuances offered by the Marxist understanding of material evolution. It has its ontological sources beyond the mere material human existence. Its genesis is within the incarnation of the divine reality, within the saving work and presence of God Himself.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 79.

¹¹⁵ See also Herbert Marcuse, *Marxism and the New Humanity: An Unfinished Revolution in Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays toward a Revolutionary Humanism*, John C. Reins and Thomas Dean, editors (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 4, 7. Marcuse insists that Socialism can be built only by a "new humanity," otherwise "the transition from Capitalism to Socialism would mean only replacing one form of domination with another."

In Christ, the creation of the New Humanity on an individual and communal level (the Body of Christ) is both a single act and a process. This concept reflects the relationship between justification and sanctification. However, the ultimate New Humanity is the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ, standing at the right hand of the Father. In this teleological context, the redeemed human being which experiences the event of the new (spiritual) birth in and through God is called to the process of permanent growth into the fullness of the image (and nature) of the Son of God, while also being established as a child of God (through the Spirit of adoption). The believer is born into a new family- one socium of close inter-relatedness, distinct with its common spiritual genetics (bearing the genes of the Father, the Son and the Spirit - born of God).

The process of growth into the character of Christ is marked by the measure of "the fruit of the Spirit," and its distinctly social manifestations. The fullness of Christ as the Son of Man (as equalized in its understanding with the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit) is the standard of holiness which (because of its very nature - the nature of God) is able to find its expression and realization only in social dimensions.

The inter-human context of the Kingdom is the sphere of incarnation of the New Humanity (and vice versa - the New Humanity is the initial place for the incarnation of the Kingdom). The community of the King is conceived, formed and born of the Spirit as the reality of the "first-born" - the future of the world. It is empowered by the same Spirit, with the Pentecostal passion for embodying the *novum* of the Kingdom and living-out its *praxis* (as '*martures*' of the living Christ - Acts.1:8) in the midst of a hostile world by

raising a new socio-political and economic standard - the one of God's just, humanizing reign among His people.

Therefore, the New Humanity is deeply communal and social but, being the living extension of the Cosmic Christ, it is also concerned with the condition of God's entire creation, extending toward it responsible, godly stewardship in the process of co-partnership with God in the creative formation of the *novum*. The New Humanity is concerned with the consecration of the world, including the groaning and expectation of the deliverance of creation (and its renewal into wholeness). The creation is anxious for its incorporation into the Kingdom (the all-encompassing righteous rule of God) and for its transformation in newness. Topographically, this places the reality of the new socio-political order of the Kingdom in a continuum between the redeemed present and God's future as a call for social transformation of the world.

In this light, the accomplishment of this social project rests upon the presupposition of one New Humanity, "liberated for the Kingdom", which involves (through an intentional social action) the rest of the world and creation in the dialectical process of transformation by offering them the visible alternative of the incarnated future.

The appeal "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all the rest shall be added unto you," is the biblical summary of this process of transformation. This statement of Christ, however, places the Kingdom not just at the position of the teleological goal of the world, but also presents it as an ontological principle for human self-fulfillment, happiness, and freedom.

Chapter 2

Dialectic of Liberation

The comprehension of the creation of the New Humanity and its prior liberation for the New World Order requires our further study to consider the *Dialectic of Liberation*, as the main philosophical construct within the theoretical frames of the various ideals for social transformation.

Human Alienation and Freedom

After examining different paradigms of Liberation, we can easily come to the conclusion that the ultimate striving of humanity is for liberation from alienation. Depending on the context of each separate philosophical paradigm, this longing for liberation may express itself in a fight against the alienation from the self, the fellow human, the means of production, the personal or corporate present and future, etc. Different strategies are offered for achieving the final goal of Liberation: the proletarian revolution of Marx, the hunger-drive toward the *novum* of Bloch, the libido drive in Freud, educational process of Freire, etc. There are different formulations in relation to identifying the chains that have to be broken. For example, the factor of private

property, the social norms presented by the super-ego leading the ego to a neurotic reaction in response to the repressiveness of civilization, the lack of open possibilities in the future for progressive human development, etc. In all of these theories however, dialectically the reality of human freedom is possible only in the context of an antagonistic battle between mutually exclusive opposites. In a purely Hegelian sense, this struggle between a "thesis" and an "antithesis" becomes the powerful *perpetuum mobile* of historical human development, and their "synthesis" - the stepping stones between the distinct historical periods.

Thus, for example, for Marxism human liberty is possible only as a dialectical outcome of the ongoing class struggle in human civilization at all of its stages. For Freudianism, it is placed in the context of the battle between the "id" and the "superego" in which the "ego" finds its liberating consciousness regarding the internalized past and achieves its personal equilibrium.

The Biblical principle "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32) appears as a summary of the presuppositional foundation and content of any and all dialectics of liberation. The knowing of the truth becomes a point of initiation of a transforming moment. It illuminates the present and exposes the split between 'what is' and 'what ought' to be.¹ It presents this contrast in a painfully comprehensive restless clarity, creating a discontent and longing for finding personal completeness by bridging the gap between one's present stage and context of being and its teleologically intended essence. The discontent, which is initiated by the profound sense of alienation

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967).

(from one's own meaning and purpose), produces the transformational energy for overcoming the limits of the present by the drive of the vision for the future.

The liberating truth takes a different shape and content within the various theories for social transformation. For Marxism, it is the illumination of the proletariat regarding the fact that it is reduced to a mere commodity (chained to the exploitative capitalistic forms of production) which initiates the process of its transformation from a disposable component of the market into an intentional revolutionary force. For Freud, facing the truth about one's libidinal content and its personal pre-history unlocks the possibility for therapeutic intervention to achieve a healthy equilibrium between the individual and his/her cultural context, thus providing a process of transformation for his/her immediate condition (of crisis, discontent, etc.). For Paulo Freire the results of the encounter with the truth are embodied in the process of conscientization – the development of a contextualized consciousness by the oppressed about their condition and the generating of resources for its liberating change.²

The process of social emancipation is usually understood as the antipode of alienation. The sense of isolation from the elements of the social process leads to a lack of possibilities for self-realization and thus, a lack of future, which produces apathy and despair.

² Freire's theory affirms the consciousness and historicity of human beings within a four-dimensional existence. As encountered by the truth and thus, transformed from objects into subjects of their personal history, they demonstrate their creative (and therefore transforming) presence in the world through an intentional praxis in recognition of their calling to humanize that world.

See: Paulo Freire, Cultural Action for Freedom (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 44, 52; and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 3, 60-61, 71.

The process of emancipation, in a philosophical aspect, requires a social action capable of reconstructing and reforming the *socium* of the individual (or the group) and thus, achieving a lasting social transformation which institutes the guarantees for human social reintegration and freedom of choice for *being* and *becoming*. Depending on the intensity of the dialectical struggle between the opposites (representing "the conservative" and "the progressive"), the social action propagated by the ideologies for social transformation may receive either revolutionary or evolutionary shape. In other words, it may appeal for a radical discontinuity between the past and the present, or for a gradual, intentional growth of the present into the future.³ For example, it may suggest a violent, unscrupulous civil war in the name of the utopic ideal (as in the Marxist vision of the proletarian revolution), or it may offer the alternative of Wesleyan social reformism.⁴

If alienation is understood as a separation from the possibility of self-fulfillment and self-realization, then the ultimate expression of alienation is death, and the fear of death is the fear of ultimate alienation. This incorporates fear from the void: the

³ Usually, in speaking about these two possibilities of social action, the images of revolutionary war and democratic political process emerge as corresponding opposites. As Joseph Comblin points out: "The revolutionaries regard the existing order as alienating and want to change it as quickly as possible. Like the 'hippies', they feel that it is no longer possible to *be* and to be creative, but they also protest against the established order because of the poverty and exploitation that it causes and tolerates." Outside Criticism of the Church, translated by David Smith, *Concilium*, vol. 6, No. 7 (London: Burns & Oates, June 1971), pp. 87-88.

In reflecting on the democratic process, John Stott emphasizes that "democracy not always cures alienation." Discussing John R. Luca's book *Democracy and Participation*, Stott states that the election process constitutes a form of 'minimal participation' through which "democracy becomes autocracy" because it "enables people to participate in government only to a derisory extent." Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), p. 96.

nothingness, emptiness, lack of meaning and *presence* beyond the material personal existence. The dream of immortality is a leap against the fear of death and its alienation.

As life, death is also defined in social terms - it contains the loss of the presence of others. The same is true both for our death, and for that of other people with whom we associate. Since sociality is the foremost expression of humanness, death brings an end to the definition of humanity as existing in the sharing of one's being and presence in an act of mutual participation in the being and presence of others.

The Christian perspective of Cosmology affirms this sociality as flowing out of the sociality of God (for the human being exists as created in His image and likeness). The Biblical understanding of humanness is defined in terms of fellowship, socialization, and interpersonal dialogue, first of all with the Creator as the predicate for a humanized relationship with fellow humans. The Presence of the Creator is the humanizing context in which sociality becomes possible. This Presence, being the Source of life (and the Life itself – John 14:6) validates and sustains human existence, representing the logical antipode of alienation and death (for the human being is created and called into existence by, in, and for God).

The teleological providential presence of God in history keeps humanity possible and intentional, revealing its meaning and destination. It is also the factor which guarantees the end of history. It offers the bridge of transcendence which leads the human being beyond his/her personal and corporate historical frame, beyond the boundaries of the historical process, and toward full realization in eternity (in the

⁴ In light of this statement note: Bernard Samuel, The Methodist Revolution (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1973), pp. 3-8; and Theodore Runyon, Sanctification and

Presence of God). Standing beyond all "ends," this Presence overwhelms despair and the fear of death, and through that, disarms all fears of alienation. Thus, it presents the absolute context and driving force of the dialectical process of liberation, declaring the alienation from God as the ultimate alienation for humanity leading towards death.

The nature of alienation stands decoded in the Christian understanding of "the fall" and its defeat in/through the totality of Christ. The Christ-event in its finality provided the redemption of essence, existence and position of humanity, placing it in God's presence, as the "Second Adam" sat at the right hand of the Father. Christ, the Son of Man, the incarnation of the divine Presence, validated the truthfulness and intent of human presence.

In his philosophical conclusions in *О Побстве и Свободе Человека*, Nikolai Berdyaev states: "Fear and slavery are cancerous in their consequences. If the human succeeds to overcome the slavish fear, he (she) will stop killing. The human being sows death out of his (her) fear of death. (Human) Lordship always needs to murder. Lordship always feels fear, and because of that needs to murder. It does not want to fight with death." ⁵

The fear of those who lord over others consists of the conviction that if they do not do so, someone else will lord over them. By becoming the servant of all, Christ revolutionized the notion of lordship and liberty and established the character of His contrast community as a life in service to God by service to the fellow human. The

Liberation (Nashville: Abington, 1981), p. 9-19.

⁵Nikolai Berdyaev, *О Побстве и Свободе Человека* (Paris:YMCA - Press, 1939), p. 209. Personal translation.

recognition of God's image in "the least of them," became the prerequisite for entering into the Kingdom (Matthew 25).⁶

The Cross, once a symbol of death and alienation, stood in the midst of history as the focus of God's graceful providential presence. For in the paradoxality of the Cross, His reach and liberating intent towards all humanity was globalized. The resurrection, as finalized victory over death, sealed the authenticity of Christian hope as being non-abstract, personal, present, liberating from fear and liberating for life. In Christ, the socio-political reality of the Kingdom came within reach, for the King was present as a unity of the proclamation and praxis of the Kingdom - an embodiment of the future of humanity.

⁶ The public confession of the presence of the image of God in each human being is also the only authentic foundation for social justice. In light of that, the right redistribution of wealth is not an issue of right economics, but of right relationships which make economic justice possible. Brian Barry supports this conviction in his work Liberal Theory of Justice: Critical Examination of the Principle Doctrines in A Theory of Justice by John Rawls (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 168ff.

The right relationship with the Creator is foundational for the humanization of each human being through which it flows to the rest of society. This stream presupposes social action as an instrument of facilitating the quantitative and qualitative expansion of humanization throughout society. The Biblical text (in both its Old and New Testament accounts) supplies the Christian community with the ideological foundation and the mandate for such an action. The tradition of the Jubilee year, the prophetic critique of socio-economic injustice and oppression, the ministry of Jesus and the Early Christian community provide the ethical codex and practical model for transformational social involvement.

On the establishment of the Biblical precedent for social action see: Reinhold Niebur, Love and Justice: Selections from Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebur, edited by D. B. Robertson (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1957), pp. 25-40, 57-61. Stephen Charles Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 22-34, 59-76, 128-135. John C. Cort, Christian Socialism: An Informal History (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), especially part I.

Dermot A. Lane also emphasizes the practical implications of the Christian message in his book Foundations for Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 12-24, 122ff. He states: "Praxis does shape reality and as such enters into the composition of reality as we know it. Since reality, therefore, is the outcome of praxis, then quite clearly a new praxis is capable of transforming reality." (p. 108).

Historically, the otherworldly interpretation of the Christian vision of the Kingdom connected the concept of the transcendence of God with the religious attitude of renunciation of the world. This fact gradually reduced the political function of religion in the modern world and, as Gauchet believes, brought it to an end.⁷

It is true that in the Church's historical record, the transcendence of God has been used to justify the establishment of ruling elites and thus, of exploitation which legalizes the misery of the masses and the prosperity of the political oligarchy. Therefore, union of church and state is associated with the philosophical provision for social injustice. Religious separatism is reached precisely on the presumption (based on God's transcendence) that in order to not be alienated from God and His Kingdom, this world must be renounced and a new inwardness of existence with God promoted as the key to eternity, and thus to immortality. Here, we reach the ultimate fear of alienation - the fear of death. The internalizing of the religious experience locked the understanding of the social engagement of God within the frame of individualism, portraying Him as transcendent and thus unconcerned with human suffering and social injustice outside the walls of the religious ghetto. It deprived the image of God from His cosmic dimension, from His imminent presence as a political, social, and humanizing alternative, as a powerful self-identification with the victims of the world: the tortured, the hungry, the oppressed, the handicapped, and the lonely. It suffocated the dominant aspect of God's presence in this world within history as "God with us" in Jesus Christ and "God for us" in His death and resurrection. To the question "what happened to religion in the emergence of the modern world?" Charles Davis remarks, "the social end

⁷ Marcel Gauchet, Le Decenchantement du Monde: Une Histoire Politique de la Religion (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

of religion is in that sense a fact. We live irretrievably in a secular society...Christians should resist the nostalgia for Christendom, that is a society based on a unity in the Christian faith."⁸

Truly, Christians should forget their nostalgia of Christendom, for their view of its embodiment throughout history also stands accountable for the "irretrievable" secularization of the world. Instead, Christians need a passion for the Kingdom and the incarnation of this very Kingdom within the community of the King, extending its grace and availability to the world and the entire creation with the compassion and longing of the Cosmic Christ.

The Revolutionary Praxis: An Eastern European Prospective on some Aspects of Political Theology

Political Theology and its developments in the works of John Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann and others in their dialogues with Bloch's Esoteric Marxism, brought to the attention of the theological process the need of critical analysis of our socio-political presence in the world and called the Christian community out of the internalization of the faith-experience towards revised, constructive social praxis, inspired by the horizon of eschatological hope.⁹

⁸Charles Davis, Religion and the Making of Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 46.

⁹Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope: On the Ground of the Implication of a Christian Eschatology (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965). Also: The Experiment Hope

The influence of Marxist terminology over the philosophical metaphors of Political Theology, however, brought within its theoretical framework socio-political categories which, unfortunately, are explored and used in an idealistic sense, out of their historical context and consequences. The ethical value of these categories was embraced by Political Theology on the basis of their teleological motivations and aspirations, pointing beyond their immediate frame of reference towards the utopic vision of a just future. However, they were not investigated as an ethical construct on a socio-historical level in the light of their actual historical appropriation and realization. As a result, these political categories became a subject of philosophical and ideological glamorization and a fruitful domain for intellectual speculations. The *revolution* and *revolutionary praxis* as political factors became some of the main categories in this process of theological development.¹⁰

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Johannes B. Metz, Theology of the World (New York: Harper & Raw, 1969). Gustavo Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History (London: SCM Press, 1983). Gutierrez emphasizes that "...political theology appears on the scene as an attempt to express the eschatological message of Christianity in relation to the modern era as a function of critico-practical reason. It therefore emphasizes the politico-eschatological and interprets Christianity as a provocative critico-liberative memory..." (p. 183). Also: G. Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 11. Johannes B. Metz, Faith in History and Society (London: Barns & Oates, 1980), pp. 164-5. In relation to the emerging of Political theology and its ideological commitments, see also: Andre Dumas, Political Theology and the Life of the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 2-13.

¹⁰ Frederic Hale, "The Mission" as Cinema of Liberating Theology. *Missionalia* 23: 1 (April 1995), pp. 72-91, esp. p. 77. Jose Miguez Bonino, Christians and Marxism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 16. Bonino states: "...the communist Rosales is right when he says that..."it should be inconceivable for progressive Christians" to envisage a revolution "without the orientating contribution of Marxism-Leninism." Also by Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 119. Jürgen Moltmann, Religion, Revolution and the Future (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

Here it is also necessary to point out that, as Milan Opočensky emphasizes, Political Theology (and especially Liberation Theology) have contributed significantly towards our faith-reflection on the issue of global economic justice and in teaching us " how to relate our faith to the sphere of economics, and in emphasizing that economics is not independent from our faith, from doing theology." Eschatology and Social

Since the incorporation of Marxist ideology remains one of the main trends in contemporary theology, (more concretely within the models of Political and Liberation Theology), we believe that it is time to examine the concrete historical embodiment and practicability of these ideological constructs, as well as their ethical genesis. Having in mind that the introduction to the process of integration of Marxist political thought in theology has developed in a context foreign to the historical appropriation of Marxism (namely Western Europe and Latin America), it seems that a glimpse into the Eastern European perspective of this process may be beneficial for its further theological evaluation.

The Marxist Moral Theory of Historicism

In discussing the relation of Marxism to morality, it has often been argued (by the Marxists) that morality is ideological in nature, while “by contrast with ideology of any form” Marxism is scientific. Further, the traditional Marxist view takes the position that “...morality always and necessarily has been chronically incapacitating within any scientific critique of society.”¹¹ In contrast to this assumption, George Paterson points out that:

Transformation, *Brethren Life and Thought*, vol. XXVI, No.2 (Spring 1991), pp. 92-101 (p. 98).

¹¹ Denys Turner, *Marxism and Christianity* (New Jersey: Barnes and Nobel Books, 1983), p. 82, 88. To this statement Turner responds with the thesis that “Morality is Marxism.” He states: “Marxism, as the critical science of bourgeois society and ideology, is – if indeed it is truly ‘scientific’ – all that we could expect morality to be under bourgeois conditions. Morality under capitalism is Marxism.”(p. 83).

"All political philosophies are moral as well as intellectual creations; they contain by their very nature high ideal, sophisticated theories, grand-sounding slogans, primitive propaganda and dubious facts. It is in challenging men and women to high ideals that the necessity of ethics arises, an articulation of ideals which on various levels of generality and sophistication is used in judging individuals, circumstances, and movements, and as goals and guidelines for aspirations, policies and an enthusiastic following."¹²

There is no doubt that the secret for the phenomenal longevity, captivating power, and rapturing inspiration of Marxism is found in its ideological ethical platform. Karl Popper, in his fundamental work *The Open Society and its Enemies*, correctly points out that the main task that Marx placed in front of himself in the process of writing *The Capital* was the revealing of the unquestionably objective principles for the development of human society. However, this work indirectly contains Marx's moral theory, mostly in the form of ethical evaluation of the existing social institutions.¹³

Marx's recognition and negation of capitalism is fundamentally based on rejection of its moral motives and practices. He disclaims the violent, savage and cruel exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalists, the dehumanizing social injustice expressed in economic enslavement which deprives the worker of personal freedom, the corruption of politics and their integration with the accumulation of riches in creating and maintaining an oligarchic system. The lack of social equality, the transformation of

See also: Алексей Леонтиев (Aleksei Leontiev), Дейinnost, Съзнание, Личност (София: Партиздат, 1978), p. 22-31.

¹² George Peterson, *Marxism: The Twentieth Century Religion*, pp. 5-30 in Christianity and Marxism, edited by Alan Scarfe and Patrick Sookhdeo (Exeter: The Paternoster Press Ltd, 1982), pp. 23-24.

¹³K. Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies, vol.2 (Moscow: International Fund "Cultural Initiative", 1992), p. 229.

the human being into merchandise and a commodity, the de-sacralization and corruption of human society by reducing it to a global market which prospers on the basis of devaluating the humanness in the separate individual - these thoughts Marx associated with the institution of slavery. In discussing the social establishments, he emphasizes their immanent responsibility to carry the consequences of their social praxis.¹⁴

Marx's negative position with regard to Christianity, according to Popper, is related to his ethical credo.¹⁵ His critique of religion is motivated by the analytical negation of the religious institutions of the day and the content of "official Christianity" which they presented in defending the capitalist exploitation and in attempting to canonize its nature in service to the political interests of the ruling oligarchy.¹⁶ In relation to its critique of religious institutions, with its emphasis on integration of theory and practice (of word and deeds)¹⁷ and on social justice, early Marxism (in *Frühschriften*, for

¹⁴ K. Marx, *The Holy Family*, trans. R. Dixon (Moscow, 1956), p. 157.

Also for an extended analysis of the issue see: Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 105ff.

¹⁵ Karl Popper, p. 229.

¹⁶ For Marx religion is an expression of the alienated humanity and its illusions, enslaving it into a "perverted consciousness of the world" and therefore is a "fantastic realization of human essence, because human essence does not have a true reality." K. Marx, *Die Frühschriften*, ed. S. Landshut (Stuttgart: Kroners Taschenausgabe, 1953), p. 208. Therefore, religion is a possibility for realization of human existence only in the alienated mind of the economically oppressed masses, serving as a fantasy diversion from the misery of the daily reality of exploitation.

Also: Т. И. Ойзерман (T. I. Oiserman), *Формирование Философии Марксизма* (Москва: Издательство Социально-Экономической Литературы, 1962), pp. 221-226.

Contextualizing the ongoing Marxist critique of religion in the contemporary setting, Jürgen Moltmann points out that: "Today Marxists critique Christianity by pointing to a historical distinction. For them the history of Christianity is the continuous conflict between a Constantinian wing, in which the state church is linked with the ruling powers, and a chiliastic wing, which is united with the humiliated and the oppressed in a revolutionary way." *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, p. 70.

¹⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 4. In his famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Marx states: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various

example) presents some socially relevant reformation ideas, which explain its enormous moral influence.

Thus, the young Marx, in light of his ethical convictions, boldly outlines the ten fundamental characteristics of the envisioned New Communist social order, namely:

- “1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduate income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transportation in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equal distribution of the population over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children’s factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production.”¹⁸

However, while early Marxism is marked by the passionate optimism of inspired (by the Socialist Utopism) social activism, the mature Marxist theory finds its theoretical focus in the scientific claims of Historical Materialism. Its method draws premises from the axiomatic foundation of the following general laws:

1. The law of the relation between the social *base* (the economic relations of

ways; the point is to change it.” K. Marx, Theses on Feuerbach (<http://csf.colorado.edu/psn/marx/Archive/1845-Theses/>).

As Jürgen Moltmann states: “If the beginning of the critique of religion lies with Feuerbach’s referring all religions back to mysticism, the revival of mysticism into revolution becomes the spear point of the Marxist criticism of religion.” Religion, Revolution and the Future, p. 94.

- production and distribution) and the *superstructure* (the political, ethical, cultural, ideological social content), stating that the base determines the superstructure;
2. The law of struggle of social groups as foundational for the evolution of society;
 3. The law of revolutionary change in the evolution of concrete societies (which employs the dialectical principle that quantitative change eventually results in a qualitative change) stating that the conflict between the development of production and the inadequacy of the existing relations of production (and their institutions) can intensify to the degree of inducing a revolutionary situation;
 4. The law of the role of individuals in social events, giving preeminence to the leading role of the masses versus that of the individual;
 5. The law of social progress as moving in an evolutionary manner from simple to complex forms, gradually becoming an expression of larger social groups, and thus, eventually advancing into a shape corresponding to the interests of the entire humanity.¹⁹

In light of that, the main premises of Historical Materialism's methodological approach to social reality are: 1. The empirical social material (concrete factology) is the basis for drawing of all sociological conclusions; 2. "All phenomena of social life are reciprocally tied, related and interdependent"; 3. "All phenomena originate, evolve and disappear; there are no social events that do not change"; 4. "Changes in social events are caused by internal conflicts which are influenced by external conflicts."; 5. The main causes of social change are intrinsically present in the facts which are under scientific investigation. Therefore, each social phenomenon bears within itself the content of

¹⁸ K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 94

future changes which will develop according to the concrete characteristics of the given social environment.²⁰

Within this frame of methodological reference Marx develops his determinist socio-economic theory in which human labor has a preeminent significance as the vehicle through which all historical process is being driven toward its infinite evolution. Labor is the dimension which makes humanity possible and redeemable. (It is its ontogenesis and context of evolutionary metamorphosis). It is the sphere of redemption of both human beings and nature, as well as the relationship between them. Further, labor identifies and differentiates humanity among the elemental content of nature as a distinct "conscious species-being."²¹ At the same time, in a paradoxical conceptual dichotomy, in Marxism labor remains a "necessity" and not an act of "freedom" within the historical development known to us. As such, it is associated with oppression, exploitation, impoverishment, deprivation and marginalization due to the alienation of the worker from the product of his/her labor and the means of production. Thus, suddenly the worker is in need of liberation from labor unto creative freedom – a liberation from the very thing which according to Marxism has made him/her human (and continues to serve as an identification for humanness).

As was previously noted, in light of Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, one of the strongest points of attractiveness in Marxism is related to the demand for materialization of ideology into practice. In the context of the presumptions of Historical Materialism, however, practice is not the outcome of human choice; it is not a moral

¹⁹ Peter Berger, editor, Marxism and Sociology: Views from Eastern Europe (New York: Appleton Century – Crafts Educational Division, 1969), pp. 40-41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²¹ George Peterson, p. 15.

decision - an extension of one's ideological ethos, or an embodiment of freedom of will. It is rather an evolutionary outcome of the naturally developing historical process, driven by the inertia of economic determinism within its irreversible (and therefore scientifically predictable) echelons.

The revolution, as an expression of the political practice of Marxist ideology, is therefore, the inevitable outcome of particular historical circumstances that represent the content of the so-called "revolutionary condition" without which, according to Marx, a successful revolutionary action would be impossible.²² According to this logic, if the specific conditions are not present, ideology remains only material for theoretical speculation, but not a matter of practical engagement. Thus, practice appears entrapped in the scientific principles of Historical Materialism as an immanent possibility, but not necessarily relevant to the present setting of historically contextualized and economically predetermined social relations.

In light of that, the impracticability of revolutionary ideology in all circumstances raises the issue of its relativity as an instrument for inducing social change. Society, however, is faced with the challenge of a permanent need for change and transformational evolving into "its better self" – a process that parallels its organismic nature as a form of organized life, which by its virtue of being "life" is therefore dynamic and metamorphic. Along this line of thought, it becomes clear that the transformational necessities of society demand the inspiration and motivation of a permanently practicable ideology which is able to supply a relevant incarnation of its vision for social transformation in any given moment.

²² И. Ф. Бакалина и ред колегия (I. F. Bakalina and others, editors), Проблема Человека в Современной Философии (Москва: Наука, 1969), pp. 136-138.

Such a demand can be fulfilled by a practice, the content of which remains transcendent to historical, economic and geo-political determinism while addressing in a timeless relevance all (geographical and generational) geo-political locations of human pain, suffering and dehumanization in response to their call for social justice and redemption.

Within the context of the Eastern-European historical account, Marxist ideology remained non-practicable (even after the establishment of a revolutionary proletarian dictatorship), and in constant expectation of the achievement of suitable economic conditions which would make the Communist dream an actualized social praxis. This longsuffering expectation was politically maneuvered and manipulated throughout the decades of Party Congresses and the “five-year strategic plans” which (though quite ambitious) were never achieved for realizing the Communist Paradise on earth. As each new Congress faced the failure to arrive at the desired destination, it worked out various adjustments to its ideology, accommodating theoretically the impossibility of its immediate practical implementation. Suddenly, society found itself in some compromising historical location (painfully distant from its dreamed end), entitled with a newly invented appropriately optimistic name like “not fully developed,” “developed,” or “highly developed” Socialism (the achieving of the last of which remained a subject for a further strategic planning).

The failure of the ruling system to produce a materialization of the Communist ideological content within the Eastern-European (or any other) social dimensions is related to the fact that a factor essential to the realized practice of Marxist ideology

(according to its very own dogmatic) is the presence of the New Humanity²³ as a mediator of the New Social Order and an embodiment of its philosophy and conscience.²⁴ Confusing enough, however, this New Humanity appears to be at the same time both the product of and the pre-condition for the advent of the New World, and therefore, it remains inevitably unachievable as its own historical project. For as Herbert Marcuse confessed:

“...unless Socialism is built by a ‘new type’ of human being, the transition from Capitalism to socialism would mean only replacing one form of dominion by another.”²⁵

The definite conflict between Marx’s optimistic activism and his pessimistic historicism are also evident in the fact that: while Socialism must be the realm in which human reason actively controls human deeds, Historical Materialism disclaims the opportunity of the human mind to participate in creating a more rational (and just) world. The free will of the separate individual does not play a significant role in formulating

²³ The creation of the New Humanity engaged in on-going discussions (and consequent political agendas) of the ideological elite of the former Eastern Block. The issue was discussed at length on the Twenty-second Congress of CPUSSR in 1961. The documents of the Congress stated: “The Party regards the education of the new man as the most difficult task in the communist reshaping of society. Until we remove bourgeois moral Principles roots and all, train men in the spirit of communist morality and renew them spiritually and morally, it will be not possible to build a communist society.” (George Peterson, p. 19).

²⁴ The development of a New Conscience as a characteristic of the formation of the New Humanity was considered to be one of the main tasks of the education systems within the countries of the former Eastern Block. One of the routines in pursuit of this goal was the cultivating of a “critical and self-critical” attitude which would facilitate the analyses and discernment of all issues conflicting with the Communist ideology (personal or otherwise) and achieve their elimination toward a complete conformity to the Communist moral code and corresponding world-view.

²⁵ H. Marcuse, *Marxism and the New Humanity: An Unfinished Revolution in Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward Revolutionary Humanism*, ed. John C. Raines and Thomas Dean (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 4.

moral decisions in the Socialist vision for the humanization of the future.²⁶ Thus, social freedom is handicapped by the moral limitations of the rulers, which become the protagonists of the social reality.

According to the historical moral theory of Marx and Engels, the ethical understanding and formulations of "justice" and "injustice" are products of socio-historical development in a particular generational and class context. For example, the concept of justice for the oppressor is different from that of the oppressed and is specific for the concrete historical system of economic production. In other words, the content of moral categories depend on their historical context. This rationale might be defined as *historical relativism* in the sphere of ethics.²⁷

Therefore, Marxism subscribes historically to the dialectic of social evolution, associated in its various stages with historically contextualized moral systems: Christian-Feudalistic, Protestant, Liberationally-Educative, Bourgeois and finally, the Proletarian as the embodiment of the morality of the future.²⁸ Thus, for Marxism, there are not objectively existing ethical absolutes whose nature remains transcendent to the historical epochs and yet immanently present and valid within each one of them. The law of historical materialistic development of society remains the hermeneutical principle of all existential, social aspects in Marxism. In that regard, the only truthful morality is the one of the future social order. For Marx, this is the proletarian morality,

²⁶ K. Popper, p. 232.

K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 14, 15, 19.

²⁷ K. Popper, p. 233.

²⁸ K. Marx and F. Engels, A Handbook of Marxism, edited by E. Burns (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1935), p. 247ff.

which represents the interests of the future, since it is the future ruling class. Therefore, as Engels writes,

"of course, the reasons for all social change and political overthrows we should not try to find in the human mind, not in the growing human understanding of eternal truth and justice...not in philosophy, but in the economy of the existing epoch."²⁹

Evidently, within the Moral Theory of historicism, the ones who are in power define the objective ethical standard of the present, and this standard must be accepted as truthful. In its philanthropic nuance, this standard may raise the priority of ethical categories as "human equality" and "freedom" (as in Marx's vision of the proletariat's state). However, the opposite side of this ethical concept reflects the image of cynicism, the affirmation of the right of the powerful and successful, and the rejection of the right of the socially disadvantaged, which ultimately leads to moral skepticism and apathy.

The Marxist View on Human Rights, Equality and Freedom

Equality and freedom are fundamental terms for the Marxist Moral Theory of Historicism, and their contextual understanding is a key issue in researching the Marxist ethical commitments.

Obviously (for Marxism) the class-structure of society conflicts with the scientific-historical understanding of equality and social justice. The private property (and the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 279.

L. Laurat, Marxism and Democracy, trans. E. Fitzgerald (London: Collance, 1940), p. 16. Laurat states: " Placing within the foundation of Socialist development the rationalistic economic law, instead of explaining it with moral's demands, Marx and Engels proclaimed Socialism as being a historical necessity."

economic relations of production based on it: exchange and redistribution of capital) is the historically developed reality which symbolizes the impossibility of justice. Therefore, it becomes the hermeneutical principle of all manifestations of social evil. Since the liquidation of private property is the only avenue toward the classless society, it is perceived as the condition for the achieving of a just social transformation and reconstruction of human existence in the light of a new type of moral - the "real" human moral, transcendent to class passions (and possible only in a classless world). This new moral system is absolute and final. It is the frontier of ethics, as it reflects the end of history itself in the "Kingdom of Justice," otherwise known as Socialism.

In the light of the liquidation of the different modes of exploitation and exploiters, the "humanness" common for all individuals finds its realization as the foundation of understanding and validation of human equality (in equal rights). Human rights are an expression of the immanent necessity to be equally human. This necessity is demonstrated in the right of equal political and (its corresponding) social meaning among all members of the state.

Engels sees the process of the institutionalization of Christianity (and its becoming a State religion) as the path of corrupting the true ideals of human equality and creating the dogmatics for maintenance of private property, exploitation and social injustice (within the feudalistic and capitalistic society). He claims that: "Christianity knew only one equality for all people; namely, the equality of the original sin, which completely corresponds to its character as a religion of slaves and oppressed."³⁰ This negative equality before God is carried on with the transition of Christianity from the

³⁰ K. Marx, F. Engels, Gesamtausgabe, ed. D. B. Razianov (Moscow, 1927), p. 97; also in A Handbook of Marxism, p. 247ff.

religion of the outcasts to a State religion; the point of antagonism is being shifted from the conflict between oppressors and the oppressed, to the one between Christians (believers) and pagans (gentiles) or Orthodox and heretics. Therefore, Christianity did not resolve the problem of inter-human conflict; it just created a base for its further metamorphosis.

For Marxism, religion in itself is a slavery, because it deprives the human being of objective epistemology, which in turn is the key to freedom. For freedom consists in the knowing of the natural laws, and (on the basis of this knowledge) in the possibility of planning the future, submitting the outcome of these laws' function to a concrete goal.³¹ Therefore, the freedom of one's will is nothing less than the capability to make decisions which are informed by objective epistemology. It is not an original quality of the human being, it is an evolutionary outcome of his/her historical existence. Since the knowing of natural laws is a historically predetermined necessity, then freedom itself is a necessary product of historical human development. True human freedom could be possible only in the context of harmonious living with the "known" natural law; this happens to be the context of the Communist future in a classless society without the concern for means of personal existence (for everything is provided in abundance for all).

This materialistic view of Marxism on equality and freedom unfortunately reduces the human being to a consumer of material benefits whose existence is predetermined by nothing but economic interests and their socio-political visualization. These interests are formed on the basis of the self's survivalist instincts and are historically informed

³¹ K. Popper, pp. 238-241.

Gregory Baum. Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 21-24.

and contextualized in the light of the evolutionary ideas of Scientific Materialism. Unfortunately, this human being conflicts with the nature of social justice and freedom expressed in the recognition and affirmation of the humanness of the fellow human above and beyond one's personal interest (economic, political, etc.).

Since according to Marxism, economic relations predetermine all other aspects of life, justice becomes an issue determined by the conditions of the existing market and its quantitative inter-relational demands. Thus, the one who contains "more" market-exchange value is subject to "more justice." There is not a common denominator for executing justice, and therefore, the ones who are not sufficiently "convertible" on the market remain out of the sphere of administrated justice.

In economic terms, justice is done when one receives the full exchange price for his/her market value; anything less than that is exploitation. The full value, on the other hand, must be sufficient for meeting all needs which correspond to the individual's humanness. The logical deduction from this principle offers us the conclusion that the ones who are "unsellable" (or have a reduced market value) are less human, and if justice equals an affirmation of humanness, then they remain in the periphery of the possibility for justice.³²

³² Eastern-European Communism attempted to handle the cases of the "less valuable ones" by disposing of them through pushing them beyond the edge of the visible society. In Bulgaria for example, the invalids were sent to special homes located outside the cities in less populated regions. They were bound to the geographical limits of these homes and expected to not create social dramas by showing up in society. The mythology of the good and perfect Communist society conflicted with the exposed view of their handicap. All components of the urban human enterprise (buildings, transportation, communications and other infrastructural developments) were constructed in a way of intentional denial of their existence.

The market operates anonymously, impersonally, automatically, according to observable economic laws.³³ It automatically deprives from justice the ones without an “exchange” power, namely: the invalids, the children, the illiterate, the elderly, etc.

In this context, the utopic dream of Communism is a proclamation of the intense expectation of an era of universal justice that is not a function of the market-exchange principles, and therefore is unlimited and available for all. It is supposed to reach to the marginalized and the outcasts and welcome them into the human family as equal partakers of the new social reality.

However, since this justice requires a new morality which is an essential characteristic of the socially responsible conscience of the New Humanity which (as was already emphasized) becomes a dialectical impossibility, the vision of Communism remains non-practicable and unincarnated while society stands entrapped in the uncontrollable savage brutality of the market.

The commodified society is unable to undergo the humanizing metamorphosis from socio-economic oppression to liberation for all. It demonstrates the impossibility of social justice apart from the personal embodiment of justice and a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed. Its existence relies on the suppression and silencing of its opponents, and therefore, on rejection of their right of equal humanness. As justice in Marxism remains a matter of economically contextualized ethical relativity, it asserts the dimension of justification of the powerful over/against the powerless, thus making the Communist future a dialectical illusion.

³³ M. Douglas Meeks, God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 38.

Usually, the claim of revolutions is that they are intensified struggles for justice.³⁴ Yet, the outcome of revolutions affirms an institutionalization of the practices designed to maintain the dominant position of the revolutionary forces. "Then the very ideology that provided the dynamics for revolution gets in the way of creative response to the problem of order and change."³⁵

From its standpoint of political supremacy, revolution does not recognize the need of social reconciliation as an indispensable characteristic of a true transformation. Without reconciliation there is not a possibility for developing of concern about the liberation of all persons, and therefore, there is not a potential for an actualized justice.³⁶ Further, as John M. Swomley Jr. states:

"The outline of concepts such as repentance, reconciliation, nonviolent struggle and the willingness to suffer, clearly indicates that moral men and women are necessary participants in the process of liberation. A moral man [woman] is one who strives intensely to let nothing stand in the way of liberation. He [she] is a new person, not only because is committed to liberation of all, but also because is involved in the struggle now."³⁷

While the Marxist revolution proclaims a commitment towards establishment of justice for all, which is conveniently located in the distant future dawning after the

³⁴ Richard Shaul, *Revolutionary Change in Theological Perspective*, pp.23-40 in Christian Ethics in a Changing World, ed. John C. Bennett (New York: Association Press, 1966), p. 245ff.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁶ "Reconciliation is the process of turning enemies into friends. Traditional revolutionary thinking does not offer real hope of liberating because it has no doctrine of reconciliation with enemies; their only choice is submission or extinction." John M. Swomley, Liberation Ethics (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972), p. 228.

See also Shirley C. Guthrie, Human Suffering, Human Liberation and the Sovereignty of God, pp. 22-34 in *Theology Today*, vol. 53, No. 1 (April 1996), p. 28. Guthrie states: "Like God's justice, true human justice deals with sinful, lawless individuals and groups by seeking reconciliation rather than destruction."

³⁷ Swomley, p. 229.

liquidation of all of its political opponents, true justice always occupies the dimension of the “now.”

True justice remains personal, present and concrete, not anonymous, abstract, futuristic and faceless. Justice and freedom are not historically evolved categories, they are immanent, humanizing absolutes. They are a trans-historical social reality, which is incarnated in moments of inter-human embrace, and in the recognition and reverence toward the same human rights as a necessity and privilege for all.

Any group committed to serious social transformation must oppose all structures of oppression and violence within itself first.³⁸ This principle establishes a perpetual demand for an internal critical revision, cleansing from bureaucratization of ideology, and striving towards reconciliation and restoration of the human community.

In Marxism, the understanding of humanity conflicts with its own Socialist dream for the future of humanity. A society in which self-understanding is rooted only in economic relations and modes of production lacks the transcendental, integrating ideal which overcomes personal interests in the name of the future common good. Without such an ideal, the disclaiming of the rights of others would naturally be present.

The realization of the Marxist dream for social formation remained unachievable, for it lacked the inspiration and motivation of the reality of personal social transformation toward something superior to the historically predetermined, materialistic *homo economicus*. It needed the vision of the redemption of humanity from itself, from the trap of natural historical evolution. It needed a glimpse of transcendent hope for the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.234.

future, more powerful than the natural laws and the historical processes, and faith in the immanent otherness of its reality.

The Marxist Revolution

In the light of the analyzed moral foundations of Marxism, we may now focus on understanding the Marxist perspective on revolution and revolutionary praxis.

In the very genesis of this historically materialistic understanding stands the perception of the inter-human relationships of production and the realization of its value. With this in mind, the revolution seeks to accomplish a fundamental change in the mode of production, the re-distribution of wealth and the restructuring of the socio-economic order relating to it. This is achieved by changing the ownership of the means of production through "their privatization by the new state" and the establishment of a new centralized economic system for re-distribution of the final product and its value according to the objectively existing human needs, in relation to the socio-political vision for the future and the developmental strategy of the state.³⁹ The revolution is accomplished by the vast masses, which lacking ownership of the means of production, are viewed as an economic commodity by the private owner.

³⁹K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 82. Ultimately in Marxism "the theory of the Communism may be summed up in the single phrase: Abolition of private property....Capital is...not a personal, it is a social power. When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby translated into social property. It is only the social character of property that is changed. It loses its class character."

The New State, which is the product of the Marxist revolution, supposedly expresses and reinforces the interests of the masses, transforming them from oppressed objects into the subjects of the new social order. For, according to the words of Marx, in the revolution: "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."⁴⁰

The revolutionary situation is viewed as the dialectically developed outcome of the gradually accumulated economic and socio-political despair (due to the proletariat's alienating the labor from its fruit) which, being provided with the clarity of political self-awareness about ones personal position and function in the social context, can produce a paramount of social discontent that may culminate in apocalyptic, revolutionary force.⁴¹

In its idealistic form, the ultimate motivating and integrating factor for the formation of the revolutionary potential of the masses is the hope for social justice and rightful self-realization, for recognition of the humanness of the separate individual and his/her claim upon destiny. The all-encompassing horizon of the process is the Communist future in which each individual, as being a part of the New Humanity, will contribute to the corporate, communal prosperity according to his/her personal potential, while participating in the re-distribution of the common wealth by receiving from it according to his/her objective needs.⁴²

The proletarian revolution, which is the key point within the beginning of the evolution towards the new socio-political reality, leads to the establishment of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

⁴¹ K. Marx, Early Writings, translated by T.B. Bottmore (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), pp. 75, 85, 124-125. Also in The Communist Manifesto, pp. 71-77.

⁴² K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 84ff.

proletarian dictatorship through which the masses suppress the former ruling minority until it gives up its reactionistic, contra-revolutionary attempts to regain power and economic prosperity.⁴³

The Marxist revolution is presented as the historically and dialectically predetermined outcome of a gradually developing set of socio-economic circumstances which serve as a catalyst to the proletarian revolution. Among these are various conditions like: the deepening of the gap between the economic status of the capitalist owners and the proletariat; the disappearing of the middle class – due to the mass-proletarianization of the population; the intensifying of exploitation and social marginalization; the awakening of the proletarian revolutionary conscience and its adequate social contextualization.⁴⁴ Marx's presumption was that lack of any or all necessary circumstances makes the revolution impossible (or at least highly improbable). His hypothesis axiomatically assumed the continual impoverishment of the masses and the escalating social demand for underpaid labor. Within the context of European historical development, however, neither one of these predictions came to pass.

With the development of technology (and especially in regards to automation, and later to computerization of production) the working days became shorter and the process of labor evolved into a joined cooperation of high-tech constructs and blossoming human ingenuity. Suddenly, the issue of mass proletarianization faced its

⁴³ Ibid., p.93 ; K. Popper, p. 175; I. F. Bakalina, pp. 140-141.

All of these references relate to the Marxist claim of the revolution's dialectical inevitability and historical justification of its violent dictatorship.

⁴⁴ K. Popper, p. 179.

K. Marx, Capital, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (London: J. M. Dent and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1930), p. 846.

historical impossibility as it was replaced with the increasing social dominance of the white-collar, middle-class professionals. At the same time, due to technological advancement, the decreasing numbers of “proletariat” were faced with the problem of escalating unemployment (an issue equally unexpected and unimaginable for Marx who’s social prophecy predicted a higher demand for a working force with the development and growth of industrialization). The attempts for a resolution of the problem focused on alternatives for education, training and consequent career change of the ones left outside the stream of the working force.

Indeed, Marx’s view on revolution (and revolutionary situation) reflects a 19th century industrial Western Europe – a reality irreversibly lost in history. In contemporary First-World-Capitalism, the ideas of Marxist revolution are reduced to not much more than a ghostly image of antiquated philosophical speculation with a historically limited value.

It is logical to assume, therefore, that the voice of the proletariat is no longer the ultimate voice of the future. Does this mean that Western democracies offer the absolute resolution for global social justice? Obviously not! The economic prosperity of the First World continues to stand in a correlation of dependence on the natural and human resources of the Second and Third Worlds (and thus, on their proletarianization).⁴⁵ Within the inter-related, globalized context of contemporary existence there are multiple

⁴⁵ In regards to a critical reflection on the historical development of the First World’s colonial and neo-colonial expansion in Latin America and the misuse of Christian dogmatics as an ideological foundation and excuse of its dehumanizing practices, Jose Miguez Bonino offers a passionate analysis in his book Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). He points out that; “Christianity entered Latin America under two historical movements: conquest and colonization in the sixteenth century and modernization and neo-colonization in the nineteenth.”(p. 4).

locations of silenced pain and suffering, of dehumanizing poverty and various forms of socio-political injustice. There is a paramount of latent, explosive religious, racial and ethnic hatred employed by the political powers of the day for the purpose of mass-manipulation and as a substitute for the old imperial maxima for handling social discontent by providing "circus and bread." So the contemporary circus offers the diversions of ethnic and religious cleansing, economic genocide, nationalistic and chauvinistic propaganda, etc. Amidst the abundance of entertainment, the bread usually remains secondary and dreadfully scarce, available to the socially privileged and the politically correct. The fear of securing "daily bread" (a fear differentiating between life and death) has often suffocated the voice for justice as the cries of the oppressed were "out noised" by the applause of the ones feasting at the table of the Caesar.

Does this condition present a revolutionary situation (in the Marxist sense of the term), thus making classical Marxism once more relevant and applicable? Not necessarily! The same socio-economic characteristics, which made the Marxist revolution inadequate in the countries of the West, are already present in various stages of development around the global socio-political map. What remains unquestionably relevant is the immanence of the demand for a humanizing social transformation through the incarnation of a hope for a just future manifested in a visible, tangible, prophetic form in the present: a form of social praxis of the future of humanity which challenges and reshapes the present while affirming the individual significance of human life in its purpose and content.

In conclusion, if we carefully review the Marxist revolutionary theory we can summarize that, from the standpoint of its sociological interpretation, the revolution is a

violent, unscrupulous, uncompromising, apocalyptically unrestrained civil war. It establishes the socio-political dictatorship of the proletariat over the rest of society, repressing its reactionistic sources until their total extermination. The moral excuse of the savage violence in the Marxist revolutionary theory was the fact that it is the revolution of the masses represented by the proletariat. The voice of the masses is the voice of God. However, in its historical realization in Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe, this moral foundation was invalidated. Lenin made his proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917 when the proletariat formed less than ten percent of the Russian population.⁴⁶ The same was true as a sociological statistic for the Eastern European countries where the middle class represented the majority at the time of their occupation by the Russian Army in and after World War II. Therefore, Marxist revolutionary theory stood upon the claim of a historical prophecy that never came to pass within the social context in which (and for which) it was theoretically developed.

The Revolution established the dictatorship of a minority, unscrupulous in its political agenda, which persecuted and pursued in savage extermination all its intellectual, cultural, and political opposition. It disclaimed the democratic principles of equal human rights and social justice in the name of the unquestionable, undisputed rule of the Communist Party and its totalitarian form of government as the only possible present and future social reality. Each prophetic voice of criticism on behalf of the humanization of society disappeared into the nightmare of concentration camps and endless records of incidentally disappearing people.

⁴⁶ Francis B. Randall, *Introduction to The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Washington Squire Press, 1964), p. 38.

The ones who based their claim for political power on the call for economic emancipation, justice and equality invented a vigorous system for economic exploitation of the natural and human resources of the Eastern European countries. After 45 years of being robbed and raped by the Communist elite, these national economies were brought to catastrophic ruin.

In the more recent post-Communist history of the Eastern-European region, the Neo-Communist governments camouflaged themselves under the mask of democratic slogans and revived nationalism to continue their selfish, irresponsible policy of economic exploitation, until the total devastation and exhaustion of the economic potential of their countries. The heart-breaking misery of the people in Bulgaria during the winter of 1996-97, the unimaginable poverty of the unemployed, the despair of the countless homeless children in the cities of Sofia, Bucharest and Moscow - these are just a down payment of the inheritance of Communist rule experienced today in each of these countries striving for social and economic survival.

The Eastern-European countries are presently trying to take their legitimate place on the contemporary sociological map of the "Old Continent" by seeking acceptance and integration into the global European family. With few exceptions, however, they still remain outsiders, faced with the uncertainty of a long and hard process of reconstruction and the development of functional national market economies. They are challenged by the need for a humanizing social transformation which reaches beyond economic factors into the ethnic ghettos of the gypsy minority, the invalid and elderly homes forgotten by the rest of civilization, the ecological despair

of the post-Chernobyl world and its cancer explosion, the refugee camps in Macedonia and the memories of the massacres in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The list may continue, but it is fundamentally a voice against the historically and politically forced fragmentation of reality, against the erected social memorials of human alienation, against ethnic cleansing and economic oppression. This is an expression of the need for transcendence incarnated into a new, visible, hopeful social praxis, the need of a tangible future.

The Eastern-European civilization stands upon dozens of centuries of institutional Christianity. Yet today, it is more materialistic and secular than ever in the midst of its social despair. The Easter crowds at the Orthodox temples are disoriented and confused between the formulation of their new spiritual identity and the felt need for a rediscovering of their historical roots. Driven by an undefined spiritual hunger and yet disappointed by the church's social inadequacy and selfish political passions, the people cluster around the light of the Easter candles in hope for a social resurrection.

What can theology offer to these generations, broken and bruised by an oppressive history and planted in the fragmented world after the end of *utopia*?

The answers are simple and require our faithfulness to the Biblical categories associated with the vision for a social transformation. They are: the reality of the Kingdom, the community of the saints - the Body of the crucified and risen Christ, the Pentecostal passion for renewal of the broken world in light of the eschatological vision of the sovereign rule of God, the Way of redemption to the future and its transforming hope.

The Spiritual Revolution: A dialogue with Nikolai Berdyaev in the midst of the Post-Revolutionary Social Despair

In his book, *Philosophy of Inequality*, one of the most distinct minds of the 20th century Eastern-Orthodox philosophical tradition, Nikolai Berdyaev (driven by the apocalyptic experience of the Russian revolution), offers a critical analysis of the genetical content of the phenomenology of political revolution.⁴⁷

The book is written in the summer of 1918 in the context of a passionate antagonism against the triumphant Communist Revolution. As Berdyaev later points out, for him this is a period of a "spiritual catharsis," thus placing his writing in the atmosphere of an intuitively-emotional response without a systematic religious reflection. As he emphasizes (in the Epilogue of the 1923's edition) the necessity of an

⁴⁷ N. Berdyaev, *Philosophy of Inequality* (Sofia: Prozorec, 1998).

Berdyaev was a graduate of the Kiev University's School of Natural Science. He did not have a formal education in theology or philosophy, yet his thought did impact them dramatically. The theologico-philosophical dialogue of Berdyaev is unique with its encyclopedism and eclecticism. It brings a dimension of vastness overflowing beyond the traditional exposes and clichés with a sense of cosmic globality. He is often regarded as "the philosopher of freedom," for as he himself states, the distinction of his philosophy is contained in the fact that it is founded not on 'being' but on 'freedom'. N. Berdyaev, *Freedom*, pp.167-175 in *Russian Philosophy*, edited by J. M. Edie, J. P. Scanlan and M. Zeldin, vol. III, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965).

In this context, Berdyaev views human creativity as the sublimation of freedom. (*Philosophy of Inequality*, p. 21) Further, according to him the ethic of creativity is one of the three forms of ethics (together with ethic of the law and ethic of redemption)(p.18). Creativity as Berdyaev's anthropodice is based on this perception of creativity. (p.16) In his early years of striving for social justice, equality and freedom for all humanity, he embraces Marxism as a possible answer. Consequently, he experiences a deep disappointment with Marxist ideology in the context of its practical application in the Russian revolution. His early attempts to reconcile Marxism and Christianity, however, give us sufficient ground to perceive him as a forerunner of contemporary Political Theology. This fact as well as his consequent criticism of Marxism under the sobering experience of the revolution and the following "new social order," make Berdyaev

adequate, mature and genuine response to the hell of revolution, Berdyaev offers the following conclusion:

“The Revolution – ungodly and satanic in its nature, must be lived-through in an unsuperficial spiritual way and in a manner evoking a religious enlightenment. The one who finds in the Revolution only malice and hatred, the one who seeks only the restoration of the past, which brought to existence the revolution of the old life with its entire injustice – such a person has not experienced the Revolution neither spiritually nor religiously... Only the one who has seen in the Revolution his[her] miserable existence as well as the misery of his[her] people, the one who has sensed in it the retribution for passed sins, who has past through the act of repentance, through a critical dismantling exposition not only of the Revolution but also of the pre-revolutionary injustice – this is the one who can say that he[she] has experienced the Revolution in a spiritual manner.”⁴⁸

In his elaboration on the spiritual foundations of social thought (and social psychology), Berdyaev passionately resists the notion of poetization and idealization of the revolution. For him, this is tantamount to spiritual adultery and manipulation of the corporate social *soul*. He refutes the claims of Russian revolutionary propaganda, which states that in the storm of the revolution the *new humanity* is being born and the *new social conscience* is revealed.⁴⁹

In this context, Berdyaev points to a clear dialectical problem within Marx’s dogmatics related to the conviction that the proletariat is the “new humanity” of the future (after an eventual evolutionary adjustment of its conscience). Thus, supposedly, the proletariat is transformed into the humanity of the age to come. In light of this claim, Berdyaev places a legitimate question: If the process of proletarianization (which is

especially relevant to the present study. Isaac Passi, *Introduction to Berdyaev’s The Worldview of Dostoevsky* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 1992).

⁴⁸ Berdyaev, *Philosophy of Inequality*, p. 221.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

distinctly linked to the degrading capitalist conditions of oppression and exploitation of the worker) dehumanizes the proletariat, how could we expect a “new type” of human being to emerge out of this regression? For as he points out: “According to Marxism, “the higher type of man will be the result of complete dehumanization!”⁵⁰ According to this view, the separate individual is just rough material for the production of the “new humanity” and has value only in light of his/her potential of becoming something qualitatively different.

In a philosophical analysis of the historical record of human revolutionary praxis, Berdyaev critiques the moral motivations and the spirit of the political revolution as repressive, dehumanizing, totalitarian, and destructive to the progressive cultural and intellectual trends in human civilization. For him, the revolution exterminates life rather than births it.⁵¹ It is an expression of regress and not of progress in the spiritual life of the nation. It is a rejection of the genesis of spirituality, for it (the revolution) finds its arguments in the external, material dimension. The revolution does not seek to embody the meaning of life, but seeks only life's economic benefits. It is done not by the image of God, but over/against it, for it exterminates the individual personality and its human value, creativity and future possibilities as a separate identity, and after “killing God” in the name of the human future, establishes the criteria of unification as the only context

⁵⁰ Ibid.

See also: N. Berdyaev, *Marx versus Man*, translated by Donald A. Lowrie, pp. 183-196 in Russian Philosophy, vol. III, p. 192. Berdyaev states: “The process of proletarianization dehumanizes, it robs man of his human nature. And in this the proletariat is the least to blame. But out of this progressive dehumanization, this terrible narrowing of man's consciousness, how can we expect a new type of man to emerge? Marxism expects a miraculous dialectical change of what it considers evil, into good, into the better life. But at the same time the proletariat is burdened with the “Fatum” of capitalist industry, exploring, oppressing, robbing him of human dignity.”

⁵¹ Berdyaev, Philosophy of Inequality, pp. 10-11.

for human equality and justice.⁵² Thus, the individual is being swallowed up and disposed of by the masses. His/her personal identity is exchanged with the only identity that is politically correct - that of the Communist colony - faceless, nameless, massive, submissive, hostile toward the humanness of the separate person (proclaiming it as reactionistic, retrograde and antagonistic to the bright Communist utopia).

In the context of his critical analysis of proletarianization as a continual process of dehumanization (and thus as being incapable of supplying the material for shaping the "new human being"), Berdyaev challenges the ideological protagonists of the Russian Revolution by questioning the content of their historically manifested spiritual genetics:

"You, the today's revolutionaries, you do not have a legitimate heritage (a pedigree), for to be an offspring of Robespierre or Marx means to not have a heritage."⁵³

By this statement, the author obviously refers to the disruptive character of the Revolution. In its active negating of the past and present, in its violent antagonism with "the old" and even with "the memory of it," the Revolution takes a stand against historical self-identification, against genealogical continuity, and thus, against ethical and spiritual heritage per se.

Berdyaev insists that the revolutionary disruption between the future and past "can only distance us from spiritual content of life."⁵⁴ We could continue this thought

⁵² Berdyaev, Freedom, p. 173. Also in Slavery and Freedom, translated by R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 193.

⁵³ Berdyaev, Philosophy of Inequality, p. 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also Berdyaev's book The Meaning of History (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1936). He insists that: "Man is in the highest degree a historical being. He is situated in history and history in him." (p. 26). Further: "The inner soul of history emerges in all its clarity only in the process of transformation and transfiguration which takes place in historical memory...the human personality, when not

further by making the observation that such an interruption liquidates the possibility of social redemption. It recognizes the social evils, but does not offer a functional remedy. It is deprived from salvific content, which makes the advent of its ideological future unachievable.

The violent liquidation of the old humanity does not provide a content for the creation of a new. The annihilation of the old world leaves the "new" unpopulated and deserted.

The paradox of the revolutionary ideology is further intensified by the fact that the revolutions are done by the "old humanity" and carry on the imprint of its nature and social inadequacies. As people who are a product of the old system (and whose content is nurtured and developed in the midst of it), the revolutionaries are full of the past, their memories are overwhelmed with bitterness and desire for social revenge. This dehumanized content explains the tyrannical character of all post-revolutionary regimes (represented by the revolutionary elite) and their fascination with political immortality, which motivates their energy for suppression and extermination of all political opponents.

Therefore, consequently, the revolutionary outcome of the "old humanity" is

bound by memory into an integral whole, lacks the faculty of apprehending the human soul as a certain reality." (p. 28) "The historical tradition is precisely this inner historical memory which is transposed into historical destiny." (p. 29) In this context, Berdyaev proceeds with the conclusion that: Each human being "represents by virtue of its inner nature a sort of microcosm in which the whole of reality and all the great historical epochs combine and coexist." (p. 32) He states that: "The philosophy of history is in its origins intimately allied to eschatology...Eschatology is the doctrine of the goal of history, its issue and fulfillment. It is absolutely essential for the conception and elaboration of the idea of history, as a significant progression or movement capable of fulfillment." (p. 39)

marked by the spirit and character of the "old world." In light of that, the question legitimately follows: Can the spirit of the old world give birth to the reality of the new? Undoubtedly not!

The "new" must be born out of the spirit of the "new world," of the future which is to come! This is why neither the Marxist Revolution nor any other violent civil war action could produce a meaningful and lasting social transformation. The aborting of the old world deprives it from the possibility of being transformed, for only the full length social pregnancy (with all its discomforts, pains and functional complexity) can bring forth an authentic "new life" capable of growth and extending itself within the human socium. Therefore, society needs a genuine spiritual conception in order to undergo the transformation which brings forth the desperately needed social newness.

Along this line of thought, the answer of Christianity to the claims of any militant political revolution is definite and final: the Spirit of God which was the agent of the incarnation of God Himself is the One who can move over society and mediate the conception of the future within it (the ultimate content of which is God Himself and His sovereign rule: the Kingdom of God). The Spirit is the agent of genuine social transformation, shaping and forming the "new humanity" and thus, the "new socium" of the Kingdom within the maternal womb of history (as it remains the intentional redemptive history drawn through the Holy Spirit toward its final consummation in God). The Spirit tabernacles in history and His mediation transforms the historical journey into a sacred teleological process of traveling with God, through God, toward God.

In this context, the Church stands as a lighthouse (by its very virtue of being), as a point of inbreaking of the Kingdom through the Spirit of God in the fellowship of the

saints, which grows and matures into the incarnate Body of Christ in the midst of the present (and as a foretaste of the adventing future).

Further, the political revolution's devotion to fragmentation of the globality of the historical human existence through its antagonistic dichotomization between present and future,⁵⁵ makes Revolution perpetually present within the society's genetics in a pathological and traumatic way. What is then the genetic content of the post-revolutionary "new order" if the Revolution itself paradoxically attempts to establish a rational and promising future through employing irrational forces?⁵⁶ Obviously within the deep shadowy places of the societal consciousness, within the locations of historical identity diffusion, of unconfessed moral conflict and confusion, within the realms of unrationalized discontent and passion for change, the irrational disruptive force of revolutionary violence will remain as a latently present and permissible option. Thus, one revolution will sooner or later lead to another. Such a philosophy offers an ideological justification for aborting the present through violence, cruelty and enslavement, depriving its opponents not only of their "present" but also from the right to a future.

From a Christian perspective, this view is disturbingly reactionistic and dehumanizing in nature, even more in the light of the conviction that "God is," and "the present" stands as His choice of dimension for self-revelation to humanity. This is why "the present" is salvific and therefore indispensable to the providential heritage of the

⁵⁵ Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 195. Along the same line of thought about the revolutionary praxis, Berdyaev states: "The present is regarded exclusively as a means, the future as an end... For the present life is a nightmare, in the future, life is paradise."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

future, which is God Himself as the all-encompassing end of everything. Thus, the future "is" because "God is" now.

In light of the fact that the revolutionary discontent becomes an indispensable part of the nature of the post-revolutionary order, Berdyaev reflects on the dialectic of contra-Revolution:

"The fear of contra-revolution takes possession of the Revolution... The fear grows in proportion to the victory of the Revolution... The Victor does not become magnanimous and humane; he[she] becomes merciless and cruel...possessed by a thirst for extermination."⁵⁷

This fear produces the ideological foundations of the proletariat's dictatorship in an attempt to immortalize its social dominance and rule as an embodiment of the end of history. The consequent political terror is the loss of everyone's freedom - the loss of freedom for all.⁵⁸

The social freedom is not a class characteristic; it is not a quality of a particular social group. It is an attribute which is present in society only when it applies to all of its members. In the act of enslaving the vanquished ones, the victors become slaves to their fear for survival, fear from hatred and vengeance, fear from their possible end (and thus, fear from violence and death). Thus, ultimately violence does not create victors, but slaves, and society cannot experience the triumph of liberation (the ultimate goal of each Revolution) until it is embodied in freedom for all. In this context, Berdyaev points out that:

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 195.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

"All revolutions which are not spiritual revolutions, are like that, all depend upon the objectivized world, that is to say a world which has lost freedom. Revolution ought always to introduce a new life."⁵⁹

This is a life which cannot be qualitatively new if it is lived through "old" human beings. Therefore, the renewal of the separate human being becomes the only guarantee for the renewal of "life per se" - life that flows from the Spirit of Life in accordance with the nature and character of God.

In a striking contrast to the savagely violent dictatorship of the revolutionary victory (which employs hatred as a "substitute for breath" in manipulation of the masses⁶⁰), the victory of God is the victory of the Cross and not of the inquisitor or the tyrant. The ultimate liberation of mankind from sin and death was not the one offered by the crucifiers but by the crucified One. A trans-epochal transformation, unparalleled in its significance and eternal consequences, was accomplished on the Cross, facing humanity with the truth about itself, with clarity about the magnitude of its deprivation climaxing in the crucifixion of its Creator, and with the ultimate triumph of freedom in the resurrection as the act of overcoming death, and thus, also the fear of it.

Typically, the call for justice and humanization of society (involving its transformation as well as that of its institutions) is associated with the prophetic

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

See also: Berdyaev, The Faith of Man in the Modern World, translated by Donald A. Lowrie (New York: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1935), pp. 48-51. Berdyaev points out that at the end of the revolution "The will to justice is overcome by the will to power." (p. 23) He traces the origins of freedom to the realm of the Spirit and the idea of inalienable subjective human rights to Christianity and the movements connected with the Reformation (pp. 34-35). Berdyaev also emphasizes that: "A dictatorship must create a unity of ideas...The modern dictatorship of ideas is based on the assumption that the spiritual life may be dealt with on exactly the same basis as the material life, that the spirit and thought, and the creativeness of culture are susceptible to the same sort of organization as political or economic life." (p. 51)

⁶⁰ Berdyaev, The Faith of Man in the Modern World, p. 13.

tradition. Thus, the prophetic stands as a critical expression of a conflict in the name of justice between the ultimate meaning and purpose of humanity and the existing social order. As Berdyaev summarizes it:

"The call to this conflict is that of an inner voice, the voice of God...(The) annihilation of the prophetic would result from the final absolute conformity of man to society, complete adaptation, eliminating all possibilities of conflict."⁶¹

This statement points to one of the internal contradictions in Marxist theory of the proletarian Revolution. On the one hand, the proletariat is perceived as being called to fulfill its historical destiny through prophetic engagement in revolutionary action for the sake of restoring the proper social position and significance of humanity by modifying and humanizing life through a dramatic change in the existing economic system. On the other hand, in exercising its revolutionary method through the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, the proletariat rejects the right of existence to the prophetic per se by annihilating everything critically opposite or different to its own worldview.

After suffocating all prophetic voices, the new oligarchy is free to establish its spiritual mediocrity as an absolute standard. Therefore, there is no true social freedom in the revolution and its political agenda; there is only unscrupulous opportunism and exploitation of the future.⁶²

Another major problem in Marxism's ideological basis for social transformation relates to its claim for universal and trans-historical applicability. According to Marxism, a historically contextualized human conscience is purely a product of a concrete set of

⁶¹ Berdyaev, Marx versus Man, p. 158.

⁶² Berdyaev, Philosophy of Inequality, p. 22-23.

economics (and the accompanying relations of production). Communism, however, claims that within its social establishment is the proletarian revolutionary conscience that determines economics. Obviously, such a claim places under question the very ideological foundations of Marxism, namely, Historical Materialism and the so-called Scientific Communism. By turning Marxism "inside out" it exposes its historical limitations and lack of social universalism. Perhaps Marx could argue in response that Communism represents a qualitatively new setting of socio-economic relations, being possible through the liberation of humanity – through relocating it from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom for a productive self-realization in voluntary labor as being an integral part of society as a whole. However, as Berdyaev correctly points out, in Marxism it is the collective humanity and not the separate individual that is free.⁶³ Logically then, the Communist view of justice is the one flowing out of the society's good as a whole, relying on the sacrifice of the individual human being and his/her need of justice, freedom and personal dignity.

In focusing on the anti-personal nature of the political revolution, Berdyaev states that:

"In Revolution a process of objectivization takes place, a process of alienation of human nature into the object world, whereas a real and radical Revolution ought to be a triumph over all objectivization and a transition to free subjectivity."⁶⁴

This statement outlines the task of the spiritual Revolution. Since the individual is being enlightened by the truth and consequently led to an adequate contextualization of

⁶³ Ibid., p. 161.

⁶⁴ Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 193.

conscience, the liberation of his/her spirit serves as an initiating and energizing motivation for appropriate social action. The methods for social transformation of the political revolution conflict with the deeply personal nature of this conscience-illuminating and liberating experience. For they are an act not of the personal, but of the collective (of the ideological inertia of the masses), which explores the generated class hatred as a stimulus for revolutionary accomplishment.

Since the Spirit creates life and not death, the spirit of the political Revolution cannot be the spirit of God. The Spirit of the crucified God is of forgiveness and self-identification with the suffering of the victims. It is not the spirit of massacre, of persecution and inquisition of its opponents. It is a Spirit of loving embrace, of invitation and intercession, which never lacks the creative capacity for a deeply personal touch, as is indeed the touch of the Creator.

Revolutions are done supposedly in the name of justice, freedom in humanization of society, in the name of the future of humanity. Yet, they seek a triumph at all costs – displaying an ethic that justifies the tyranny of the victor possessed by fear from the immanently possible contra-revolutionary judgment day. The rest of humanity is obligated to submit to the “new” set of social regulations and definitions of human rights and freedom imposed by the proletarian dictatorship, denying them the possibility of participating creatively in the formation of the corporate societal future. The visions and dreams for a distinctly personal future are considered contra-revolutionary sabotage. The future (and its blueprints) becomes the exclusive property of the Communist party’s elite. Its access, management and social availability are strictly a Party matter. Thus, the future proclaimed in the name of the liberation of

the masses becomes their socio-political imprisonment, the ideologically maintained inevitability of which also transforms the present into a prison for the creative personal human freedom.

The revolutionary ideal, therefore, provides a license for dismissing the image of God in the "fellow human" and disposing of his/her being in the name of the ideological fixation on Party-justice. A "forced justice" is an oxymoron; it is illegitimate as a concept for humanizing practice, for it is about the justice of the powerful, giving him/her the ideological foundation to violate others, depriving them of the right of freedom to be themselves. Authentic justice is possible only when it is done from the standpoint of the social margins, of the pain of the suffering and the oppressed, and not from the pedestal of political power. Oppression is not being lifted from the oppressed by equipping them with the ideological and material means to reverse the status quo through the exercising of oppression over their former oppressor. Oppression is diminished by facing the social evils in confession and repentance from historical societal sins.⁶⁵

The society is able to experience spiritual liberation and transformation only by self-identification with the points of pain and suffering within it. The public confession and repentance followed by the embrace of the victimized and the suffering (as being the expression on the suffering of the society as a whole) opens a therapeutic horizon of social, inter-human healing towards a genuinely lasting transformation.

Spiritual liberation is not abstract and general but deeply personal, finding its expression in the attainment of personal wholeness as Christ – the personal Savior –

⁶⁵ Berdyaev, Philosophy of Inequality, p. 17.

becomes the gravitating center, hermeneutical principle and embodied hope for wholeness of the entire human being (in a reunion between the creation and the Creator).

In presenting the need of a complete or "entire victory over slavery" as a fundamental question of spiritual liberation, Berdyaev emphasizes that the world is evil not because matter is evil, but because it is not free, because it is enslaved.⁶⁶ The fundamental antithesis, according to him, is not the one between matter and spirit, but between freedom and slavery. Therefore, the spiritual victory is not concerned only with a victory over human dependence upon matter, but even more with a victory over "deceptive illusions which precipitate" humanity into slavery "in its least recognizable form" since "antichrist can seduce through deceptive likeness to the form of Christ."⁶⁷

The victory over the "fear of life and the fear of death" is the foremost expression under liberating spiritual victory over slavery. Faced with the truth, fear gives birth to lies, which sabotage the process of liberation. The knowledge of the truth demands a victory over fear and since "perfect love casts out all fear," the fearlessness becomes a definitive characteristic of mature and responsible freedom.⁶⁸

Reflecting, in this context, over the fear of death as "the limit of fear" and of its dictatorial nature, Berdyaev concludes:

⁶⁶ Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 249

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 245-250. "A demonical character attaches to everything relative which is transformed into absolute, to everything finite which is transformed into infinite, to everything profane which is transformed into divine. Man's relation to the state, to civilization, and even to the church becomes demonical...When the church, as objectivization and a social institution is regarded as holy and impeccable, then the creation of an idol and the slavery of man begins...Man possesses the capacity for turning love for God and for the highest ideas, into the most terrible slavery."

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

"...the fear of death denotes the slavery of man, a slavery well known to every man. Man is the slave of death and triumph over the fear of death is the greatest triumph over fear in general...From fear...domination is always constrained to kill...Men in authority are very much like gangsters."⁶⁹

The socio-political reality of God's Kingdom stands in stark contrast to the image of revolutionary dictatorship, while the idea of *the revolution of the Spirit* is brought forth as an antipode to the political revolution. In difference to the political revolutions in this world, the revolution of the Spirit is done by the New Humanity (as its creation) - the one already liberated and emancipated into the Kingdom. This is why, for Berdyaev the Kingdom can be a result neither of revolution nor of evolution for "it is a marvelous transfiguration."⁷⁰

"The time can be concurred not within time, but in eternity; that is the only environment in which the Kingdom of God can occur," he concludes. Congruent with the Eastern-Orthodox tradition, Berdyaev understands the Kingdom as the goal and end of history which, therefore, places it beyond the historical boundaries and makes it impossible within the historical time frame.⁷¹ The Kingdom is presented as an absolutely spiritual phenomena which cannot be embodied in the present material world. For Berdyaev, Christian eschatology cannot be materialized; *Chiliasm* has always been materialistic eschatology.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

⁷⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev, Philosophy of Inequality, p. 220. Further, Berdyaev states: "The freedom of the Christian fellowship in the Spirit does not have anything to do with the anarchical freedom, and the Christian brotherhood in the Spirit does not have anything in common with the Socialist brotherhood. The Christian fellowship is the love of Christ. The anarchic and the Socialist fellowship belong to the kingdom of Caesar." (p. 215)

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 210.

⁷² Ibid., p. 213.

This understanding of the Kingdom stands in conflict with the thesis of the present work and its appeal for the incarnation of the Kingdom within the Christian community here and now, as a contrast social alternative, as the future of the world breaking into the present (and thus, as a hopeful motivation for social transformation through the praxis of the Kingdom).⁷³

Yet, with the vision typical for the Eastern-Orthodox cosmic dimension in understanding Christ and the Kingdom (as well as of the global battle between good and evil, between chaos and order), Berdyaev offers to theology a sense of vastness and reverent expectation, challenging the trends toward anthropomorphic associations of God's sovereign rule and affirming His right to store something critically *new* and *other* for us beyond the familiarities of the historical process.

The Political Theology of the Cross and the Eschatological Hope of the Kingdom

Christian politics never have been a mere discourse about the city (the polis) of God. Christian institutions have always been political and politically involved and have a notorious record of advocating politics foreign to the nature of God. From the military banners of Constantine through the centuries of the Crusades, Inquisition, anti-Semitism, racism, and colonialism, to the pro-pacifism and anti-abortion

⁷³ Most materialist ideologies for social transformation seem to find their inspiration in the dream to recreate Eden: a Paradise on earth. But God's history does not reverse its walk; it has only one possible destination – the future. How could the Kingdom serve as an inspiration for social transformation if no one has ever experienced it. To present its visible embodiment, therefore, is the mandate of the Church: inviting the world to be transformed through an intentional participation into its content.

demonstrations; from the massacre of St. Bartholomew's night, through the piles of human hair and root-crowns in Auschwitz to the Latin American Liberation movement, the Eastern-Orthodox fight for reintegration in the post-Communist world, and the Christian Democratic parties in our Parliaments – the Church has always been passionately political in its presence through intentional action or passivity in the world, defending more often its own cause, and less often the cause of God's Kingdom.⁷⁴ Both ends of the "Church-Sect" typology of Troeltsch and Weber represent political statements and constructs.⁷⁵ Both the secularization of the Institutional Church and the "counter-culture" expression in sectarianism define their action through the logic of the political argument either as protagonist of a concrete socio-political reality or as a critique and protest against it, respectively.

The construct of the Kingdom of God (His sovereign rule) stands as a socio-political contrapunct to the human historical process and its political metamorphosis. God's providential involvement in human history has never been foreign to political notion in its quality of taking the shape of a passionate critique of the dehumanizing

⁷⁴ In emphasizing the ethical and social adequacy of Political Theology, Jürgen Moltmann makes the following statement: "Churches and Theologies which claim to be 'unpolitical' always cooperate with the powers of the status quo and have always entered into conservative alliances. Their alleged Political neutrality is the price of their privileges." In Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), p. 27.

In this context, Gustavo Gutierrez defines as political this theology, which presents "an attempt to express the eschatological message of Christianity in relation to the modern era as a function of critico-political reason." The Power of the Poor in History (London: SCM, 1983), p. 183.

See also Mathew L. Lamb, Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation (New York: Cross Roads, 1982), ch. 1, 4, pp. 103ff.

⁷⁵ Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); The Sociology of Dominion and The Sociology of Religion (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 1992); Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of Christian Churches, vol.2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

injustices in each socio-political order. His voice in the voices of the prophets and the law of the year of Jubilee cried for justice and grace on behalf of the oppressed, the exploited, the needy and the despised, and outlined the vision of an alternative political system which breaks the status quo that fragments God's creation and births antagonism and negation within it. The prophetic imagination challenged the ethical motifs for political stratification of the day, and the prophets were persecuted and victimized for political reasons. The head of John the Baptist was offered on a plate in the name of the political cynicism and moral corruption of his day. The apostles became martyrs while proclaiming the hope for a different, contrast socio-political reality and its soon returning King, whose reign will bring all emperors to their final, irreversible abdications.⁷⁶

In the center of the political nature of Christianity, however, does not stand the image of the triumphant, militant conqueror of the world, but the crucified and risen Christ; crucified as "the King of the Jews," raised as the Cosmic Lord of the universe.⁷⁷

In the incarnation of God, His rule became present and personal as the visible (in Jesus) Kingdom embraced the outcast, rebuked the hypocrisy of political religion, and established the contrast community of the ones liberated to love, accept and serve

⁷⁶ On the political significance of the Gospel as a manifesto for social transformation, see: John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972), pp. 27-36, pp. 64-77, and The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 80-104.

⁷⁷ The phrase "Political Theology of the Cross" is prominent for the writings of Jürgen Moltmann. On the significance of the Cross in relation to Christian praxis of the Kingdom, see: The Crucified God: The Cross as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973); Religion, Revolution and the Future (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 95-97; The Experiment Hope, translated by M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 115ff; Political Theology of the Cross in The Scope of Political Theology, edited by Alistair Kee (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 10-14.

others. The Cross which was erected as the symbol of the end of this socio-political challenge, became the event of its victory over its opponents, even as the passion of Christ became a passion for reconciliation between God and humanity in the grace extended both to those who crucified Him and those who wept for Him. The Cross stands at the center of human history as God's moment of identification with the victims of all oppressive, ungodly regimes throughout human history, and thus, proclaimed the negation and invalidation of these regimes from the viewpoint of eternity. The Cross became the announcement of their finitude and the rejection of their claims for immortality, thus becoming the point of conception of an authentic hope for social transformation. In the light of this hope, the Cross united needy humanity with the groaning creation in expectation of redemption and raptured it in the vision for the transformation of the *cosmos*.

The resurrection event seals the victory of the Cross as a new paradigm for liberation and social transformation in cosmic proportions.⁷⁸ The Spirit of Life makes life possible and present, raising Christ from the dead as our life. In this event, two contrast socio-political models, two antagonistic alternatives break forth through the images of the Cross and the empty tomb. If Christ is life and freedom, anti-christ is death and slavery.

⁷⁸ On the significance of resurrection see also Oliver O'Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1994). The author's foundation of argument is that: "Christian ethics depend upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the death" according to Col. 3:1 (p. 13) and that the vindication of humanity in Christ's resurrection includes both its redemption and transformation (p. 57). Also, Jürgen Moltmann, The Passion for Life: A Messianic Lifestyle (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 72-73. Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press, 1983), pp. 87-91. On the significance of the resurrection as a pronounced judgment against the political establishment, see: Oliver O'Donovan, The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 136.

At the Cross the end of any tyrannical system and structure marked by the spirit of antichrist becomes possible. New life becomes possible at the resurrection of Christ as the initiation of the *novum* and validation of the "coming of God" and "His day."

The resurrection of Christ encapsulates the vindication and justice for the victims of oppression and tyranny, and the retribution and judgment for their torturers. The One who identified Himself in His death with the suffering and pain of the victims is the same One risen and returning as Judge of the world. The fact that God is not death, but that He overcame death, means that He is present. "He is" and His presence is intentional and teleological, but He is also coming and His journey has already started from beyond the ends of history (Revelation 1:8). He is coming for the final meeting with the present order which will mark its end. The vision of John in Revelation captures the greatest hope of Christianity – the Returning, Resurrecting Lord. His *parousia* will mark our own resurrection and reunion in the context of the physically present Body of Christ on earth under His all-embracing, just reign. This vision establishes the ethical absolute of the Kingdom in its trans-historical relevance. God not only exists, He is actively present. This fact brings teleological meaning into morality and life itself, for as Dostoevsky expressed the existential pessimistic tragism of the alternative, "if there is no God, everything is permitted" (*Brothers Karamasov*).

In contrast to the West, which emphasizes the celebration of the Incarnation, the Eastern Church is focused and centered around the passion and resurrection of Christ as its point of theological integration. The annual religious calendar raises the Easter week as the hermeneutical principle of all existential dimensions for humanity. In the light and expectation of Easter, the trials and tribulations of our daily struggles are

transformed into a prelude to victory, to a new life, to a new beginning and new hope for "being" and "becoming." The awakening of nature to new life through the Spring season is associated metaphorically with the renewal and restoration of the entire creation, the provision for which was made through the passion and resurrection of Christ. The Easter events open the horizon of possibility for transformation, which will bring in its final accomplishment the harmonization of God's rule "on earth" and "in heaven." Thus, it will make the Kingdom all embracing and cosmic. This eschatological expectation is foundational for Eastern-Orthodox ecclesiology in its vision of the Church as the medium for the consecration of all creation.

Unfortunately, the Eastern-Orthodox institutional model of the Church is associated more with secular than with divine structural prototypes. Using its noble ecclesiastical aspirations as a moral argument, this model has always been oriented toward a struggle for global political influence over society and for the social authority and significance of a Political, State religion.⁷⁹

The Church indeed has a mandate for transforming political initiative and presence, but only so far as it is the authentic embodiment of the eschatological reality of God's Kingdom,⁸⁰ the incarnation of the Kingdom's radical praxis as a living

⁷⁹ As an example of the Eastern-Orthodox political inspirations, especially in relation to the rise of Nationalism in the former Eastern-European countries, the following works present an insightful reflection: Vigen Guroian, Ethics after Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethic (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), especially chapter 5; Peter Kuzmic, An Evangelical Looks at Nationalism and Nation Building. *Evangelical Theology*, vol.24, No. 4 (October 2000), pp. 292-298.

⁸⁰ The idea of the Kingdom as being the goal of the Church, and therefore, demanding her to live under the reign of God is prominent for the works of Howard Snyder, A Kingdom Manifesto (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 99-107. In his book Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom (Marshall's: Hants, UK, 1983), Snyder states: "If the Church has one great need, it is this: To be set free for the Kingdom of God, to be liberated from itself as it has become in order to be itself as God intends. The Church must be freed to participate fully in the economy of God." (p.

extension of the incarnated Christ; and living out the inter-personal humanizing reality of the Kingdom within His Body in the context of the mutual loving acceptance and nurture of the fellow members. The Body of Christ stands, in its organismic integration and oneness, against all fragmentations of humanity and creation by various cultural, radical, ethnic, and political prejudices. As the center of a transforming reintegration of all reality it offers the Crucified and Risen God – Creator of all.

In this vision of the "present" Kingdom, the paradigm of social transformation is unique with its simultaneous reach both to the personal and social dimensions of humanity. The Kingdom is embodied by the New (in Christ) Humanity, which is the community of the saints. In Christ, the separate individual experiences his/her personal liberation for the Kingdom and its communal essence. It is a liberation of one's self for the fellow human, and thus for personal humanness in Christ-likeness.

As the agent of the new creation, the Holy Spirit brings forth the experience of New Life – the new human being (a new creation). While shaping and molding it into the image of Christ, He shapes and molds the community of the saints, expanding and maturing it into the authentically present Body of Christ. Thus, the personal experience of salvation and transformation of each individual is co-joined (through his/her

11) The present study, however, is calling for reaching beyond 'participation' into an active incarnation of the Kingdom. Also in relation to the contemporary political task of the Church see: Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), pp. 83-86, 108ff. According to Hauerwas, the first political task of the Church "is to exhibit in our common life the kind of community possible when trust, and not fear rules our lives." (p. 85) Reflecting on the nature of the Christian community, he emphasizes its contrast character and counter-cultural content. Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), pp. 30-40, 69-71.

incorporation/adding to the Body) to the transformation and perfection of the Body itself, and furthermore, to the growth and expansion of the Kingdom within it.

Therefore, the Body is in a constant process of formation as the transforming power of the Spirit places before it the challenge to accept and love each newly-added member as an eternally inseparable part of the whole. The challenge contains the fact that the Spirit affirms the individuality of the separate person, rejecting the deconstructive forces of uniformity, and rejoicing in the organic union of creative personal variety. This paradigm of transformation, when embodied in the Church which stands in the power of the Spirit, offers hope for a peaceful reintegration of the world into a radically new whole under the sovereign reign of God. The power of the Spirit, in this context, is a power for truthful oneness with the one who is created different.

Therefore, the authentic oneness of the Kingdom is impossible without this power from above. Without it, Christ cannot be present in this world as incarnated in His Body, the community of the saints. The apostles could not be His witnesses without it (Acts 1:8), for if they were the embodiment of the Kingdom, they had to be ready for martyrdom (first to their own selfishness in order to live with and for others, and second, to embrace the Cross in social denial and suffering even to death for the sake of this Kingdom). This form of transforming, revolutionary passion is foreign to the Church triumphalism and social arrogance. It is Christ-like in its suffering and sacrificial victory, for it is born out of the Spirit of Christ.

In this light, Pentecost authenticates and seals the incarnation of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom and its transforming hope within the Church. Pentecost is a hopeful eschatological event in which the "Church in the power of the

Spirit" emerges as the Church of the last days, created and brought forth by the Spirit of the end. This creation is more radical and revolutionary in its embodied proclamation of equality and justice, exactly because it is not based upon the condition of creating a rudimentary new ethnos, but on the negation of ethnic prejudice and the liberation for mutual acceptance and love. In this creation, the Spirit testifies of Christ, (of His nature and character, and of His passion and concern with creation) and offers the vision of the ultimate future of the world, when "He will be all in all" (Eph. 5). While the socio-political systems of this world, in the spirit of anti-Christ, "divide in order to conquer," the Pentecostal vision of the new creation stands as their anti-Babel. It portrays a unique eschatological *socium* in which one's humanness is affirmed in the loving embrace of the humanness of others in spite of their "otherness," as a part of our own being (of our own humanness). In the light of the prophet Joel's vision, Pentecost joined in its eschatological oneness "all flesh" as the poured out Spirit melted the fragmenting barriers within it. Old and young, daughters and sons, masters and slaves all stand equal before the Creator. Therefore, the Church of Pentecost is the prophetic voice and presence of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom in the midst of the not-yet transformed cosmos. It challenges the prophetic imagination of the faith-communities and provokes the eschatological expectation of Christ's *parousia*. The life in the Spirit becomes a life in the presence of the end and in the coming of God. Thus, each moment of life must be lived in the light of the immanence of Christ's second coming (for judgment as well as for establishment of cosmic justice).

It is not accidental that approximately 90% of the Eastern-European Protestants are Pentecostals. Throughout the decades of severe persecution by the militant

atheism of the Communist regime, the underground Church discerned, in its Pentecostal experience, God's gift of power for life and for witness as well as His personal presence in the midst of their suffering.⁸¹ Their personal Pentecost brought them liberation from the fear of death and persecution, and thus, liberated them for ministry in a hostile environment. It liberated them to be servants and martyrs, transformed them into a political statement of protest against the dehumanizing nature of Communism's nightmares, against its savage all-exterminating triumphalism in hatred towards its negators. The Eastern European Pentecostal Church found itself free to embody Christ's justice in the midst of the context of social imprisonment of reality within the communist political agenda. She was free to carry on a human integrity which was the overflow of the integrated presence of God in her members, free to be a political dissident, a prophetic article proclaiming that the day of the Lord is near, and it is a day of bestowing judgment and justice. The Church believed passionately that her suffering is a sign of the nearness of the end (which is in God Himself), and that through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, she partakes in this end "here and now," that she is co-

⁸¹ In addition to the traditional Pentecostal understanding that the empowerment with the Holy Spirit is "for the sake of mission," Frank Macchia and Wynand J. de Kock discuss the Pentecostal experience of glossolalia as sacramental. Frank Macchia, Tongues as a Sign: Towards a Sacramental Understanding of Pentecostal Experience, *Pneuma*, 15,1 (Spring 1993), pp. 61-67. Also by Macchia, Sighs Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Glossolalia, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 1 (1992), pp. 47-73. Wynand J. de Kock, Pentecostal Power for Pentecostal Task: Empowerment through Engagement in South African Context, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16 (2000), pp. 102-116. William Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels (New York: MacMillan, 1972). All of the above-mentioned authors affirm the practice of glossolalia as "a linguistic symbol of the sacred." As de Kock points out: "Essentially, sacraments signify that God is present. In this way we may think of Jesus Himself as the sacrament of God, or as some have argued, that the church is the sacrament of Christ in that it makes him present in the world." As a "linguistic symbol of the sacred'...glossolalia also signifies that God is present. As Christ is a sign to the world that God is present among us, so too glossolalia is a sign that Christ is present in his Spirit in the church." (pp. 110-111).

joined with the spiritual reality of the end as it grows within her, and she grows into it. Therefore, for the suffering Church, the second advent of Christ is an immanent reality, for through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present and embodied in and by the Church. Thus, sanctification and holiness are not a revival agenda, they are an intrinsic necessity for each individual Christian, for he/she lives each day in the reality of Christ's return and His Kingdom, both "being" and "coming," both stationed in the paradoxical dimension of the "already" and "not-yet" future of the world.

Chapter 3

The Drive Towards Social Transformation in the Post-Modern World: Trajectory to the Future.

Towards Understanding of Post-Modernity and the Post-Modern Self

According to Peter Kozlowski (*The Culture of Postmodernity and The Tests of the New Time: On Postmodernity*), there are three existential tendencies which allow us to view the present period as Post-modern, namely: 1) the development of technology towards its immaterial nature, 2) the discovery of the finitude and the problems of ecology, 3) the religious development after the dissolving of utopism.¹

In light of this existential triptych, the Post-modern philosophical dimension could be characterized as a critique of rationalism (and the dominant aspects of individualism and the European dogmatic humanism related to it), and a stand against the philosophical systems of rationalistic logic - as in structuralism. Post-modernism is the negation of all systemizations, but its critiques contain different nuances, depending on their central focus, which may be differentiated on the basis of their definition and understanding of Modernity. Thus, Modernity may be characterized as, 'the

¹ Peter Koslowski, Die Prüfungen der Neuzeit (Wien: Bohlau, 1989), p. 68ff. and Культура Постмодерна (Москва: Издательство Република, 1997), p. 22-24.

instrumentary mind/racio” according to Theodor Adorno, as ‘logocentrism’ according to Jacques Derrida, as ‘calculative thought’ according to M. Heidegger, or as ‘discipline’ and anthropocentric subjectivism according to Michel Foucault. Professor Kiril Neshev offers his Eastern European post-Marxist definition of Modernity as: "The meaningful development and consolidation of scientific and technological control."² But perhaps we can offer one more definition of Modernity as being the epoch in which the *new* (the inbreaking of the *novum*) appears. Therefore, Modernism is not so much a particular historical time-period, but rather a teleological (and spiritual) position, which evaluates the events within the historical process linearly instead of cyclically.

Along this line of thought, some philosophers, such as Koslowski and Neshev, see the conflict between Modernism and Post-modernism as historical dialectism always present when Modernity is confronted with the need of transformation.

On the other hand, Post-modernity is not a mere description of the 'most new' which already settles in history, but a struggle for the spiritual reconstruction of the present. Thus, the Post-modern as 'post-history' is a recognition of the fact of historicity while creating the 'new' through an ongoing dialogue with the spiritual, post-materialistic longing of contemporary human beings for the reconstruction of reality toward a humanizing, anti-alienating future.

Dialectically, the conflict between Modernity and Post-Modernity seems to be motivated by the historical crisis in Modernity's moral and its anti-social consequences. Thus, the Post-modern consciousness (which ushers the era of Post-Modernity within

²Кирил Нешев, Философския Постмодерн (София: Издателство Филвест, 1997), p.7

the human socium) is formed in the process of awakening to the need and application of transforming practice, flowing out of the ethical construct of the future in its *otherness*.

The reaching and accomplishment of the *otherness* (and not its explanation) is the main focus of the Post-modern concept. Therefore, the authentic pluralism (not just in co-existence, but in co-equality of various different points of view), is one of the natural banners of Post-Modernity. Transcendentalism, as a medium for overcoming the dividing and structuralizing boundaries within reality, is Post-modernism's philosophical presupposition for its pluralism. This transcendence also points to a corporate future, to an inter-human sociality, to a community, which embodies the future and thus stands responsible for its infinity.³ Transcendence makes possible the new horizon of time (which travels towards us) in togetherness with the *other* human being, and the individual is liberated to choose this togetherness.

If we have to sum up the philosophical essence of the Post-modern project, we may use Jürgen Habermas' consideration that the paradigm of the subject-centered philosophy of consciousness is over. It is exhausted and must be replaced by the only formation, which can liberate us from the vices of Modernity (such as fragmentation of antagonism culture, social in stratification and mass-impoverishment world-wide, etc.); this is the paradigm of *communicative action* based upon inter-subjectivity implied in harmonizing mutual understanding.⁴

³ A view is prominent for most of the works of Emanuel Levinas.

⁴ J. Habermas. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I: *Reason and Rationalization of Society* and vol II: *Lifeworld and System: Critique of Functional Reason* (Boston: Beacon press, 1984 and 1987, respectfully).

In order to further comprehend the development and content of the Postmodern ethos, we must focus our attention briefly on some of its fundamental dimensions, namely: Postmodern Deconstruction, the concept of "the Other" as being the gravitating center of Postmodern ethics, the Postmodern understanding of truth, time, space and history as well as its metaphoric representation within the constructs of Cyberspace and Virtual Reality.

The Position of Deconstruction and The Postmodern Vision of Social Transformation

The Philosophy of Deconstruction stands out as an embodiment of negation and protest against the technocentric utopianism and ethical disillusionment of the Modern era. On the other hand, Deconstruction (together with retrospective, anti-objectivist interpretation) represents the core epistemological and hermeneutical method of Postmodernism⁵, and as such offers deconstructive reading of modern reality which involves demystifying and desacralizing of its rationalistic presuppositions and politicized hierarchies with their contradictions, inconsistencies and perversions.

⁵ Pauline Marie Rosenau, Post-modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 16.

In this reflection on Postmodernism, the author includes highly informative chapter on Postmodern methodology. Rosenau distinguishes between Deconstruction and Interpretation, pointing out that while Deconstruction "emphasizes negative, critical capacity," interpretation "expresses a positive of view." For the purpose of this present work, however, deconstruction is viewed also as a radical reinterpretation of reality gravitating against the stereotypical hermeneutical normatives of Modern rationalization. Therefore, interpretation is a part of the critical content of Deconstruction.

Deconstructive reinterpretation disposes of the 'Modern scientific method' questioning its normative validity and brings forward as its substitute the affirmation of the intuitive, imaginative, creative, playful, emotional, personal, empathetic, and subjectively experiential.⁶

The traditional pessimistic, skeptical understanding of Deconstruction is associated with the idea of "textualization" of reality and the perception of its social aspects as an inter-human (inter-textual) discourse.⁷ Therefore, because everything is a (con)text, the application of deconstruction (and interpretation) is unlimited.⁸ Applying literary deconstruction to the world as a whole, Postmodernism concludes that there is no one single meaning (or truth) of the world, and thus, there is not a transcendent center to reality; meaning and truth are immersing in the epistemological process of the self as a personal (thus subjective) interpretation.⁹ The Postmodern method re-reads the tapestry of the social phenomenon in a manner foreign to the orderly inductive and

⁶Tzvetan Todorov. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle. Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁷ Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) and Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965).

⁸ Deconstruction is viewed as having its philosophical beginning in Postmodern Literary Theory, associated with the names of Derrida, Foucault, Rorty, etc. The infamous phrase of Derrida "The text is all and nothing exists outside of it" (*Of Grammatology*, p. 158) has been carried out of the context of pure linguistics in reflection to the relationship of author, text and reader, and implied as a generalization for the Postmodern approach towards reality.

See also Rosenau, pp. 25-26. "Everything comes to be defined as a text in a post-modern context, yet the text is marked by an absence of any concrete and tangible content... The reader and the text are inter-relational. Meaning does not inhere in the text, it resides in the interaction between the text and the reader...there is no single meaning to any text.

⁹ Foucault insists that every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power. To know is a position of power and knowledge is a result of its application. Foucault, *Truth and Power in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, (1972-1977)*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1980), p. 199.

deducted dialectical mechanisms of the social sciences: While they strive for synthesis, generalization, and rational simplicity Postmodernism aims toward diversity, uniqueness, and complexity. Instead of gravitating towards a hermeneutical center, it focuses on the margins and highlights the unrepeatable and enigmatic. It allows the text to deconstruct itself by being incorporated into a radically "heterotopic," centerless universe¹⁰ of unlimited freedom in re-definition and transformation.

The deconstructional critique of Modernity does not aim to single out its "errors," for in pronouncing such a judgment it would stand on the assumption of a singleness of truth (leading consequently to the creation of another center and its accompanying hierarchies). Rather, as Thomas Oden argues, "the axiom of postmodern consciousness is not that Modernity is corrupt, but that it is defunct, obsolete, passé, antiquated."¹¹ The deconstruction attempts to liberate reality by dislocating, reversing and delimiting through challenging its existing centers (and the boundaries defined through them) resituating their hierarchies and questioning the definitions of bipolar opposites produced by them (such as object/subject, right/wrong, good/bad, pragmatic/principal).¹²

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences (London: Tavistock Press, 1970), p. xv-xvi.

Paul de Man, The Resistance of Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 118.

¹¹ Thomas Oden, The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality in The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement, edited by David S. Dokery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), p. 19.

¹² Derrida, Positions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 9, 59. Derrida argues that in spite of their superficial difference, opposites are also the same. See also Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 150.

Therefore deconstruction does not offer definite structural alternatives, but in a consistency with its nature, continues to question and thus, perpetuates itself by further self deconstruction,¹³ leaving an open ended horizon in the drive toward otherness.

Presented in the above terms, deconstruction may appear to be a highly abstract and rather fruitless process. Paradoxically, in the idea of deconstruction, we see the reflection of the hypothesis for a new praxis-philosophy corresponding to the postmodern protest against the dichotomizing of the epistemological process into theoretical and practical dimension. For, as Kiril Neshev points out: "if the praxis is the 'last word' of philosophy, then the 'new beginning' as such is the main dimension on the human presence in the world."¹⁴

Further, this trend of deconstruction is motivated and provoked by the moral and ethical crisis of Modernity and the reduction and marginalization of humanness evoked by it. Thus, the questioning of this morale's legitimacy, as well as the validity and privileges of its social constructs, is an attempt to reshape the social realm for the purpose of creating a space for the separate individual (with his/her otherness and uniqueness) and his/her assertion in the midst of society as an inter-human enterprise.

The Promethean Spirit of Modernity found basic incarnation within three summarizing aspects of the Modern era, namely: rationalism, humanism, and devotional faith in progress. These three principle characteristics, and the extensions of

¹³ An example of such Post-modern critique we find in Foucault's *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, edited by Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 118ff. Also in Derrida's Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 17. There we read: "Now who are we?...we are only at this point, and know 'us' only this: the power or rather the possibility of questioning, the experience of questioning."

¹⁴ Neshev, p. 12.

modern truth and meaning flowing from them within the multidimensional social existence, frame the basic targets for application of Post-modern deconstruction.

The Enlightenment displaced God (as the guarantor of the epistemology) with the *ratio* and its totalizing functions (delegated to an autonomous rational subject), and associated "the rational" with "the truth." Thus, the rationalization of reality guaranteed its truthfulness on both the empirical and theoretical level, as the intellectual development of the "Enlightenment project" erected its fundamental epistemological assumptions, namely, that knowledge is certain, objective and good as well as accessible to the human mind.¹⁵

As rationalism subjugated with self-confidence all reality to its epistemological principles, it claimed it in the light of the "Copernican revolution" as a domain of unlimited experimental investigation and taming through technological control. The words of Francis Bacon, "knowledge itself is power" became the banner under which rationalism undertook the experiment of systematical totalization and centralization of the world (which was assumed to be natural, understandable, observable, and therefore predictable, and controllable); and thus, stereotyped, trivialized and limited existence as routinely unified and governed by scientifically discerned principles.¹⁶ The modernists'

¹⁵ About the fundamental rationalistic assumptions see: James M. Kee, Postmodern Thinking and the Status of Religions. *Religion and Literature*, No. 22 (Summer-Autumn 1990), p. 49. Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 4.

The phrase "Enlightenment project" was constructed by Jürgen Habermass, to designate the rationalistic intellectual quest of Modernity in its attempt to bring a systematic management and improvement of human existence through scientific and technological development.

¹⁶ As Leslie Thiele points out in Thinking Politics: Perspectives in Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Political Theory (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 69, Modern science was born in the midst of the passionate fight of rationalism and its experimental investigations against any kind of authority. Reflecting upon the sense of gap between experience and knowledge, and the preoccupation of the

epistemological centrism gravitated existence to its rational internalization, leaving it without a transcendent alternative, without the possibility for an exodus from its scientifically defined boundaries, and thus, without objective (self-distant, over-viewing) focus for self-reflection and self-knowing. This seems to be one of the Modern paradoxes of rationalism: the self-objectification of the knowledge-subject, as an intentional investigator of reality, becomes impossible because of logical limits placed upon him/her by the rational materialistic reconstruction of reality. This fact, however, questions the validity of the entire rationalistic ambition of the Modern Project.

This triumph of epistemological self-confidence in Modernism, is at the same time paralleled with an anthropological self-assuredness.¹⁷ Modernism celebrates humanity as the master of the world, free to explore, grasp, control and transform its reality. This freedom, however, in the light of the Renaissance's origination of "secular" humanism, is understood by Modernity largely in individual terms. It is perceived as an autonomous, self-sufficient and self-determining existence outside any communal tradition¹⁸ (since the communal existence is closely associated and identified with religious convictions and values, contextualizing humanity in a common sacred story on its origin and purpose). In contrast to Modernity (for which the modern human being was initiated within the Enlightenment's process of liberation from irrational, dogmatic

modernists' philosophical thought with it, Steven Conner states that: "the modernist period is often created with the discovery or rediscovery of those intensities of experience which had for long been concealed or distorted by false structures of understanding." He goes further to point out that: "...if one way of characterizing modernist culture and modernity in general is in terms of its discovery of experience, than another way is to see it as the movement when self-consciousness invaded experience." Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary. Second edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Backwell Publishers, 1997), p. 4.

¹⁷ J. R. Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age (Downer Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1995), p. 20.

¹⁸ Grenz, *Ibid.*

prejudice), for Christianity the human being is *contemporary* in its essence since the very day of its fall and banishment from the Garden of Eden (for there has not been a rudimentary change in human nature after this episode). While the modern autonomous subject is his/her own constructor, inventor and redeemer, the story of Genesis establishes the sense of human dependence and need of salvation, which has its source and completion “in “and “through” an external, transcendent source of truth and being.¹⁹ Therefore, the Biblical story had to be disregarded as mythological for the sake of the rational integrity of the humanistic project.

The validation of the redemptive secular history of the autonomous rational subject is encapsulated within the Modernity's historical self-confidence identified as an inevitable conquest of reality and its transformation through an unstoppable progress. Besides being scientific and humanistic, Modernity is inherently progressivist, devotedly believing that the world (and humanity) are constantly changing for the better. This improvement is based upon the belief in the unlimited capacity of the human mind to accumulate knowledge and therefore to perfect its capability of control over the natural world through the means of technological developments and moral evolution, consequent to the improvement of material conditions.²⁰

The principal of progress became the point in which Modernity finalized its breaking with tradition, or as it stands in its historical philosophical record, "a point of

¹⁹ Thiele, p. 71-2. The author emphasizes that: "The Renaissance reached its peak in Galileo's and Bacon's time. By then the privileged throne of humankind at the center of God's creation, like the privileged position of the earth at the center of the solar system, was crumbling. Yet, humanism could maintain its celebration of human values and human spirit because it aimed to unlock the secrets of the universe through human ingenuity, that is to say, through science and reason."

²⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

rebellion against the Ancients.”²¹ The Ancients expressed a nostalgia for the good old days – the Golden Age – in which everything was harmonized and perfect. They argued that “the Classical” is distinct with beauty, truth, and grace foreign to the contemporary. Modernity, however, argues that knowledge is progressive, and as such empowers each next generation with the epistemological capacity of its predecessors, as it further perfects and develops it into a new level of higher quality. Therefore (in its attempt for historical self-assertion and legitimization) Modernism concludes that there is a deepening chasm between the past and present, and hurries to disclaim the past as a valuable dimension of human existence. This conclusion is justified by the epistemological method of Modernity, for according to it, if the conclusions are properly reasoned (scientific and scholarly) they are true!

Paradoxically, it is precisely the march towards progress (in its conquest of the material world) that produced the results which, in turn, placed under question the ethical content of Modernity and opened the avenue for its deconstructive critique.

Along these lines of thought, the humanistic intellectuals understood and proclaimed modern society as a self-legitimizing construct based upon self-generated principles, externally independent and arrogantly dismissive towards their historical precursors. Ironically, this self-definition becomes the presupposition for self-limitation and self-entrapment, producing an ongoing crisis in Modernity (battling depression and self-alienation). As Jürgen Habermas summarizes it:

“... modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has

²¹ A.K.M. Adam. What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 2-3.

to create its normativity out of itself. Modernity sees itself cased back upon itself without any possibility of escape." ²²

Thus, the Modern concept of the self-making of society was coined with the term *autonomy* – as a saturated expression of the modern essence and determination. Humanism's construct of *autonomy*, however, developed a specific intrinsic duality. On the one hand, autonomy functioned as an interior dimension of reason-centered totality of the social order, subordinating all components of the system (and their action) to that totality. On the other hand, Liberalism propagated individualism as the foundation of authentic human freedom, based upon the right of personal autonomy in relation to social centrism. These extremes were further antagonized by Modernity's rationalistic differentiation of reality, decomposing its totality in separate elements, standing in scientifically argued and rationally defined hierarchical systems, classifications and correlations (distinctly different, yet codependent, and therefore un-free "to be").

Feeling alienated from the whole, yet desperately enslaved by its rational claims for dominion, the separate elements (individuals) accumulated the ideological motivation to generate social transformation which would reconstruct the totality in a harmonizing, reenergizing way, resolving the tension between the two visions of autonomy.

The idea of inducing a reconstruction of the differentiated totality into an organic whole, found one of its expressions in the birth of Romanticism. It attempted to reconstruct the social totality by overcoming Modernity's resistance to unity.²³

²² Habermas, 1987, p. 7.

²³ John McGowan, Postmodernism and its Critics (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 4 "...romanticism can be characterized as the attempt to create the

Romanticism reached to the use of arts as a medium for construction and mediation of a holistic vision for transformation of Modernity. Paradoxically, the autonomy of art (through its virtue of being free and independent in its creativity from any totality) was employed as a strategy for constructing the whole.

Driven by its internal tensions, Modernism has an extensive historical record of rehearsing the complaints – both of high Romanticism and of Realism – against its commercial culture. However, as John McGowan correctly argues, “Modernism... offers no distinctive transformative vision of its own; instead, different modernists recycle different visions of high romanticism’s radical political utopias.”²⁴

The emergence of the artistic avant-gardes was associated with determination for open confrontation in seeking strategies for institutional transformation. While criticizing and challenging the institutions’ ethical commitment and motivation, the avant-gardes failed to deconstruct the institution of modern art, a project which was later successfully undertaken by Postmodernism.

- In an attempt for self-preservation and self-sustenance, the era of Modernism generated various strategies for social transformation, approaching reality either from above – through spiritual, ethical, intellectual means, or from below – through materialistic constructs (the proletarian revolution, the "id", etc.). In all cases, however, the differentiated totalized Modern structure guaranteed the exercise of strict control and guidelines from above, thus making the vision of freedom for unity *chimerical* and distant from the domain of corporate human existence. Being unable to provide

ethical totality of society through a revitalized mythology conveyed to the people in poetry and other art.”

²⁴ Ibid, p. 8

liberating experience (which to overcome the rational social limits and fragmentation into a mutual embrace), the modern arts' romantic dreams of purity and authentic freedom were utilized in the further dismembering of reality to its dehumanizing extreme, by serving as an ideological inspiration manifested as dogmatics for nationalistic passions, culminating in militant totalitarian dictatorships and violent ethnic intolerance, thus producing suffering, injustice and social despair.

In the light of the above brief outline of some of Modernity's basic aspects, Postmodernism employs the methods of Deconstruction to challenge the modern status quo by inducing disruption within its hierarchical totality through questioning its constructive principles in their claims for truthfulness. It, further, brings affirmation, empowerment and validation to the voice and content of the suppressed, marginalized, differential components within that totality, thus shifting its meaning towards its limits and defining its essence through its boundaries.

As a result of Deconstruction's application, Postmodernism (being itself a product of the Modernity's despair and discontent) challenges the modern priorities (individual and corporate) concluding that there is sufficient evidence for negation of Modernity's moral claims and commitments, and unveiling the repressive, subjective character of its institutional constructs, and its lack of resources and will for authentic liberation.²⁵

Further, it challenges Modernity's global worldviews (e.g. Capitalism, Liberalism, Christianity, Marxism, Nazism, Islam, Humanism, etc.) in their totalitarian, manipulative approach towards all dimensions of existence, and dismisses them all 'as logocentric',

²⁵ Alaine Touraine, *Modernity and the Subject*. Paper presented to the International Sociological Association Congress, Madrid, Spain, July 10, 1990.

transcendental totalizing meta-narratives, that anticipate all questions and provide predetermined answers,²⁶ refusing humanity the right of personal, contextual experience and freedom of interpretation which bursts beyond the limits of the narrative's political agenda. In fact, by naming "grand narratives" the philosophical voices dominating the 18th and 19th century ("such as Dialectic of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth"), Jean-Francois Lyotard goes further to define "post-modern" as "incredulity towards metanarratives."²⁷

Meta-narratives are the apologetics and dogmatics for establishment of institutions and centralization of power, claiming the right to govern the entire realm of inter-human enterprise; intolerant and oppressive towards its opponents and critics, defined by it as "different" and therefore as "opposite" to its vision. As Foucault argues, there is something monstrous in an existence of a classified order, which excludes any possibility for an existence of an ordering principal outside of itself.²⁸

Deconstructing the Modern worship of progress (and its historically disillusioning anthropocentrism) Postmodernism questions the supremacy of present over the past, of the modern over the pre-modern. The prefix "post"²⁹ in Post-modernism is an indication for going beyond the boundaries of the modern, both in futuristic and retrospective direction. Thus, Post-modernism, has the self-consciousness of being both "future" and

²⁶ Rosenau, p. 6.

²⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. XXIII – XXIV.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, On Order of Things, p. XVI.

²⁹ See Graham Word's book The Postmodern God (Malden, Massachusetts: Backwell Publishers, 1997), p. XXV, for some interesting linguistic analogies between the English prefix "post" and the Greek prefix "ana."

“past.” The Post-modern (as in a Freudian psychoanalysis) is concerned with the therapeutic re-reading of the past, recollecting and reinterpreting the repressed, and affirming the freedom “to be” in the present, while incapacitating humanity to indwell the future.

This transcendentalism provides Post-modernism with a viewpoint for reflective critical deconstruction of Modernity, as well as with the ideological exodus out of its totalitarian rationalism. The transcendental dimension of formation of the Post-modern ethos challenges the modern classified fragmentation of rational organization of reality. Thus, by affirming its own radically interdisciplinary character, Post-modernism celebrates the organic harmonization and wholism of existence (in its inseparably interrelated, mutually penetrating dimensions: spiritual, social, communal, etc). It deconstructs and aborts the idea of the authoritative, autonomous Subject as a center of invention and interpretation of life, and substitutes it with life itself – with its complexity, diversity, enigmatic eccentricity and infinitely creative metamorphosis into a surprising and wondrous otherness. Therefore, Post-modernism displaces the centrality of the consumerist, colonizational individualism with “conversational” communitarianism.³⁰ Further, Post-modernism explores the nostalgia and hunger for authentic community as a social and political humanizing necessity.

³⁰ Robert Nash, Answering the “Virtucrates”: A Moral Conversation of Character Education (New York: Columbia University, 1997). The author of this Postmodern work points out that: as a modern political philosophy communitarianism is derived from the *Republic* of Plato and from Hegel, and his development of the idea of the Spirit (Geist). As Nash states: “Against the Enlightenment claim that the self-willing individual is the center of the Universe, Hegel argued that the individual is actually a “social subjectivity,” a “collective subject,” a product of a “complex social inheritance” that is continually evolving.” (p. 55) Thus, for Hegel no individual exists independently. Individual identity is a dialectical outcome from inter-human co-relatedness.

The authentic Post-modern community attempts to nurture authentic individuals by affirmation of freedom for uniqueness and otherness versus unification, inter-human sociality versus egocentrism, tolerance and mutual corporate acceptance versus violent competition for self-sufficiency and supremacy. This communal vision does not aim for the extinction of the Subject but rather for the birth of the Post-modern individual as the return of a New Subject.³¹ This thought presents a dimension of Post-Modern deconstruction in which it is employed as a maternal womb for conceiving, nurturing, sheltering and shaping the embryo of the Post-modern humanity. The Post-modern subject is a creation of a dialectical communication with its context. He/she is a dialogical presence within which the open-ended post-modern (con)text meets the open-ended personal (internal) human (con)text in a discourse of mutual interpretation, formation and transformation. In this respect, the moral character of the Post-modern subject outlines an expansion beyond the liberal virtues (of fairness, tolerance, personal autonomy, etc.) to the domain of Post-modern virtues like: “a sensitivity to the realities of incommensurability, indeterminacy, and non-foundationalism”; dialectical and hermeneutical awareness.³² The “conversational virtues” nurtured by the Post-modern community are essential to the communal existence of the “New Subject” since they represent the pluralistic guidelines in the dialogical formation of the Post-modern social presence (and thus, in the Post-modern project for social transformation). Among those virtues, Robert Nash outlines as most significant: hope, confidence and trust in conversational processes and purposes; courage in moral conversation; faith in “the work of others, even while we criticize their ideas”; self-denial expressed in “the

³¹ Rosenau, p. 21.

³² Nash, p. 163.

capacity to surrender ourselves to the sake of the better opinion; charity “defined as finding a way to understand and respect other view points, overcoming the temptation to disregard them as inferior.”³³

This brief account on the birth and formation of the Post-modern subject also presents an outline of the teleological focus and “*dedifferentiating*”³⁴ dialectical approach of deconstruction in the Post-modern strategies for social transformation. It reflects its determination to abandon the search for all-encompassing triumphalistic meta-narratives and to dislocate the boundaries of rationalistic epistemological frames and ontological prejudices in order to liberate itself from the despotism of the hierarchal dehumanizing unification of Modernity. It strives toward a socio-cultural communal context in celebration of spontaneity and otherness, thus, giving the birth of a new, liberated for ‘being with the other’ humanity.

Paradoxically enough, the strong degree of consensus in the Post-modern discourse and the devotional promotion of its convictions has brought forth the formation of a new, total, comprehensive narrative, integrated and structured around a cultural condition in which supposedly “totality is no longer” thinkable.³⁵ Thus, the dialectic of deconstruction (and the dedifferentiation) constructs a new political agenda for the world (an alternative based on its own principles, orders and vision). Further, the Post-modern construct requires particular moral and ethical “maintenance” to secure its validation and self-perpetuation.

³³ Ibid., pp. 165-166.

³⁴ For an expounded thought on Post-modernity’s “dedifferentiation” as a deconstructive contra-punct to the Modernity’s differentiation, see Paul Heelas, *Introduction to Differentiation and Dedifferentiation*, pp. 2-9 in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

³⁵ Steven Conner. ,p. 9.

Therefore, the Post-modern claim for pure and uninhibited pluralism and tolerance is overstated and illusory (after all, it is based upon intolerance towards the centrality of any other version of a 'grand-narrative'). Finally, Post-modernism is still predominantly a 'First World' phenomenon as well as an ideological product of a high-tech, economically prosperous late Capitalism, and developed as a counter-reaction to the cultural legitimization of the alienating effects of the affluent "informational society" through seeking a new avenue for social reconstruction and reincarnation of ethical collectivity. On the one hand, this fact clearly asserts the cultural relativism of Post-modernity and its values. On the other hand, it demonstrates a lack of social political globality and narrowness of transformation vision, since it does not reach the ultimate social margins, namely those of the Second and Third Worlds. Obviously their eventual dislocation may endanger the cultural harmony (and its foundational economic enterprise) in the neo-colonialistic, capitalistic context, which produced and sustains the Post-modern cultural climate with its realm of Virtual Reality – immortal and infinite.

The Post-modern context stands in a clear contrast to the trivial daily struggle for survival of the marginalized citizens of the "global village", for whom the Post-modern sense of "virtual, cyber-freedom" can be reductively translated as freedom to obtain literacy, and the prosperous concept of ownership of a personal computer and other communication technology - as the sole ownership of a cow, a farming tool, or a daily piece of bread.

Victor Burgin correctly indicates that erosion of certainty in 'First World' Postmodernism (and its abandonment of the universal horizon of morality and values) contradicts the continuous domestic struggles on moral principles elsewhere in the

world, further stating: "moral certainty and political necessity is not, of itself dissolved in the 'restless flux' of Postmodernism's 'anything goes'. . . The end of 'grand narratives' does not mean the end of either morality or memory."³⁶

It seems that in its global placement over the socio-political topography of the contemporary world, Postmodernism serves as an example that the attempt to evacuate the sphere of universal values leads to an irrational embrace of opposites. However, the mutual coexistence of opposites (outside of a validating principle) always contains the potential for their mutual annihilation. It also, ironically enough, testifies for the continuing corrective force of "the collective ethical principles."³⁷

In the light of the above, a brief reflection on the central principle of Post-modern ethics would be a logical consecutive point for further attention in this work.

"The Other" as the Focal Point of Postmodern Ethics

The Postmodern view of ethics flows naturally from its arguments for philosophical deconstruction of Modernity's boundaries and hierarchies. It disclaims the ontological and epistemological foundations of Modernity's ethics as subjective (lacking self-transcendence and objectivity), fragmenting and antagonizing reality oppressive to humanity and nature, (and therefore) marginalizing, limiting, and dehumanizing

³⁶ Victor Burgin. The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity (London: MacMillan, 1986) p. 198.

³⁷ Conner, p. 276.

existence. Postmodern ethical construct starts its self-disclosure with negation of the modern spirit of *conquista* over the “other,” and violently ambitious “seizure of power over nature by human beings.”³⁸ The old imperial strategy “divide and conquer” is viewed as being the methodological principle of Modernity’s approach towards the multi-dimensional complexity of reality: an approach which colonized, systematized and framed life, thus alienating it from itself, and depriving it of its freedom “to be.”

The concept of ‘Christendom’ and its claim on virtue was dismantled alongside Modernity as a totalitarian construct, which has historically generated genocide and violence, thus further antagonizing humanity. It contributed to the division of the world into “us” and “the others” and did not hesitate to preserve itself by exterminating “the others” (e.g. in relation to anti-Semitism, Islam, religious nationalism, etc.).³⁹ In fact, the Biblical account of “Beginnings” is viewed by Postmodernism as dogmatic initiation and ideological foundation of Christendom’s divisive and fractious genetic nature. As Julia Kristeva insists, it is the Biblical God who inaugurates separation at the beginning of Creation, as He creates a division, which is also the mark of His presence.⁴⁰

Further, the story of Babel is singled out as an epitome of fragmentation and alienation from God and from one another. It is re-read as a textual memorial of the ultimate social initiation of “the other” and “the otherness” of the disruption of inter-

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann employs this terminology in describing the birth of the Modern World in his essay *Theology in the Project of the Modern World*, in *A Passion for God’s Reign*. Miroslav Volf, editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), p. 3.

³⁹ See Richard H. Roberts, *The Construals of Europe* in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Paul Heelas, p. 202.

⁴⁰ See Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love: Faith and Psychoanalysis*. trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

human dialogue and provocation towards mutual (cultural, racial, ethnic) negation, culminating in violence.

In its critical reflection on Modern differentiating totalization, Postmodernism picks up “the Other” (a product of the Modern project itself) and redefines it as an ethical exodus towards beyondness in regards to the moral corruption of Modernity. By decomposing margins and disclosing centers de-construction prepares the Gestalt for the emergence of the Postmodern vision of “the Other”; for in the process of cultivating inter(con)-textual open-endedness, “the text” flows into the margins and the margins indwell the text, thus respacing reality and its disruptions through birthing within it the vision for an organic cosmic unity.

In this respect, Postmodernism (especially clear in the works of Emmanuel Levinas) brings forth ontology (viewed as based upon the totality of human behavior, and not on the knowledge of the being in the act of its creation) as priority of philosophical meaning. Thus, for Levinas, the human being in its wholeness is ontology, as well as the truth for his/her being. At the same time, to be human means to be in togetherness with “the Other,” accepting him/her as oneself.⁴¹

In embracing “the Other” as a part of our being we embrace our delimitation and burst out of ourselves, overflowing into others. Thus, in “the Other” we encounter our possibility for infinity and transcendence, our self-beyondness, our exodus from the ego-capacity of the “I.” Further, in “the Other” we meet the future, and enter into a dialogical relationship with it, for as Levinas points out, “the present is future making

⁴¹ Neshev, p. 37.

itself present.”⁴² The gift of “the Other’s” presence is a graceful sharing of his/her being and thus, of his/her future with our present. In “the Other” one is able to find a point of absolute in regards to history, and while still remaining interior to history, when one human truly approaches “the Other” he/she is “uprooted from history”⁴³ and replanted into eternity. This inter-human existence is not just a construct of opposition between totalization and infinity, but a correlational expression of a concrete ethical stand. It is a dedication to life against death, to peace against war, to justice against injustice, to freedom against slavery, to humanness against dehumanization. In this inter-human plateau, time transcends its historical ends and is being transformed into a “messianic time where the perpetual is converted into eternal.”⁴⁴

The very drive towards transformation (understood by Levinas as fundamental for each human being and expressed in the “desire for the new” and “the intrinsic capacity for renewal”) is defined as desire and striving for “the other.”⁴⁵ The discontent from the present may generate both a groaning for the future, as well as a nostalgia for the past. Thus, in the act of inducing transformation, chronology becomes indifferent and irrelevant. The revival of an “old” element is equivalent to its meaningful renewal in the order of the “new” (even though chronology assigns it as belonging to the past). “In the nostalgia for origins the past returns in the imagination more new than it was in its

⁴² Emmanuel Levinas, Time and the Other, transl. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 122. See also p. 79.

⁴³ E. Levinas, Totality and Infinity, transl. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961), pp. 51-51. For Levinas, to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the “I” “means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.” The conversational relation with the Other is “a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation,” but it is also “a teaching.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285. Levinas, however, does not discuss the nature of eternity. He leaves us at the end of his book with the question: “Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of messianic consciousness?” The question remains unanswered!

⁴⁵ Levinas, Time and the Other, p. 121.

present, and purely temporal novelties exist that are straightaway and old.”⁴⁶ In any case, transformation is conceived and generated in the longing for “the other” (or otherness) and is actualized in its incarnation within the present.

Therefore, in the being of “the Other,” we are also challenged towards transformation which is actualized in the embrace of the event of “the other” – a self-exchange of love and acceptance which reconstructs our personal being in an open-endedness in self-transcendence, that is yet infinitely immanent and existential. Then, future and eternity overflow into our present and conform us to their boundless freedom “to be” and “to become,” and our daily life is redefined in the light of receiving the gift of an ecstatic consciousness about personal freedom by facing and entering into the infinity of “the Other.”

One of the natural questions which arises from the Postmodern view of ethics is about the establishment of the relational balance between self-giving into “the Other” (and in reverse absorbing “the Other” into oneself) without being assimilated, disintegrated, and terminated as a distinct personality.⁴⁷ How do we defend our humanness (in willing vulnerability) in the encounter with “the Other” when it presents a potential danger for our annihilation? Here we can consequently raise more questions. Is the Postmodern ethical demarginalization of the “Self” within “the Other” relative or utopic and artificially preconditioned, or could it, indeed, substantialize its application as an authentication of the Postmodern inter-contextual discourse? Can the Other-

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Levinas also raises the question: “How can a being enter into relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other? Time and the Other, p. 77. He contextualizes this question, within the relationship with death as “the other,” as alienation of one’s existence. The question is given priority, for it represents “the very problem of the preservation of the ego in transcendence.”

centered Postmodern ethics serve as a moral foundation (an ideological content for global social transformation) or is it limited to the sphere of the individual contextualization (and thus remains entrapped within the vast modern condition, which is its point of initial departure)?

The last question can be restated in the following manner, “does Postmodernism contain the ethical capacity to step beyond Modernity, or is it just an event of vogue reinterpretation and recycling of the Romanticism’s Utopias?”

As was earlier noted, Postmodernism paradoxically enough (since it is in contradiction with its deconstructive claims) integrates and consolidates itself around the presentation of a “new” meta-narrative (about the impossibility of meta-narratives!) and promotes it as the “new” (thus, supposedly better) project for reconstruction of reality. This new vision of the world requires its own set of absolutes with pre-constructed answers, so that it may gain the power for survival and self-perpetuation within the polyphonic, pluralistic atmosphere, which is an outcome of its own ideological efforts. This is where Postmodernism meets its biggest temptation (and fails to overcome it), for the principle of deconstruction assumes a continual self-deconstruction versus ideological self-integration and self-affirmation. In its attempt to formulate a sustaining “story about stories”⁴⁸ and utilize it as hermeneutical lenses through which to reinterpret past, present, and future, Postmodernism steps out of the realm of the immaterial (the realm of the spirit, and of the ideas) into a process of self-materialization

⁴⁸ “A story about stories” is a terminology, borrowed from Walter Trueff Anderson, Reality Isn't What it Used to Be (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), p. 267. For him, to develop tolerance means to develop a “story about stories,” a perspective on all our values and beliefs. Anderson concludes: “We need such a story desperately now, as much as we need sound environmental management and respect for human rights.”

and institutionalization, with the assertion of its concrete political platform and agenda, seemingly able to display potential for the successful accomplishment of a vast social transformation. The ethical foundation of such a platform must be capable of incorporating the diverse dimensions of existence into a meaningful, coherent wholeness, empowered to enter its better future, equipped with the reality-unifying answers which are able to face and bridge the void (with its fruitful silence) on the way to infinity.

This line of thought brings us back to the initial question about the presentation of an authentic self in the act of mutual embrace of an overflow into “the Other.” In seeking an answer to this question, Postmodernism (with a gesture lacking originality, yet supplying theoretical resolution) reaches back to the Christian tradition, and more concretely, to the resources of hagiography.⁴⁹ Since one of the problems of modern moral theories is that they do not result in moral action, and thus, do not present a relevant, satisfactory solution to the constantly expounding sphere of moral problems, Postmodern ethics turns towards the saintly response to the Other as a resource for self-integration and validation.

The saintly life presents a powerful deconstruction of the materialistic modern construct. It entails non-defensive vulnerability in placing oneself with the entirety of his/her being-spiritual and physical (as well as all material possessions) at the disposal of the Other. It is a self-offering as a tangible gift of life to the Other, in the name of the

⁴⁹ In her fascinating book, Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990), Edith Wyschogrod explores the concept of sainthood on the background of the Postmodern definition of ethics as “the sphere of relations between self and the Other” (p. XXI).

Other's lives. In the light of the pluralistic aspiration of Postmodern ethics, Edith Wyschogrod offers the following understanding of sainthood:

"Saints lives should not be imagined as emanating from some specific religious community but as found across a broad spectrum of belief systems and institutional practices. A saintly life is defined as one in which compassion for the Other, irrespective of cost to the saint, is primary trait. Such lives unfold in tension with institutional frameworks that may nevertheless later absorb them. Not only do saints contest the practices and beliefs of institutions, but in more subtle way they contest the order of narrativity itself. Their lives exhibit two types of negation: the negation of self and the lack of what is needful but absent in the life of the Other."⁵⁰

Hagiography presents an alternative to the monological character of moral theory by offering the comprehension of saintly life as a communicative practice. The hagiographic narrative and its implications to contemporary existence incorporates into itself its immediate receiver (with his/her contextualized interpretation), and thus bridges the gap between theory and practice by generating a model for moral action (and offering through that a needful revision of ethics).

Since "the Other" becomes a place where ethical existence occurs, he/she is the sphere where practice corrects theory and challenges its claim on truth. It is also the context of realization of a hagiographic imperative: since in the act of the saint making him/herself fully available to the Other, a moment of challenge and calling towards sainthood is empowered and displayed in the imperative "Come, follow me!" through the benevolence of self-giving. This saintly action is a "labor in the form of dedication to the Other" – a total involvement of one's being in the needs and interests of others.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. XXIII.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 85.

This labor involves suffering, rejection, and intense pain produced both by the overcoming of itself in the name of the other and by the possible violation, misuse or negation that can be exercised by the other. The saintly response to that suffering is nonviolent, creatively affirming to "the other(s)," thus providing him/her with an infinite hopeful possibility for self reconstruction and transformation, leaving them a space for an exodus from their enslaving social stereotypes (and thus, offering a way of liberty towards authentic humanness). This process naturally involves reinterpreting (and renouncing the modern concept) of power for the sake of free and joyful self-expression of life and its celebration "in" and "with" the other.

Love stands in the center of the Postmodern understanding of sainthood as its source of motivation, generation and empowerment. Through the power of love one is equipped with a new epistemological methodology making possible "the knowing of the other" or as James Olthuis phrases it: "a knowing otherwise, a knowing of the heart with the eye of love."⁵² For Olthuis, love is the source of all affirmation, a preliminary pledge to "the Other" (and his/her context) which precedes any engagement in "language and action" as well as a sustaining principle of the existence of all variations of life in their interrelated togetherness. In light of the Christian tradition, incorporated into this vision of love, it is a gift and a call from God, which gracefully holds the world together.

The knowing otherwise of self-sacrificial, self-giving love within the dialectical exchange between the "I" and the "Other" is a foundation for the ideological (theological) summary which Olthuis offers as a programmatic for postmodern transformational (inter-relational) ethics:

⁵² James H. Olthuis, editor, Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 1.

"Knowing otherwise is meeting, not mastery.
Knowing otherwise is mutuality, not competition.
Knowing otherwise is of the body, not limited to mind.
Knowing otherwise is ethics, intimacy with, not power over, the other.
Knowing otherwise is love; opening, not closure; connection, not fusion; drawing nigh not distancing.
Knowing otherwise is celebrating with, and suffering with other.
Knowing otherwise is spirit, shaping love even as we are shaped by Love.
Knowing otherwise is spiritual process of mutual transformation in which everything arises.
Knowing otherwise is to take the risk of loving the other, the risk of meeting in mutuality."⁵³

In this regard, Postmodern theology asserts itself upon the stand of the dialectic of deconstructive differentiation, pluralistic eclecticism and tolerance (as a motivation of the attempt to develop a "Story about stories") integrated around the effort to correlate epistemology, ethics and spirituality within the supremacy of the dialogical, saintly relationship (of mutual responsibility) between the "I" and the other(s).

It takes a determined, critical stand against ontology of power and violence and emphasizes the alternative of love as a mature ethical response to the call and the suffering of the other. Its spirituality is based on the fact that from God, as God-with-us, flows our humanness; as "human being" means "being-with-others."⁵⁴ Yet, in the pictorial tapestry of general postmodern theology with its various hermeneutical sources of eclectic spirituality in religiosity, each one of the borrowed faith terminologies (including the ones traditional for Christianity) needs a further contextual definition, since it often departs and significantly differs from its original ideological content. For example, depending on its immediate Postmodern context, "God" can be understood

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

as: a mediator of *agape* embodied in a loving (Psycho) analyst and his/her therapeutic personal presence in the life of "the other" (Julia Kristeva); "The Other" as the source and content of the new ontology (Emmanuel Levinas); a post-Nietzschean "übermensch" who in his/her (expressed) genius will affirm life in its pluralism and unlimited difference; "the Being" as the ground of identity and wholeness (Heidegger); that which escapes us and makes us wonder – our own divinity and troubling mystery (Ferdinand de Saussure); the Judeo-Christian God in his capacity of being God of the victims, of the marginalized and the ostracized, Who returns forgiveness for violence (Rene Girard); etc.

In spite of this plurality of content, and its strong negation of "grand narratives," the Postmodern ethical construct obviously continues to borrow (consciously and/or unconsciously) images, metaphors and symbols from the biblical narrative (and from its soteriological and eschatological linguistics). Perhaps the explanation of this fact is in the assumption that the Postmodern deconstruction and critique of the totalization claim of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its meta-narrative is motivated (and provoked) not so much by the biblical content, as by the historically developed anthropocentric (and thus idolatrous) human institutions (within Christendom) which claims the Christian cause as their foundational validation and apologetic resource. The deconstruction targeted these institutions' ethnocentricity, cultural subjectivity and aggressive, arrogant conquest for unification of the world under their interpretation of the truth, reinventing themselves as a social medium for humanization and meaning (and thus identifying themselves with God's Kingdom and His reign).

The very nature and initiation of church institutionalization and denominationalism lies in the attempt to establish their particular (subjective, culturally contextualized) view of Christianity as a standard of absolute truth, and to proselyte into it (or impose upon) the rest of Christendom, based on the claim for Biblical authenticity (thus, on containing the eternal salvific content of truth and validity). Each separate institution (or denomination), however, presents only the culturally predisposed interpretation of the Biblical content (an interpretation generated and marked by the context of particular sociopolitical, economic, ethnic, racial, linguistic, etc. environment). This process of the emerging of various versions of interpretation consequently leads to the deepening fragmentation and antagonism within Christendom. It supplies the apologetics for the rise of ecclesiastical, political passions, unscrupulous negation of the other and arrogant proselytism, employment of imperial methods of social maintenance, control, and manipulation, separatism and self-centered triumphalism.

Along this line, we may conclude that the multitude of Christian denominations are expressions of subjective inter-contextual interpretations of the Bible's narrative, interpretation based primarily on monological reading of the narrative, rather than on a dialogical reflection between the narrative and the re-interpreting context.

Therefore, until we do learn the language of "the other" (his/her cultural metaphors and clichés) in the attempt to comprehend their interpretation of the "Sacred Story," until we do make the effort for a dialogue with "the different" through recovering our common beginning in the Story (and transcending the human barriers erected to guard the transmission of the denomination's interpretation of the Story rather than of the Story itself), until we do integrate ourselves around Christ's character and mission

as a focus of our personal presence, we will not be capable of communicating one unifying and coherent narrative to the world – a Story powerful enough to indwell us with the courage to overcome ourselves and reach to “the other” in a life-transforming and love-affirming communicative action. For, the authentic retelling becomes possible not by its interpretation but by its incarnation. When the Word becomes flesh, it enters our context and deconstructs it by becoming its center. It also relocates the contextual margins, thus becoming our interpreter as well as exodus out of our context into the Sacred Story itself.

The Biblical concept of sainthood and saintly life can be summarized as “the Word in flesh” – the Word (Christ the Lord) embodied, incarnated within us for the sake of “the other” and his/her liberation from sin and death, from oppression and despair, being ushered into the just, sovereign reign of God through embracing the Word as the truth, the way, and the life. For, to love this God, means to love one’s neighbor as oneself. Or, as it is in the light of the Wesleyan tradition: there is no holiness, but social, and its visible expression in the perfect love towards one another makes Christ and his Kingdom present and available (within the communion of the saints) as an event of social transformation for a despairing and hopeless world.

In this respect, reflecting back on the Postmodern critical elaboration upon the Biblical account of the story of Babel, we are able to challenge it with an alternative Christian reading of the story.⁵⁵ Its traditional interpretation as a tragic record of humanity’s corporate idolatry and God’s severe judgment must be reviewed and comprehended also in the light of God’s gracious and just providence, of His infinite

⁵⁵ Middleton and Walsh, p. 44.

creativity in love and covenantal commitment towards humanity. God's act of striking down the united human project of striving towards self-divination can be viewed as a powerful deconstruction of one monolithic totalizing (very Postmodern-like) celebration of human progress and its self-centered (numb to the external struggles for existence) imperial triumphalism.

Thus, the deconstruction of Babel could be interpreted as God's intervention on behalf of humanity's future by supplying a historical provision and space for formation of genuine cultural and ethnical diversity. In the Babel-event God established the precedent of creating a context for liberating humanity from totalitarian unification and assimilation, toward meeting the challenge of the "new" basic inter-human need for mutual understanding and acceptance. By placing humanity in the midst of communication-impossibility, this event supplied the urgency of an environment for development of translation, interpretation and a dialogue between personalities and cultures. It necessitated the effort to learn the language, symbols, and cultural landmarks of the other's existence in order to be able to participate in one-another's being, and thus, also "to be" oneself. It shaped the principles of inter-human exchange and modeled the Gestalt for cultivating an authentic humanness, emancipated to respond to the call of "the other" with empathy, tolerance, mutual acceptance, and self-giving.

In the light of the Postmodern condition, the act of destroying Babel could be raised as a metaphor and expression of the negation of humanism's claim to inherent prosperity and unlimited capacity for perpetual, progressive social transformation. It labeled Babel as a monument of emptiness and alienation, erected to separate

humanity from God to cut the umbilical cord of dependence on the divine presence, and to proclaim oneself as self-maker. The striving towards self-divination of humanity affirmed this alienation from God in human civilization, which, consequently, filled with void (with anti-sociality and aloneness) the inter-human relational context.

The emergence of the inter-human dialogue after Babel requires negation of violence, exploitation, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism. It rejects the possibility of mono-cultural interpretation of reality as a hermeneutical imperative. It rejects the monological understanding of existence and questions its authenticity and truthfulness, dismissing it as tyrannical and abusive. This dialogue should provide mutual, cultural interpretation in the light of the common Sacred Story, allowing it to incorporate us within it and to reinterpret us (in the midst of our diversity) in the light of our common beginning, present, and future. God in His nature of being the *alpha* and *omega* of all existence, is the center of integration and affirmation of the diversity created by Him (and its incorporation under His sovereign reign). The Body of Christ, shaped and incarnated by the Holy Spirit, is lifted up as the celebration of this diversity in unity of love and self-giving, as the reality of the Kingdom raptures it into the future of all creation.

The Postmodern Concept of Truth, History, Time, and Space

The Postmodern “liberation” project stands upon the denial of the existence of absolute truth (for such is perceived as being an embodiment of Modernity with its

scientific rationality, order, and reason). The Postmodern philosophy varies in its degree and intensity of negation of truth. One of its extremes is associated with the dismissal of its possibility of meaning and coherence.⁵⁶ For, in Derrida's words: "There is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it. Even if it should be for me, about me, truth is plural."⁵⁷

Postmodernism argues that the absence of truth is a socially reconstructive liberating activity as it leaves reality open and available for "complexity and complication."⁵⁸ Therefore, (for Postmodernism) the claim on truth is a claim for political power towards social manipulation for the sake of one's self-interest. This truth becomes an ideology for social re-arrangements, a tool for propaganda and totalitarian subjugation of the realities of others to one's personal reality.⁵⁹ For Postmodernism, the claim for absolute truth is thus "a form of terrorism."⁶⁰ It threatens and silences its opponents, "eliminates the argument of the other" (Lyotard), manipulates and corrupts reality for the sake of retaining control.

The definition of reality within a particular layout of truth is a self-assertion of its author (for each truth is authoritarian and subjective). Since Postmodernism rejects the centrality of the subject, and the validity and primacy of the author in relation to the content and intent of a text (or reality), the truth about it is an issue of interpretation.

⁵⁶ Lyotard is typical in this respect (e. g. The Postmodern Condition)

⁵⁷ Jaques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 103.

⁵⁸ David Couzens Hoy, Splitting the Difference: Habermas's Critique of Derrida . *Praxis International*, 8 (4), pp. 447-464.

⁵⁹ Foucault reflects on the interdependence upon the claim on truth and exercise of power, as well as on the ideological function of truth. Power/Knowledge . ed. C. Gordon, transl. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, and K. Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 132.

⁶⁰ Rosenau, p. 78.

Thus, there is not a single true reading of reality (for it would be incomplete, inadequate, lacking self-transcendence).

In consistency with the Postmodern view of representation, there is no truth that can represent reality. Yet, reality exists, and for many Postmodernists, it is associated with the culturally-contextualized, narrated forms of community-truth and its possibility within a limited domestic frame of reference. Therefore, the truth may vary from one context to another in the light of the communal ethos of its transmitters.

In this concept, there is not a problem with simultaneous existence of conflicting truths. There is just a simultaneous existence of various parallel worlds in which these truths have their hermeneutical validity.⁶¹ Logically, the following questions develop: Is there a single unifying reality or is all existence trapped in unintentional parallelism? If truth is a definition of the “meaning” and “being” of reality, does the absence of truth make reality absent? Then what about the reality of our personal being and its sense of self-identification? These are questions which overwhelm the “self” and create a space for both disillusioned apathy as well as endless imaginative, philosophical and artistic speculation.⁶²

⁶¹ Nelson Goodman, Of Mind and Other Matters (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 30ff. One of the main issues of critique about the Postmodern concept of truth is the argument that Postmodernism diminishes the difference between truth and error and thus, opens doors to nihilism. See Robert Scholes, Protocols of Reading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 56. Postmodernists, however, insist that they are not endorsing nihilism, but supplying a context for liberation. For, the absence of any possibility of truth (à la Derrida) makes totalitarianism impossible. See Joel Schwartz, Antihumanism in the Humanities, *The Public Interest*, (Spring 1999), pp. 29-44. Also Rosenau, p. 90.

⁶² Joseph Natoly, A Primer to Postmodernity (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 70-71. The author states: “...it is the indeterminacy of our saying in relevance to reality that converts fundamental truths – and all modified variations therefore – into challengeable narratives of truth. Selves are brought up within a clash of such narratives. So in the end, it is not some postmodern perversity that simply chooses

If we attempt to discover a Postmodern, comprehensive answer to these questions, it will involve the integration of various developments of Postmodernism such as: Heidegger's view of truth as "relational" (as it has to do not with certainty about presuppositions, but with "revelation" and "disclosure" of Being);⁶³ Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism (showing the impossibility to draw a distinctive line between reality and our linguistic-representation); Rorty's new-pragmatism (which perceives "what is right" in terms of "what is useful");⁶⁴ and Nash's moral conversation as a way of synchronizing meaning.

It seems that after all, for Postmodernism, reality becomes an inter-human, dialogical construct. It appears at the points of intersection of our contextual meaning with that of the others. It is an issue of discourse and agreement over the content of language and its relational authentication. Thus, reality is relative and is an issue of choice (as we believe in what is likable and useful for our immediate context), but it also involves our choice on behalf of the content and context of "the other" (resulting either in the freedom for disagreement or affirmation).

The issue of reflection upon the chronological metamorphosis within this reality brings us to the question about the Postmodern view of history. In self-consistency, Postmodernism negates conventional history (and in some cases history, per se) as well as the historical (methodological) approach towards the social dimension of existence. It condemns it as logocentric, ideologically manipulative, prejudiced, and a

to ignore fundamental truths of all stripes... but a recognition of the unreliability of our representing capacities, a pointing out of the distance between words and worlds."

⁶³ Heidegger, *Metaphysics as History of Being in The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 26.

⁶⁴ Richard Rorty, *Introduction: Pragmatism and Post-Nietzschean Philosophy in Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.

subjective source of propagating of one's world-view as a norm for political maintenance and social order.

The Modern view of history with its social function (of reflection and interpretation) assumes as its basis the existence of "reality, identity and truth," and therefore, is unacceptable within the philosophical foundation of the Postmodern project for transformation of existence.⁶⁵ History is perceived as a triumphalistic invention of the First World's civilization in celebration of its memory, and as a tribute to humanism and its progressivistic self-understanding. As such, it is considered to be oppressive and marginalizing to the other cultures and traditions.⁶⁶

History, according to Postmodernism, deludes us from the centrality and priority of the present, attempting to insert itself as its foundation and genetic heritage (thus, claiming that the present is rooted in history, and contains its experience within its historical self-identity and content). But since we live in the present and its contextuality, our identity is integrated in and derives from the contemporary (where "future is anticipated presence, and past a former presence"⁶⁷) and the historical impact on it is questionable – depending on the stand-point of interpretation. Therefore, history brings disruption within the present, especially in light of the fact that it attempts to link us to our past inadequacy (moral failures and compromises), burdening us with shame and guilt, and thus disabling us from an unhindered embodiment of the present.

Postmodernism argues that history is exhausted as a resource for therapeutical

⁶⁵ M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, p. 151.

⁶⁶ Rosenau, p. 90ff.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Culler, *Jacques Derrida*. In *Structuralism and Science: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*, edited by John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 162.

reflection and empowerment for transforming action; that we are desperate to forget our history (our past) in order to be liberated "to be." The deconstruction of the historical margins and the striving towards their beyondness is a Postmodern dialectical necessity for emancipation of humanity within its present. This is a push beyond the universal epistemology, in an attempt to rediscover and regain eternity.⁶⁸ For the breaking down of history's barricades will open existence to the beyondness from which eternity will inbreak and overflow the present, as the present also is absorbed by eternity.

How does Postmodernism reconcile this history-ending attitude with its inter-generational narrative-transmission of local community-identity (as common identity is being linked to common memory-transmission)? The answer is: through a new concept of reflection on the past (New History) as a Genealogical analysis. Genealogy does not interpret the past, it is rather a "history of the present in the sense that it finds its point of departure in problems relevant to current issues and finds its point of arrival and its usefulness in what it can bring to the analysis of the present."⁶⁹ In contrast to modern history, Genealogy is always present (for it is inherently contained in the nature and structure of the present). Therefore, it affirms the present (the being) in its undisrupted wholeness and self-harmony. The present contributes to the Genealogy and its further transformation and transmission. It participates in its formation and thus, penetrates

⁶⁸ Postmodernism often views history as a representation of the "loss of eternity." See Kamper Dietmar and C. Wuff, editors, Looking Back on the End of the World (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989).

⁶⁹ Julian Henriques, Wendy Holaway, Cathy Urwing, Couze Venn and Valerie Walkerdine, Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Religions, and Subjectivity (New York: Methuen, 1984), p.104. On Genealogies, see also Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 83.

both past and future. How then does this view of history and present reality correspond to the categories of time and space?

Derrida employs the term *chronophonism* as an indication of the Postmodern negation of the perception of time as chronological and linear sequence⁷⁰ (evolutionary or intentional). The Modern concept of time is dismissed as oppressive, limiting, controlling and imperative upon life, depriving it from its natural sense of celebrant joy and enslaving humanity in depressive boundaries of being. Instead, Postmodernism offers a view of time as disconnected and misaligned. It is comprehended as a boundless dimension of life where infinity constitutes its essence,⁷¹ and to be '*infinition*' (Levinas) means to exist without limits. The Postmodern time refuses to be arrested within rational, evolutionary totalization, and welcomes their *alterity*. As the temporary is being negated and overwhelmed by infinity, the Being is being liberated from its immediate temporal limits, and time is becoming an issue of choice for presence (or absence), for participation or nonparticipation.

The choice of time is an issue of self-identity, because it is "always the time told within the story you're in."⁷² Time is at the mercy of stories. It unfolds in our personal narratives and communal stories. Time is radically relational and, as Levinas defines it, it is "the non-indifference of one person to another, the proximity of the Other, an infinite distance without distance."⁷³ In this relational time, future is present through the Other,

⁷⁰ See Derrida, Positions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁷¹ Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 284.

⁷² Natoly, p. 76ff.

⁷³ Introduction by Richard A. Cohen, to Levinas' Time and the Other, p. 13.

as much as the past. "The presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face with the Other."⁷⁴

Therefore, time transcends chronology, for interfacing the future it also chooses the future thus generating a power for transformation of the present through its translation into the future (and vice versa). The liberating force of this perception of time is in its relativity, for we can skip fractions of time and penetrate others as the reality becomes an invention of our choice and preference.⁷⁵

What is then the relation between time and imagination? Could we invent time through our imaginary discourse about reality, and which reality will be more real in the light of the "realness" of time? If there is not an 'absolute time' and if time is rather a personal relative concept, then it frees us to move throughout it (as we are our own "time machine"), and there is "no important difference between the forward and backward directions of imaginary time."⁷⁶

Joseph Natoly raises a legitimate question: "Can we get stuck in time if time is told from within a narrative? Can a whole culture get stuck in time?"⁷⁷ What about our institutions which are established for the purpose of securing the transmission and perpetuation of the narrative, on which the legitimization of their existence depends? The Postmodern answer points out that the unfolding of time in the Other (as a different

⁷⁴ Levinas, Time and the Other , p. 79.

⁷⁵ For some of the Postmodern philosophical speculations on time, see: J. Baudrillard. Hunting Nazis and Loosing Reality. *New Statements*. February 19, 1988, pp16-17 and *The Anorexic Ruins* in Looking Back on the End of the World.

⁷⁶ Stephen Hawking. A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to the Black Holes (New York: Batman Books, 1988), p. 139, 143-44. The reader has to keep in mind that Hawking is not a Postmodern philosopher, but a theoretical physicist and mathematician, thus, presenting his thoughts about time as part of his scientific hypothesis.

⁷⁷ Natoly, p. 77.

narrative, as *alterity*) offers an exodus from our personal narrative and supplies a horizon of transcendence and possibility for transformation and open-endedness in our being and context which allows it to invade the future in the midst of the present.

As Rosenau points out:

“...to dismiss the post-modern challenge to conventional views of time as absurd would be a mistake because, ironically, it receives unexpected support from modern science. New perspectives on time in the universe, such as light years and cosmic dimensions, were barely imaginable a few years ago and they feed the skeptical post-modern feelings of vulnerability.”⁷⁸

In the light of the above, Postmodernism also challenges the conventional comprehension of the topographical layout of reality within time. Mark C. Taylor states that:

“To interrogate presence is to question both space and time...Time that lacks the present implies a space that is never present (though it is not simply absent). The space of Postmodernism is the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time.”⁷⁹

Postmodern geography cannot be mapped within bi-dimensionality. As all directions of eternity inbreak into the present, the issue of location and distance becomes irrelevant to the position of the being. Modern space is reconstructed into hyperspace (a place of dissolution of things) where pieces of presence are inter-related and inter-penetrated in a dramatically holistic way, so that the attempt to outline

⁷⁸ Rosenau, p. 68.

⁷⁹ Mark C. Taylor, *Back to the Future in Postmodernism – Philosophy and the Arts*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 13.

positions and locations (by appealing to latitude and longitude between different points) becomes impossible.⁸⁰

This concept of space resonates into the Postmodern political agenda for social transformation and negates the modern political fragmentation of the world (on First, Second and Third, with its geographical exclusion). It reconstructs our socio-economic maps and diminishes the locational barriers, thus emancipating the margins and dislocating the former centers of existence. This topographical action is based upon the assumption of equality between all locations of life (and equality of their significance, as all life is equally significant). It affirms the right of the space of "the other" with its cultural and social context, self-expression, and particular interpretive narrative about the universe.

The Postmodern critical revision of geography brings to the surface locations of hidden, silenced, suffering and dehumanization and challenges the managers of the Modern sociopolitical construct towards honesty, repentance and intentional initiative toward contextual transformation of these locations. Thus, Postmodernity provides them with a platform and a voice within the convention of the world's diversity and lifts up their truth as an equally legitimate perspective for reinterpreting our reality.

In the light of this brief observation of the Postmodern view of truth, history, time and space, we may summarize their critical reflection by stating that Postmodernism insists on the equality, interdependence and unity of all dimensions of existence. By abolition of metrics, temporality, historical subjectivity and scientific rationality Postmodernism believes that it liberates reality from its entrapment in modern

⁸⁰ See Frederic Jamson, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. *New Left Review*. No. 146. (July/ August, 1984), pp. 53-92.

multidimensional limitations and transforms it into a hyper-reality, which is delimited to transcend all rationalistic presuppositions and to infinitely reinvent itself towards centerless wholeness and harmonization. Thus, Postmodernism presents us with its ideology for redoing (transforming) reality, which in its essence is based upon a critical reflection, reinterpretation and negation of the foundations of the conventional modern construct. This ideology presents an eclectic philosophical composition with romantic, utopic, imaginative and apocalyptic nuances. It could be both depressing and inspiring, rapturing and excluding, providing a future or homelessness and confusion. Yet, it remains powerful enough to stamp and seal our contemporary times with its name and signature as a distinct era or episode in our desperate striving towards self-understanding, beyondness, immortality, infinity and eternity.

In this regard, it seems that the concept and realization of Cyberspace and 'virtual reality' presents the epitome of this ideological settlement, and therefore their comprehension is indispensable to our analysis and understanding of the Postmodern setting.

The Cyber-construct of the Virtual Postmodern World

As the Postmodern culture took advantage of Modernity's technological and scientific achievements, the terms "Cyberspace" and "Virtual Reality" became an indispensable part of the expounding techno-jargon of the informational society and its

enormous Internet traffic. Under the "New International Information Order" the ones who control the process of digitalization of communication and own the navigation rights for the "informational super-highways" are the new colonizers of the contemporary reality. For whoever controls larger amounts of information, controls a larger portion of the digital society per se.⁸¹

In light of this, many of the traditional social issues receive re-definition and re-contextualization. For example, the concepts of human rights, equality and freedom become also a function of the extent of freedom of choice and accessibility of information. In its 1986 report entitled Freedom and Equality of Access of Information, the American Library Association remarks:

"Knowledge is power. We have known that from the beginning. How freely and how equally citizens have access to knowledge determines how freely and how equally they can share in the government of our society and in the work and rewards of our economy."⁸²

The issue of emancipation in the information society introduced a new term, "the digital divide," which presented a socio-political reflection on the correlation between information accessibility and race, economic class, and geo-political location. The struggle for humanization of the immediate environment of the ones who are peripheral

⁸¹ Stacey L. Edgar, Morality and Machines: Perspectives on Computer Ethics (Sudbury, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1997), p. 346ff. Edgar reflects on the race of different private and government structures to establish possession of the content and control the development of informational traffic. See also Enrique Manet, *Microelectronics, Innovations and New International Order*. pp. 84-105 in Information Technology and a New International Order, Jorg Becker, editor (Sweden: Studentlitteratur AB, Chrtwell-Bratt Ltd., 1985).

⁸² ALA, Commission on Freedom and Equality of Access to Information. Freedom and Equality of Access of Information: A Report to the American Library Association (Chicago: ALA, 1986), p. 1.

to the prosperity of the informational society became associated with the development of strategies for narrowing the digital divide, through providing them with an opportunity for global Internet access.⁸³ Ironically, this endeavor did not resolve the already existing needs of the ones dislocated beyond the socio-economic and geo-political walls of the First World. It only offered one paradoxically disconnected and unrealistic Postmodern re-reading of their contexts through the lenses of Western prosperity.

Another issue, which presses towards the authenticity of personal freedom in the information society relates to the access of information about:

"... the type of information stored, who collects and stores it and why, and who else has access to it. This is freedom of access to (the so-called) *meta*-information. Without this freedom there may be no awareness that there is information to which freedom of access is required. There may be legal or moral rights to information access, but if we do not know about the information and its importance, these rights are of little value."⁸⁴

Thus, to our social phobias and suspicions was added one more frightening possibility: the misuse (or unauthorized use) of personal information (either correct or incorrect), surveillance and digital image manipulation.⁸⁵ In light of that, the information

⁸³ Currently, the US government is focused on implementing these new strategies for digital emancipation. However, in the effort to computerize the world of the outcasts and disadvantaged many tragic (in their paradoxality) social contrasts have surfaced. For example, in response to the criticism about the digital segregation, the government has established community computer centers providing informational access for the homeless, the ones in the urban ethnic-minority ghettos and the Indian reservations (where people often do not have a telephone line or running water). What an irony. Or is it an attempt to escape from the immediate social demand into the virtual tranquility?

⁸⁴ John Weckert and Douglass Adeney, Computer and Information Ethics (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 31.

⁸⁵ Electronic changes of images are scientifically undetectable, as soft-ware is capable of "tweening," "warping," "morphing," and retexturing photographic and other images. See David Duguid, *The Morality of Synthetic Realism*, a paper presented at Noosa Regional Galery conference (Tewantin, Queensland, Australia, March of 1994), p. 6. Also, William Mitchell. When is Seeing Believing? *Scientific American* (February, 1994), pp. 44-49.

society has been pressing toward the development of international legislation which could bring a sense of order and security within the realm of the accumulation and navigation of information.

The Internet (the symbol and substance of global communication) is expounding so rapidly that nobody knows how big it actually is.⁸⁶ As one of its architects, Vinton Cerf, remarks: "The global Internet is only a sample of the potential for the real information infrastructure to come. Its shape . . . cannot be predicted clearly."⁸⁷

The potentially limitless power and popularity of the Internet undoubtedly relates to the fact that it represents the ultimate (at least for now) "means of delivering personalized mass media." As Steve Jones points out:

"The Internet, as market metaphor, derives its power from the notion that the market is not only theoretically based but quite practically functional at the level of the individual, thanks to new technologies."⁸⁸

This sense of individualization of information is perhaps also one of the reasons why the Internet is so anarchic and control (or organization) resistant. It is perceived as

In his book The Absence of the Sacred (San Francisco, California: Siera Club Books, 1991), Jerry Mander directs our attention to the threats of *megatechnology* in surveillance, invasion of privacy, health and nuclear hazards, centralization of government power, etc. (p. 55ff).

⁸⁶ John Tiffin and Lalita Rajasingham, In Search of the Virtual Class: Education in an Information Society (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.124.

⁸⁷ Vinton Cerf, *Communications Week*. 21 February, 1994, p. 29.

⁸⁸ Steve Jons, editor, *Studing the Net: Intricacies and Issues*. pp. 3-4 in Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 1999. Jons also suggests that: "Perhaps the formation of "personalized" mass media is in its way a manifestation of a destructive tendency toward existing conceptions of community, one arising from a late 20 th century distrust of institutions (particularly governmental ones), and one given ground by the Internet, a medium itself "de-institutionalized"(p. 18).

an electronic frontier that people are domesticating and commerce is colonizing.⁸⁹ The normal civil laws do not apply in its domain,⁹⁰ which in consequence raises the logical question: should they, and if so to what extent? In light of these questions, Stacy Edgar states:

"A community without laws quickly becomes an anarchy. An anarchy might be alright if everyone in the group were morally responsible and rationally competent. But if we live in a community (in this case, that of the Net) in which not everyone acts ethically and rationally, and there are no laws to constrain hurtful behavior, the community will self-destruct. . . We are in new territory where there are now existing laws to appeal to; we must appeal to ethical principles."⁹¹

The author however, does not answer the question, "Whose these ethical principles should be?" Yet, the Internet provides a vivid incarnation of the spirit of Postmodernism with its particular concept of human liberation and social emancipation – as the perfect location of ethical relativity, often referred to as Cyberspace.⁹²

The science fictional background of the term contributed toward a tendency to view "on-line forums and interactions" as existing in a parallel, independent reality, "separate from off-line environments, bodies, and concerns,"⁹³ and its Cyber-inhabitants were determined to defend their world of boundless freedom against any external attempts to impose upon it legally regulated communication limits.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Howard Rheingold, The Virtual Community (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993), p. 145ff.

⁹⁰ John Seabrook, My First Flame. *New Yorker*, June 6, 1994, pp. 70-79.

⁹¹ Edgar, p. 205.

⁹² The popularity of the terms "Cyberspace" and "Cyber-punk" originated with W. Gibson's science fiction novel Neuromancer (New York: Ace Books, 1984).

⁹³ Steve Jons, p. 60.

⁹⁴ John Perry Barlow drafted a manifesto in 1996 in opposition to the US Government's attempts to place restrictions on the Net's communication content and dispersion. He wrote: "I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose upon us... (Cyberspace) is an act of nature and grows

Since Jaron Lanier coined the term "Virtual Reality" in 1987,⁹⁵ it has often been used (in popular literature) as interchangeable and synonymous with "Cyberspace." There is, however, a degree of technological and conceptual difference in relation to their content and background. "Cyberspace" is associated with the notion of the complex realm of computerized, digital level of informational existence, including all of its technological (hard- and software) provisions and their endless capacity for self-expansion and development through constant pressing towards (and overcoming of) its frontiers. Cyberspace is the domain of beyondness of time and geography – the inexhaustible, limitless colonization project of the informational society. It is also the technological resource of creating and introducing (and constantly perfecting) a parallel to the material world reality, thus providing an alternative habitat for the human mind – a world known to us as "Virtual Reality."

"Along with the term 'Cyberspace', the phrase 'Virtual Reality' has come to symbolize both our enthusiasm and ambivalence about social and cultural transformation through technology."⁹⁶ Since according to Webster's dictionary, "virtual" means "unreal," the phrase "Virtual Reality" presents us linguistically with an oxymoron – an impossibility. However, for the surfers of the cyber-dimension, it represents the

itself through our collective actions... We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth... Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us... Our identities have no bodies, so, unlike you, we cannot obtain order by physical coercion. A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace. (http://www.eff.org/pub/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/Barlow_0296.declaration[1989, May 11])

⁹⁵ J. Lanier and F. Biocca, An Insider's View of Virtual Reality. *Journal of Communication*, 42 (4) (Autum, 1992), pp.150-171.

⁹⁶ Frank Biocca, Taeyong Kim, and Mark R. Levy, *The Vision of Virtual Reality*, pp. 3-14 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, Frank Biocca and Mark R. Levy, editors (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associated Press, 1995), p. 5.

entrance into the landscape of imagination and transcendence⁹⁷ of the limits of physical reality, by offering digital simulations of virtual environments through sensory stimulation.⁹⁸ In this process, as Frank Biocca and Mark R. Lavy point out, information “is transformed from noumena into phenomena. Information, the environment of the mind, becomes an environment to the body.”⁹⁹

While in the past the medium of “Virtual Reality” was typically defined in terms of technological content (hardware, computer systems, head-mounted displays, headphones, motion-sensing gloves, or even whole sensory suits), today more attention is being directed towards the actual human experience within the virtual dimension, and the key to defining virtual reality in relation to it is “the concept of presence.” Thus, Virtual Reality can be defined as a “real or simulated environment in which a perceiver experiences *telepresence*.”¹⁰⁰ *Telepresence*, describes the extent to which one feels present in the digitally mediated environment, rather than in the immediate physical environment.¹⁰¹ It also relates to the level of inter-activity, which the

⁹⁷ Daniel Czitrom states: “The dream of transcendence through machines is an ancient one, and the urge to annihilate space and time found particularly intense expression through new communication media... The accelerated evolution of media hardware and software has been fueled by persistence of utopian urges in the population at large.” Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 187, 194.

⁹⁸ The phrase “sensory simulation” refers to the complex technology which provides the physical body of the one experiencing virtual reality with the sense of complete immersion into the virtual environment. The effect is achieved through neuro-transmitters and simulators applied to the five senses of the user. The result is dramatically and fearfully successful, since as Morton Heilig points out, the “nervous system – sensory nerves, brain, and motor nerves – is the seat of his/her consciousness.” El cine de futuro: The Cinema of the Future. Presence, 1 (3), 1992, pp. 279-294 (p. 281).

⁹⁹ Biocca and Levy, *Virtual reality as a Communication System*, pp. 15-32 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Steuer, *Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence*, pp. 33-36 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, p. 33, 35.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

virtual construct presents as an expression of the degree to which the users "can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time."¹⁰²

Thus, in its various transformations, Virtual Reality represents the interactive entrance to the boundless dimension of Cyberspace, with its infinite sense of transcendence to space, time, and matter, and therefore of ultimate freedom of choice of one's personal identity and destiny. Capturing the spirit the cyber-universe, in a manner suitable for a New Age prophet, Jaron Lanier in one of his 1989 interviews presented the following vision:

"Virtual reality will use our body's movements to control whatever body you choose to have in Virtual Reality, which might be human or be something different. You might very well be a mountain range or a galaxy or pebble on the floor. Or a piano... I've considered being a piano... you could become a comet in the sky one moment and then gradually unfold into a spider that's bigger than the planet that looks down at all your friends from high above."¹⁰³

In this description, Cyberspace is presented as the realization of a Postmodern metaphor "used repeatedly by Derrida, Irigary, and Kristeva – the Korah, the planitudinous womb, dark, motile, and unformed, from which all things issue."¹⁰⁴ This divinized realm and its religion, however, is available only to those with sufficient socio-economic standing. Hyper-reality has a price tag unaffordable by the majority of this world's population, destined to remain entrapped in its hopeless environment deprived of the privilege of virtual exodus.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 46

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Graham Ward, editor, The Postmodern God (Malden, Massachusetts: Backwell Publishers, 1997), p. XVI.

Virtual reality is not only the entrance to, but also the ultimate horizon and destination of Cyberspace. It is an invitation for a never-ending journey, the sole transportation of which is the collapse of space on a cosmic scale. In this transportation system, the mind is being relocated (through the senses) while the body is left behind. This dichotomization of the human being promises the absolute experience and realization of freedom by creating its perfect addictive illusion. While the mind, obsessed with its cyber-reincarnations, surfs the impeccable virtual world (applying towards it its creative energies in a process of interactive transformation of the cyber-environment and its ultimate personality), the body remains chained to the environmental crisis of its material surroundings – numb and indifferent towards the need of their development and transformation.

Obviously a simulated redistribution of wealth, transformation of socio-political structures or resolving pollution-related environmental concerns within the cyberspace dimension will not accomplish the goals of the same initiative within the material world. In spite of the fact that the virtual realm seems to be more and more real (with each new technological achievement), the authentic physical world, which is left behind, continues to demand an authentic physical, transformative touch and an unifying incarnated hope.

Further, as M. W. Krueger points out:

“Virtual reality has the potential to involve users in sensory worlds that are indistinguishable or nearly indistinguishable from the real world. In addition, virtual reality environments may even merge with the real world...

...A computer presence will permeate the workplace in the home, available whenever a need is felt... Such interfaces may resemble the real world or include devices... that have no antecedents in the real

world... Artificial realities... need not conform to physical reality any more than our homes mirror the outside environment."¹⁰⁵

Since Virtual Reality has the potential to replace the sensory information of the physical world and to provide our minds with information transcendent to our current informational systems, it is vividly important to raise the question: What do we know about our notions of "realness" and to what extent are we capable of distinguishing between "real" and "unreal"?¹⁰⁶ If the Virtual Reality system becomes a highly evolved fantasy game with a complete sensory experience, what are the possibilities for differentiating between it and the physical realm? Undoubtedly, William Bicken succeeded in summarizing the character of Virtual Reality as a contrast to the physical world, by stating: "Psychology is the physics of virtual reality"¹⁰⁷ for the mind is the only place of "actual" existence.

In the light of this, a logical ethical issue comes into focus: If God stands behind the creation, navigation and ultimate horizon/conclusion of the material world (thus, His moral perfection finding its reflection in divine providence), who will be the one, or ones, standing behind the convincingly "real" sensation of the virtual illusion? There is no

¹⁰⁵ M. W. Kruger, *Videoplacement and the Interface of the Future* (pp. 417- 422) in The Art of Human – Computer Interface Design, ed. B. Laurel (Reading, MA: Addison- Wesley, 1990).

¹⁰⁶ See Michael A. Shapiro and Daniel G. McDonald, *I am not a Real Doctor, but I Play One in the Virtual Reality: Implications of Virtual Reality for Judgments About Reality* pp. 323-345 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, p . 325. The authors point out that the studies on the subject show that, although rare, it is possible for whole communities to lose touch with reality. (p. 329). A classical example is the panic resulting from the 1938 CBS broadcast of H. G. Wells science fiction story *The War of the Worlds*. See also D. Johnson, *The Phantom Anesthetist of Mattoon*, in Readings in Social Psychology, G.E. Swanson, T. M. Newcomb, and E. H. Hartley, editors (New York: Holt, 1952), pp. 208-219; and Norman K. Denzin. *Cybertalk and the Method of Instances*, pp. 107-125 in Doing Internet Research, p. 113-114.

¹⁰⁷ The quotation is used as an entitling motto in Biocca and Delaney's *Immersive Virtual Reality Technology*, pp. 57-124 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, p. 58.

doubt that the virtual creation will reflect the moral profile of its authors, a frightening, but logical conclusion.

A 1999 science-fiction movie entitled, "*The Matrix*" presents the shocked audience with a scenario for the rather immediate future of virtual existence. Being a typically Postmodern cinematographic product, the movie played out the beyondness of reality's limits, contextualizing it in a dichotomized human consciousness crucified between the need for freedom of personal identity in the material world and the unlimited possibilities for virtual metamorphosis of one's being.

The movie's script places the viewer in a familiar environment. The year is 1999, and the First World celebrates the peak of its civilization, which is epitomized in the latest breakthrough in the field of artificial intelligence. The computerization of our reality is nothing more than a daily routine; the surfing of the Net and dwelling in Cyberspace is a common component of our informational lifestyle and social identity. The sense of normality is coined, however, with an undefined feeling of existential duality, of schizophrenic lapses into an uncommunicated void, a dimension of social decomposition and personality diffusion. Out of this context a concrete sub-cultural formation emerges, one of the many aspects of Generations X's content, namely the *cyber-punk* community.¹⁰⁸ It preys on society's techno-dependence and cyber-

¹⁰⁸ Anne Balsamo examines the nature of the Cyberpunk Community in *Signal to Noise: On Meaning of Cyberpunk Subculture*, pp. 347-368 in Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality. The author discusses the Cyberpunk identity as an indispensable part of the social profile of Generation X. She notes: "Having claimed cyberspace as their own private frontier, cyberpunk resent the imposition of limits on their cyberspace travels. At one level, Cyberpunk is about resistance to a capitalist social order; many cyberpunks critique the dominant ideology of the information age that naturalizes the commodification of information and the surveillance of network access...it also projects a fantasy world where the material body ... is technologically present. Thus we can see multiple tensions at work in cyberpunk subculture and in the construction of postmodern identities." (p. 349) For Cyberpunks, the virtual reality of the Net-culture is the primary

addiction, and asserts itself both on the social surface – as an eccentric techno-elite, and “underground” – as the domain responsible for sabotaging the conventional social structures; guilty of virtually every possible crime in Cyberspace: for example, vandalization of information, invading privacy, manipulating images, breaking confidentiality, black-mailing, stealing intellectual property, exercising verbal, psychological and sexual abuse, provoking informational anarchy and pollution through taking control over info-traffic, cyber-terrorism, and different forms of organized crime in an attempt to gain power and establish control over society through fear, manipulation, corruption, and stimulation of various cyber-addictions. They celebrate themselves as the nerd-phantom standing behind the optic cables and PC screens and capable to reach into the private environment of each computer owner around the globe, at any moment of time without responsibility to conform to any moral rules and presuppositions of basic human decency. They are raptured by the sense of ultimate power.

Suddenly the movie screen shifts and, shocked and shaken, we find ourselves (by that time already being immersed in the cinematographic virtuality) displaced from our familiar environment with all of its glamour and horror, and awake to the fact that we are lost in space and time; that the year is actually 2135 (or so); the earth is devastated and ruled by machines which use us as a cheap source of bio-energy. Our self-identity has been transmitted directly to our minds through a complex system of neuro-impulse simulators, while we are being grown and harvested in endless fields of human crops –

social Gestalt. In its highly metamorphic realm, they are enabled to simultaneously enact multiple identities. The on-line identification with a simulated character is the genesis of the development of their “second self”. Sherry Turkle argues that this is an expression of a metaphysical aspect of the virtual encounter. The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit (London: Granada, 1984), p. 78. Also, Howard Rheingold, A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community (On-line document, June, 1992).

each one of us locked and enslaved in his/her isolated little cell. The shocking final discovery is that all we have considered real has been a simulation of our human dreams and self-perception through an artificial intelligence, a complex mixture of self-perpetuating hard- and soft-ware composition.

The Matrix dichotomizes the feelings of the Postmodern viewer. On the one hand, it represents the hopeless virtual imprisonment of technocratic humanity in its cyber-coma. On the other hand, it offers the temptation of a world without rules and limits, a hyper-human boundless freedom transcending time, space, and truth in a “highly desirable” cyber-escape from the trivialization and spacelessness of modern life.

Cybernetic science-fiction constructs a space of “accommodation to an intensely technological existence,”¹⁰⁹ at a time in which Postmodern spiritual theory also demands and constitutes (itself) a vigorous “defense against placelessness.”¹¹⁰

Postmodern theory legitimizes the evacuation of the dissident micro- (or macro) territories with their plurality of meanings and equality of significance, thus providing a survival from the oppressive traditions and cultural clichés. In light of this, Internet, Cyberspace, and Virtual Reality serve as appropriate metaphors for the claustrophobic crises of Postmodern existence within the limits of the modern world.

The human intellect pushes technology beyond its visible limits in order to cultivate (for itself) a new possibility for expansion, to re-invent space and reorder it according the Postmodern convictions – in a highly non-uniform and unlimited manner. The intensified, techno-informational exchange, as a new paradigm of life-style,

¹⁰⁹ Scott Bukatman, Terminal Identity: The Vertical Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), p.10.

¹¹⁰ Conner, p. 260.

displaces the topographical demands of the Modernity's infrastructures, and gives to the individual an access to their far more efficient substitutes within the "virtual city" (with its ultimate resolution of infrastructural inconveniences like transportation traffic, shopping lines, exhausting distances and other expressions of the neurotic, stressful effort for existence within the conventional material realm).

However, the anarchical demonstrations of the Postmodern ethos in Cyberspace trap the individual in loneliness and estrangement by wrapping him/her in the virtual illusion of freedom. The Cyber-lifestyle within the sacred privacy of the personal PC monitor deprives the human being from an authentic (non-simulated and illusory) human touch, with its therapeutic and affirming inter-sociality.

Within its Cyber-context, the Postmodern protest against the Modern rationale and its material incarnation is incapable of providing a paradigm for authentic social transformation. It is oriented toward internalization of the concept of freedom, toward introvert escapism (from the normative and legislative present) within a virtual disregard of the physical realm. The addictive drive towards Cyberspace, as one of the symbols of this escapism, reflects the retrieval from inter-social responsibility, the evacuation of human engagement and concern out of the sphere of the immediate incarnated social context into the realm of virtual tranquility (and inconsequential lack of social obligations and responsibilities).

As Postmodern ethnography claims credit toward establishing the foundations for a multi-ethnic dialogue instead of a monologue¹¹¹ (disposing of the economic and

¹¹¹ Stephen A. Tyler, *Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document on the Occult to Occult Document*, in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Los Angeles: University of Carolina Press, 1986), p. 126.

cultural ethnocentrism and offering a new paradigm for cultural discourse); it also has to consider how its ideological shaping of Cyberspace changes the notions of conventional ethnography. For, besides the Cyber-punk occupants of the virtual frontiers, Cyberspace is being rapidly populated with a new mass digital ethnos – one of the lonely nomadic wanderers, without a final destination and hope for arrival, without a definite identity and self-perception, a paradoxical immaterial ethnos of isolated techno-pilgrims journeying towards the oasis of the cyber-illusions.

At this point, it would be unfair to the content of the present study if we do not offer a brief retrospective reflection on one particular element of the sociological background of this immense drive toward virtual escapism in the Western culture. One of the main outcomes of the formation and development of the contemporary informational society was the progressive shrinking of the vast, transcontinental world into a single “global village.” The informational “victory” over space and time made geography irrelevant to our possibility to encounter the rest of humanity in its economic, political and cultural context.

Through the TV and computer screens, the depressing pictures of misery, poverty, suffering and hopelessness from the Second and Third Worlds invaded the comfort of the living rooms of the ones privileged to be born in the world of prosperity. The accompanying socio-political and economic analysis demanded not only the attention and emotional participation of the audience, it also summoned its conscience by provoking it and appealing toward its engagement in a corrective action. Some degree of involvement was also expected as an expression of compensation for the

existence of the seemingly unreachable gap between the "First" and the rest of the "worlds." It confronted the viewers with the pressure to meet their responsibilities as citizens of the global village and reminded them that their prosperity capitalizes on another's misery by political and economic colonization and exploitation of their reality (and its resources). The world became overwhelmingly small, overpopulated and demanding, quarreling and fighting for survival: accusatory, revengeful, and threatening ("with wars and rumors of wars"). In other words, not a pleasant place to be and peacefully enjoy the comforts of private prosperity.

Thus, the informational globalization left the Western World with an aching, unsheltered conscience, crucified between guilt and a sense of humanitarianistic responsibility. Its two alternatives were: escapism or social action.

The concept of social action, however, involves the inconvenience of stepping beyond purely humanitarian initiatives into the sphere of political engagements, taking a stand against traditional, institutional and other structural social establishments – usually in an unpopular and risky scenario with a highly hypothetical outcome.

After all, for the West, issues of human rights and social justice seemed to be disproportionately secondary when placed into perspective (control over nuclear weapons and economic interests, for example). The recent tragic records of Bosnia and Chechnya are self-explanatory memorials to this conflict between the conscience and the interests of the "global village."

Escapism (individual or corporate) on the other hand, seemed to be impossible, unreasonable and self-condemning until the cyber-revolution provided the alternative to the tribulations of this world in the bunker of Virtual Reality (with its psychological

resolution) sealed behind "the digital divide" (the technological and financial chasm between the world of prosperity and the world of misery), and thus establishing for itself a multibillion dollar immaterial market with highly profitable material consequences. This is a market without limits, regulations and scruples. A borderless postmodern *agora* where "everything goes," since the consumer demand is the only driving force behind its metamorphosis and expansion.

Thus, the immaterial cyber-context of the virtual world invaded our moral routines with a constantly expanding set of new ethical issues which bridged the borders of the virtual and entered our physical realm with a troublesome determination. Once being extended beyond the dimension of the Postmodern virtual reality, these issues became painfully tangible and alarmingly material in nature.¹¹² Their spectrum varies from invasion of privacy, mental manipulation, censorship, abuse, and violations of intellectual property, to concerns about "robot rights" and the establishment of moral guidelines in the further pursuit of artificial intelligence development.¹¹³ After all, the sense of safety and careless inconsequential anonymity in Cyberspace also seems to be a virtual illusion. The nomadic cyber-ethnos will continue to surf the digital realm and hope to find the finalization of its virtual nirvana, addicted to and haunted by its

¹¹² In discussing the development and application of legal regulations for Cyberspace, some raise the question about its immaterial nature as a presupposition against borrowing from the familiar legal methodology, common for the physical realm. In this context, Jan Fernback raises the questions: "...Can we seek empirical verification of hypothesis regarding social activity that involves bodylessness? Is there a sociology of 'placelessness'?" *There is a There There: Notes Towards a Definition of Cybercommunity*, pp. 203-220 in *Doing Internet Research*, p. 205

¹¹³ See: Tom Forester and Perry Morrison, *Computer Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994); John Weckert and Douglas Adeney, *Computer and Information Ethics* (Sudbury, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett publishers, 1997), pp. 87ff. On content and consequences of decision making in Cyberspace see: Sara Kisley, Jane Siegel, and Timothy McGuire, *Social Psychological Aspects of Computer-Mediated Communication*. *American Psychologist*, vol. 39, No. 10, 1984, pp. 1123-1134.

mirage, driven by its illusory nearness, yet entrapped in the essence of its destination namely, to never arrive.

Some Concluding Thoughts in Regards to the Postmodern Agenda for Social Transformation

The unquestionable impact of Postmodernism consists in its capacity for critical reflection and challenge for “beyondness” in regards to the claustrophobic socio-political constructs of late modernism. Being itself a product of Modernity’s despair in self-entrapment and alienation, Postmodernism presets itself as a global exodus and therapeutic strategy for achieving a tranquil equilibrium within the individual and his/her social environment. However, in light of the dialectism of social transformation presented in chapter one of this work, Postmodernism (as an expression of ideological reintegration around a critical discontent) seems to lack the teleological vision for constructive strategy towards an authentic transformation of reality. It limits itself to naming ‘the issues’ through questioning the moral validity of the institutions responsible for their invention and maintenance and sees their resolution by giving them an equal right of voice and participation in a global hermeneutical discourse.

At the same time, the very commitment towards pluralism and tolerance as a fundamental principle of the Postmodern discourse opens a platform for legitimate

mutual coexistence of both: the questioned modern hierarchical archetypes and the 'aching' reality produced by them. The principle of pluralistic tolerance requires the mutual embrace of these opposites and their non-quarreling co-existence. It does not necessarily demand their transformation, since such a demand would violate the very philosophy of Postmodern inter-(con)textuality.

Idealistically, the optimistic Postmodernists have been pressing the all-encompassing pluralistic discourse as a dialogical dialectism for social evolution through a mutual, dialogical reshaping and harmonizing, until it achieves an organic, teleological coherence. What remains silent within this project is the fact that such a social 'inter-textual' evolution will require a conscious revolution within the ethical foundations and moral convictions of Modern institutions, an undertaking that the polyphony of pluralism is unable to envision and strategize.

The displacement of center and dislocating of margins within reality may provoke a change within the superficial topographical image, but it does not change its actual content. The conceptual power-centers of Modernity have accumulated the necessary paramount of socio-political and economic inertia, allowing them to exercise directive influence and manipulation of reality from any 'corner' or 'under-point' of its plateau. Therefore, an authentic social transformation will never be possible without the internal, ethical (and consequential structural) transformation of the institutions responsible for the particular construct of reality.

The Postmodern deconstruction of reality attempts to supply an avenue for the evacuation of humanity. However, it does not provide us with the blue prints of a 'new global village'. Instead of that, it invents the hyper-reality of Cyberspace as a place of

solitude and illusory escape from the present imperfections of existence, in a manner liberated from ethical commitments. The way of resolving socio-political conflicts in the realm of virtual reality is not through transforming them, but through 'deleting' them from the cyber-map and re-inventing its updated soft-ware version somewhere else as a new cyber entity in the endless special resource of the Net. Thus, to labor over the change of the material world and its imperfections seems to be a waste of time, space, money, intelligence and creative imagination. Instead, Cyberspace provides an endless gallery of countless alternative worlds, created and re-created according to consumer demands, with a 'touch of a button'.

However, while Postmodernism's affluent elite escapes in its virtual heaven after deconstructing reality, the rest of humanity is left behind – homeless and disoriented in a world deprived of hope for survival and a future: a world exhausted from struggles and emptied from imagination and vision of eternity. This world seems too painfully 'small' to provide a peaceful space for everyone's opposites; it is a world in which the only alternative for 'being' is to overcome itself by confessing its impossibility and repenting of its arrogance, its egocentric concepts of value and content, and its introverted visions of purpose, thus gaining vulnerability and a chance for transformation.

Chapter 4

Towards a Strategy for the Church in the Postmodern Setting

In the process of generating a statement for the Church's strategic presence in the Postmodern setting, we should begin by offering a critical alternative to the Postmodern ideological foundation for social transformation by presenting a theological reflection on the Christian view of truth, time, space and history.

The Christian Concept of Truth, History, Time and Space

The Biblical claim is that *the truth* is a person - Jesus Christ (John 14:6), the incarnated Word of God - the Son of God in Whom, through the Holy Spirit, God became flesh as "God with us." Therefore, to know the truth is an issue of personal relationship with the One who is the Truth. This is a covenant relationship founded on love. The truth flows toward us out of this relationship which is an expression of the very nature of God- the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, and shapes the human being into conformity with Him (into the image and character of the One Who is the Truth). Yet this is not a process of identity and personality demolition or unification. Knowing the truth sets one free "to be" all that he/she is created and purposed for according to God's will (John 8:32). For knowing the Creator and becoming one with

the Truth is a liberating anti-conformist process in affirmation of one's uniqueness "in," "through," and "for" Him.

Thus, to know the Truth means to meet Him, to invite Him to indwell one's being and to submit oneself to His Lordship in order to be truthfully free and a truthful self. This is a freedom, which is discerned and reflected in all dimensions of sociality. It does not segregate "the other" in order to assert itself, instead it loves and celebrates the otherness of the fellow human as an expression of the Truth about Creation. It becomes a celebration of the personality, character and nature of the Creator (for He is eternally infinite in His creative capacity, as well as in His covenantal love and providential care for the Creation – as all this flows out of the consistency and immutability of His own Being).

The knowing of One who is the Truth challenges us toward truthfulness and honesty with ourselves and with the rest of Creation. It provokes us toward reflection and revision of our inter-relational environment in its multi-dimensionality (social, economic, political, ecological, etc.) and burdens us with inspiration and vision for its transformation toward truthful harmonization, emancipation and humanization of our global context, or we stand accountable for it before the Truth.

Further, the Biblical claim of the Word of God – the One Who is the Truth – is that "God is" (present tense), and this is the central focus of the Biblical understanding of time. Thus, time exists, because it is in God (Who exists). He is its beginning and end, for He is the Alpha and Omega of all existence. Time is God's time, and as such, it is intentional and teleologically purposeful, because it flows out of the providential intent of God toward a concrete telos in Him. It exists in the light of the initiation of

Creation and its eschatological determination. Therefore, time is a dimension of provision and potential for redemption, renewal and transformation; it is continually present as "the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2), as the "gate to eternity" in the midst of our present. Because "God is," time contains the future, which is in God, and thus mediates its therapeutic, hopeful horizon into the present.

The soteriological understanding of time provides us with the exodus out of it into the eternal presence of God. Therefore, as truth, so also time is a covenantal dimension of the passion of God (in His being God for us and with us) and involves the human response to it. Raptured in the Holy Spirit, we cruise time united with the trans-generational Body of Christ, participating within its past and future as it also partakes in us.

In the light of the above, history is perceived as a reflection of this trans-generational covenant in which the genealogy of the faithful points not toward an earthly but a heavenly parent, toward His genetic reproduction through "the Spirit of adoption" in all who receive him as Father, and who are also received as sons and daughters into the family of God, born out of Him and destined to Him.

As a genealogy, history is a journey from God, in God, to God and is initiated anew in each new generation as a response to the call to indwell the Way, for He is the Way, and to be transformed after His image, to become one with Him as He grows and fills from within each one of those called toward His horizon.

The Bible also challenges the conventional understanding of space as a tri-dimensional, geographically defined location. For, in Him, we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He who transcends time, space and history becomes our

refuge, and shelter. He shapes the human being as he/she is being indwelt by God and thus, by transcendence, infinity, and eternity is transformed into a temple of the Most High. The Holy Spirit, as the agent of this architectural process, freely creates a space (transcending all topographical limitations) - one new trans-geographical creation - the Body of Christ, bringing together in a diversity-affirming union all the separate members of this organism, placed in their togetherness at a new *topos*, namely, the Kingdom of God and His sovereign rule.

The Kingdom in its temporal and locational phenomenology also challenges conventional human rationalism. For it is being "already" and "not yet," here and now in the midst of the communion of the saints, and in the future to come - as it represents the ultimate future of humanity. The Kingdom deconstructs our time and space by inbreaking into it, rapturing and incorporating us (while still being in the midst of our present) into what is yet to come. Thus, it redefines the margins and relocates the centers of power and prosperity, reconstructing, reshaping and transforming the painfully fragmented reality by indwelling it, and thus, presenting itself as an alternative wholeness under the all embracing sovereign and just reign of God. As eternity branches in the "now" through the Kingdom, the present is being challenged, driven, inspired and nurtured with the content of eternity until it is being more and more filled and reshaped by it. However, in contrast to the uncertainty of the Postmodern hyper-space, which appears and disappears on demand and is a result of a subjective personal choice (thus being optional and relative), the Kingdom "is" for it is the reign of God Who "is," unchangeable, non-contradicting, and certain, Who is the beginning and end of all things and Who guarantees that all things will take their proper place in Him.

The Kingdom affirms the rightful place of the other and the different brought into the family of God as the Body affirms its diversity and a mutual participation of its members into one another through the Holy Spirit. Thus, "the other" becomes a location of our meaning and being (and vice versa); as in this organic inter-penetration, there are neither temporal nor topographical limits.

As noted earlier in this chapter, while Modernism, "linked truth with rationality and made reason and logical argumentation the sole arbiters of right belief," Postmodernism is "unwilling to allow the human intellect to serve as the sole determinator of what we should believe."¹

At the same time, the foundational Christian story is dismissed by Modernism as irrational and unbelievable, and by Postmodernism as a demanding, institutionalized meta-narrative. However, the Christian story, with its epistemological and ontological presuppositions, is rather scandalously foreign to our common ways of knowing, being and becoming. It is anti-intellectual for it is a truth accepted by faith, not by empirical or theoretically rationalized evidence. Thus, it is quite anti-Modern in nature.

Yet, if it embodies the truth, it's content must have an universal application. The content of truth does not diminish the variety of human contexts and the uniqueness of each of their interpretations. Its universality does not flow out of the unification of context, but out of the truthfulness of its beginning, existence and destination.

While the context interprets the story, it enters into a dialogue with the Story until it finds itself incorporated and participating in it and receives it as its own interpretation and interpreter. This dialogue is authentically transforming for the particular context.

¹ Stanley Grenz, pp. 13-14.

For, while being invited and incorporated into the Story's globality of trans-historical, trans-generational life, it is being provided with a self-transcendent viewpoint and thus, with an opportunity for a vision of clarity, honesty and motivation for a transforming action. Meeting us in the midst of our personal context, the truth presses us to face ourselves and reinterpret it in the light of our personal encounter with the One Who Is the Truth, as we are being challenged to examine our own truthfulness.

This is why the Word of God incarnated in the midst of the context of the first century Jewish community, personified as Jesus the Savior could be simultaneously portrayed as black in Africa, yellow and Asia, red in the Amazon jungle or white in the frescoes of the Eastern-European Orthodox cathedrals. For He is the Truth about us, and our community, in flesh, dwelling among us in the midst of our communion with Him.

We confess that He took on our flesh and bore our sins upon Himself (1 John 2:2) and in the act of (our) embracing this realization, He becomes the Savior of our being as well as of our social, inter-personal relations, bringing redemption for our communities. He becomes incarnated in us – personally and corporately. Yet, He is a personal Savior, and therefore, a personal Truth, which affirms our uniqueness and unsubstitutable content and purpose within the globality of existence in the light of the beyondness of history, in the light of Him Who is eternity.

As we interpret Him, He also interprets us. As He becomes incarnated and embodied among us in our togetherness, we become His extension in the midst of our concrete and distinct inter-human communal context. This interpersonal event, between the person of Christ and us as persons, contains the potential for our personal

transformation and therefore, also of our social expression and participation in our environment.

Differing from the Postmodern concept of truth as relative to the separate communal context (in its location and time-frame), the Christian Truth, which is the incarnated Christ Jesus and His Kingdom (present through Him in flesh), is relevant and substantial for the existence of each and all contexts (spoken into existence, sustained, redeemed and destined from, by, and to God).

In the light of this Truth, the Church does not represent a historical period, a cultural era, a socio-political construct, an ideological phenomenon (or another anthropological project), even though the ecclesiastical institutions self-identify with all those. By being the incarnated (Body of) Christ, the Church represents the future of the world (in its holistic diversity), the beyondness of space and time (in the One Who is the Alpha and Omega), the truth about our beginnings and ends of our beings ~~and~~ becomings.

Pluralism in Christianity (if we can employ this term out of its traditional secular context) is not identified with a concept about variety of truths. Rather, it represents the right to a distinctly personal relationship with the Truth, and thus of a personal experience of knowing Him; as well as a right to voice this experience as a legitimate aspect of the encounter with the Truth (in the context of His Body) - the Truth as the incarnated Word of God, God Himself, the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of our reality and its beyondness.

Called to Incarnate the Word

To claim that Postmodernism is the absolute and final expression of humanity's cultural and philosophical development, in its striving for self-realization by pressing toward its limits, would be both arrogant and unintelligent. At best, Postmodernism could be viewed and experienced as one among the many distinct chronological epochs within the ongoing process of transformation of human civilization. After all, at present, it still remains geo-politically and economically domesticated and localized within the "well developed, westernized" segments of the world; and in spite of the limited possibility for expansion into a global/universal reality, it will also be earlier or later reduced to a subject for historical reflection and philosophic speculation.

From a Biblical standpoint, there is only one dimension of consistent relevance to human life and existence, which has a trans-epochal and trans-cultural validity and vitality: the Word of God. (Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word remains – Matthew 24:35.) The Church is called to embody the Word afresh in the midst of each new generation, becoming an extension of the crucified and risen Lord, exemplifying the reality of God's Kingdom in the midst of its immediate social, political and economic context.

When we take a stand in the reality of God's Word, incarnating it and living it out as the story of our personal ethos, we stand established in the future of the world. We are located beyond the civilization's cultural metamorphosis and experiments, beyond its eras and epochs, beyond its striving for completeness and immortality, for we

embody the very end of it all. Then, interpreted through the lenses of teleological certainty and eschatological expectation, the journey through a particular historical and cultural period is not an issue of survival for the Church. It does not demand either sectarian, separatist perseverance in antagonistic mutual negation with her context, or elaborate apologetic rhetoric and debate with the immediate environment in order to assert her right of space and relevance within the present.

However, if we consider the nature of apologetics as a medium of self-expression, then the only adequate Biblical example which the Church should focus upon is the "evidentialist" apologetic exemplified by Jesus; or, as Nicholas Wolterstorff calls it, "praxis-oriented" apologetic.² For the authentic presence of the reality of the Kingdom in Christ brought back sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf; it extended cleansing to the lepers, healing to the lame, resurrection to the dead and the proclamation of its Good News to the poor (Luke 7:18-22), thus silencing the skeptics and affirming the genuineness of the Messianic visitation.³

In the Word we (as being the Church) are a part of the present, by virtue of being already "present" in its future. Further, by embodying the Word, the Church is being transformed from a mere fragment or element of reality into an extension of the very reality which authored all of this world's elements in their existence and order. Thus,

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, Reason within the Bounds of Religion (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 111ff.

³ See also in relation to the Apologetics of the Church. Dennis Holinger, *The Church as Apologetic: A Sociology of Knowledge Perspective*, pp. 174-182 in Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, editors (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995). The author reflects upon the nature of the Church as the social context in which the gospel is mediated and the Christian worldview is expressed. Holinger emphasizes five dimensions, which the Church must embody in its attempt to "reflect coherence between the Christian worldview and expressions of that worldview." They are: the Christian narrative; the rational, cognitive dimension; the

the community of faith becomes an extension of the very presence that makes existence possible and sustains it through the Holy Spirit, holding it all together in a meaningful, teleological composition, the authenticity of which is framed by God's own being as its Alpha and Omega, its beginning and end (Revelation 1:8, 17).

Christ, as the very reality of the Church, is the only reason and ground for her existence and perpetuation. As Thomas Oden sums up, the foundation of the Church's vocation is:

"... the presence (of Christ) that makes it (the Church) cohere. Where the living Christ is not present, there the Church is not present, at least according to its classical reasoning about itself. Christianity never tires of reminding us of this. Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light, the Living Word, the Shepherd. Christ is misunderstood as merely the one who points the way. He is the Way."⁴

While Postmodernism banners deconstruction as its "religious revival,"⁵ the Church offers herself to the world as mediator of reconciliation between its past, present and future, between God and His creation, through the presence of the living Christ and the embodiment of the Kingdom in her midst. Thus, becoming the body of Christ, through the agency the Spirit, the Church incarnates the One, who did not hesitate to reach to the social margins of the day, bringing them into the focus of the Kingdom. He redefined and displaced the familiar centers of significance and power, reinterpreting

symbolic or ritual dimension; the life-experiential dimension; and moral behavior. (pp. 188-191).

⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity ... What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 181.

⁵ Wayne C. Booth, *Deconstruction as Religious Revival* pp. 131-154 in *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, David Hoekema and Bobby Fong, editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Williams B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). The author points out that innumerable "deconstructionists" have seen themselves as deliberately engaged in religious inquiry and that many theologian have treated deconstructionists as potential allies.

their content and teleological intent through His very being. He reconstructed the meaning of unity as love toward the unlovable, "the other" and the different, as a touch for the untouchable. In light of that, the nature and the person of Christ – as the gravitating center of the Kingdom – became an event of celebration of the divine reconstruction of sociality toward affirmation of its diversity.

The incarnation of the Word in the community of faith, and its transformation into an organic functional Body of Christ, coincides with her calling to be the prophetic, priestly and royal people of God. For as the Messiah united these three dimensions of vocation, so must the Church do – as His living extension in the midst of the present. Then Christ can stand visible on the frontiers of the interface between the Church and the "unchurched" world as a high priest and mediator of grace and reconciliation between God and the human race. Thus also, the priestly mission of the Church is to extend herself beyond her walls in order to meet the world on the frontline, addressing all fragments of its multi-dimensional construct and to present herself as a vessel of mediation of God's grace and love toward humanity by proclaiming to the world God's salvific provision in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Church is prophetic in her incarnation of the Word as she goes beyond the mere confession and narration of the truth into the embodiment of the One Who is the Truth in flesh. She prophesies about the end, raptured by the Spirit, as the communion of the saints lives out and shines forth the eschatological reality of the Kingdom and its future in a tangible, non-hypothetical way of commitment to its vision.

Finally, the Church is royal in her servanthood, as an act of self-identification with her Lord, the King of Kings, and the socio-political character of His reign in her midst.

She is royal in her spiritual genetics, as being born out of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, and exemplifying the character and mission to Christ as His Body on earth.

While challenging the social stereotypes and prejudices of her cultural context, and raising the standard of the Kingdom as their alternative (through an intentional transforming action), the Church should make herself available in a humble, non-pretentious way, through service to the concrete needs of each generation. Distancing herself from arrogant triumphalism, she should stand open and vulnerable in her willingness to reach the painfully fragmented and estranged world with the therapeutic and restoring touch of Christ, as she re-examines her theological commitments from the viewpoint of the social margins.⁶

In light of the above, the eschatological escapism and sectarian separatism are clearly inconsistent with the calling and mission of the Church. For, as Paul Lakeland points out: "the reason d'être of the faith community is consequently always to face outward."⁷ Yet in its agenda for social transformation, the Church should not forget that the Gospel embodied by her is the reason and content of her existence and mission as well as the ultimate resource of her transforming power in "faithful sociality."⁸

⁶ Mark R. Schwehn offers an intriguing re-reading of the Gospel of Mark, in the light of establishing it as an example of a Biblical theology developed from "the vantage point of those positioned on the margins like the nameless servants, the despised centurion, and a few women, some named, some not named," as they looked upon Jesus, seeing the Christ - "the anointed one, who must die." *Christianity and Postmodernism: Uneasy Allies*, pp. 154-170 in *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*.

⁷ Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), pp 104-105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63. Lakeland coins the phrase "faithful sociality," to summarize "...the ecclesial way of being of Christian communities" with the intention to highlight the two dimensions of this life. "Sociality" stresses the inevitably social and political presence of the members for one another and within the larger society. However, the qualifier "faithful" reminds us that spirituality is as important as political praxis.

This is sociality, which reflects a process of sanctification in the pursuit of authentic holiness (in terms of the Wesleyan “perfect love” toward one another and toward a needy world). It also involves an honest revision of the Church’s local and global presence and relevance in the midst of her contemporary context, exposing the inadequacies of her institutions and political loyalties, and demanding repentance and willingness for transformation in the light of the vision of her eschatological *telos*.

Further, the authentic witness of the Church is indissoluble from our organic unity (John 17: 21, 23).

The legacy of Pentecost, as an expression of the work of the Spirit in and through the Church, also challenges the fragmentation and political mutilation of the Body of Christ and the corruption of its mission. It urges us to examine the validity and motivation of our denominational boundaries, and submit ourselves to the sovereign rule of God over His global Body in celebration of our diversity as a part of His good creation.

Summing up all of the above, we conclude that the success of the Church’s strategies to reach a particular generation depends on our willingness to be prophetic, priestly and royal people of God: to proclaim the Gospel by embodying the lifestyle of the Kingdom in mediation of God’s love and grace toward humanity, and in self-sacrificial service to God by serving the concrete, culturally contextualized needs of each generation.

In light of that, a brief sociological reflection of the first truly Postmodern generation, “Generation X,” could provide us with a basic outline of the challenges

which the Church will continue to face in the coming decades and help us to clarify her strategies within the Postmodern setting.

Generation X

This is a generation of despair in the midst of confusion without the navigation of distinct moral arguments of definite truth, of concrete social destination and hope for arrival. It is a generation confused about its own identity and belonging, crossed (or "X'ed") as an enigma by the contemporary world, which is still controlled at large by "Baby Boomers." Some more optimistic voices have tried to explain the "X" as an expression of the algebraic symbol for multiplication, thus implying "unlimited possibilities."⁹ Others, also using an algebraic allusion, see in it the meaning of variable with the potential to represent any *constanta* from "plus to minus infinity."

Demographically, Generation X is identified as composed of the ones borne from the early '60s to the late '70s. Psychologically, it is summarized as a generation overwhelmed by the feeling of "being politically and sociologically disenfranchised."¹⁰

⁹ Jimmy Long, Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching The Postmodern Generation (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Versity Press, 1997), pp 37-38. The author also argues that the designation of this generation points to "confusion" as "a major force in the lives of Generation X." Their life offers "too many choices, none of which represents the ideal option."

¹⁰ John D. Willard, What is the Meaning of Generation X. Generation X Coalition at <http://hometown.aol.com/genxcoal/x-quest.html>

Yet, trapped in the finitude of their fragmented world, the Xers seek refuge in the introverted illusion of Cyberspace and its alternative, moldable reality. The virtual existence gives them the sense of identity and belonging to a community, authored and controlled by themselves, a world where the Baby Boomers cannot dictate the rules, where in fact there are no rules at all, a world which expresses the confused, a non-navigated identity of its inventors.

While the Baby Boomers approached the future with optimism and self-understanding as creators of their own destiny and the ambition of conquistadors, the Xers, pregnant with the pessimism of the present, do not believe in the possibility of a future. They are concerned with handling the practical side of daily survival - indifferent, apathetic and uninvolved in the dreams of the Boomers' icons of "choice and change." Or, as one Xer states: "We don't have the big ambitions you (Baby-Boomers) and your roommates had to make the whole world better by going into political action... we're trying to connect with people who live nearby."¹¹ While the Boomers are busy inventing the world, the Xers are struggling to maintain it.

The Xers are the generation coming out of broken homes (seduced by the Western notion of choice), dysfunctional families, neglected and lonely, "latch key" kids of working single mothers or fathers. Thus, the "family" metaphors and clichés do not appeal to their dreams and desires about life.¹² Instead, friendships become for them

¹¹ Robert Coles, *Idealism in Today's Students*. *Change*, September/October 1993, p. 19. See also J. Long (p.39), who states: "While we Boomers are optimistic and want to change the world, Xers are realistic and want to survive the changes in the world."

¹² Long, p. 48. "They have been called the aborted generation, the latchkey generation, the divorced-parents generation and the abused generation. A third of all Xers have been physically or sexually abused during childhood. This family pain has left deep scars. On the whole, this generation puts little trust in family."

the primary environment of self-understanding and self-identification, as a substitute for the conventional family. No wonder the most popular show (among Xers) on American TV is called, "Friends," and not "Family Matters." Yet, this is also an expression of their deep longing for community and belonging. One of the Xers' main problems is their existence in the midst of profound alienation and abandonment. As Cyberspace, the other "options" for escape from the pain and despair of aloneness are also introverted in nature: alcoholism, suicide, etc.

"Aloneness" is a term invented by the Xers in attempts to describe their dominant social and cultural experience within a world in which rules and options are set by the self-centered, narcissistic Baby Boomer generation (and their life-philosophy of self-gratification, often at the expense of their children). As one American Xer defines it:

"...aloneness is not loneliness. While loneliness is the state of emptiness, in aloneness life is full of activities but without the aid of family or friends. It encompasses a basic distrust of people and fear of being hurt. Aloneness is largely about fear. It stems from abandonment or neglect and leads to alienation from friends, family and society. Aloneness is survival technique and comes across as independence. Aloneness separates this generation from every other."¹³

Generation X is stamped by an overwhelming sense of abandonment by parents, teachers, religious and political leaders, and culture itself. Deprived of fundamental social contacts and consequently from moral guidance, this generation depends on its survival instincts in the midst of an alienating and hostile environment, which is

¹³ William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi, A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1994), p. 21.

unconcerned with their spiritual well-being. They are deprived of the affection and care which nurtures and shapes an individual into an indispensable and impacting part of his/her social context. They feel unwanted and unnecessary, treated as disposable, and substituted by technology. They are thus robbed of the hope for a possibility of a future and a meaningful personal realization.

In their desperation for meaning in life and significance for their personal existence, Xers are “flocking to places where change is taking place rapidly and where their skills and energy can affect that change,”¹⁴ (places like Eastern Europe, for example). In 1989-1990 the American Xers watched on their TV screens how their Eastern-European peers became the avant-garde of social transformation in their countries, taking a courageous stand against the totalitarian communist empire, pulling down its walls and leading their people into the marches toward democracy and freedom, inspired by hope for the possibility of a future. They witnessed the martyrdom of the Chinese college students at their protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, a horrifying event, which forever marked history with a memorial of youthful discontent against tyranny and violence. The dynamism of social transformation within this part of the world attracted tens of thousands of American Xers who were seeking out personal meaning by finding an opportunity to impact the world with the content of their beings.¹⁵

Xers intuitively focus their priorities on building relationships, rather than on materialism, driven by their need for redefined and reintegrated self-identity in and through a common life with others. They try to reconstruct and redeem their notion of

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 55.

¹⁵ Note that: just within the period between 1990 and 1994, over 20,000 American Xers relocated to Prague in the Czech Republic. (Mathedy and Bernadi, p.55)

the family by pouring themselves into their children, instead of their careers.¹⁶ They crave community as a context of healing and belonging, as a source for reenergizing existence with meaning and direction of a shared journey. The Postmodern generation regards “communal relationships as constructive to human identity.” They (the post-modern people) “... seek at the same time to honor the integrity of the individual and to make it possible for individuals to become all that they can.”¹⁷

Yet, the Xers’ fundamental perception of a social reality is that everything is uncertain and nothing can be trusted. Being children who grow up hearing many unfulfilled promises, the Xers

“are more responsive to deeds and action than... to words and symbols...For them truth is not so much stated as experienced. This generation needs to have truth lived out before it, not stated to it.”¹⁸

Thus, their definition of social consciousness is redefined in a way “that focuses on practical and rational responses to the social issues of the day.”¹⁹

The Xers were born in the era of the Vietnam War and the Prague Spring (the invasion by the Russians in 1967). They witnessed Watergate and the transformation of their parent’s communist ideals into a trivialized Utopia. They were introduced early to

¹⁶ Susan Mitchell, Generation X: The Young Adult Market (Ithaca, New York: New Strategist Publications, Inc., 1997). This book (a collection of statistical surveys in demographics and economics) establishes the fact of the intense sociality of the Xers, (pp. 9-12) and the primary focus on their children (pp. 184-237) in comparison to previous generations.

¹⁷ Ronald J. Allen, Barbara S. Blaisdell, Scott B. Johnston, Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Post-modern Ethos (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997). p. 140.

¹⁸ Long, p. 45

¹⁹ Deborah J. Hirsch, Politics Through Action: Student Service and Activism in the 90’s. *Change*. September/October 1993, pp. 32-35.

governmental and institutional corruption; to the moral corruption and fall of TV evangelist's empires; to the partisan politicization of essential social issues and their reduction to broken promises of irrelevant election campaigns; to the disillusionment with family life and the political process in general.

The same Eastern European Xers who once marched on the streets, pregnant with hope and empowered by their youthful discontent toward social transformation, suffered the severe disillusionment of the political turmoil in the post-Communist transition toward a capitalist economy. They felt betrayed by their parents, whose response to the newly encountered socio-economic challenges of the market's unpredictability was to look back with nostalgia and longing toward the familiar security of the Communist era. The Xers felt their dreams betrayed, their hopes robbed, and their sacrifice despised by the previous generations. They found themselves used and victimized by the corruption and perversion of the political process and its supporting institutions.

Today, as is in the West, the Eastern-European youth is numbed by despair, overwhelmed by a deep sense of social inadequacy and alienation, retreating in apathetic exodus into cyberspace and other forms of virtuality. They are deprived of community, since the community of origin betrayed their future to other selfish political aspirations.

Consequently, all these made Xers suspicious toward all institutions and the institutionalization process itself. The church as a religious institution is not exempt from this pattern of attitude. While confessing their profound spiritual hunger, Xers

hurry to point out their disregard for the institutional church as an inadequate option in the meeting of their needs. As one of them points out:

“. . . institutional religion offers little hope to us, for we no longer believe or trust institutions. Besides, most Xers are hung up on the idea of sin. . . references to sin are commonly taken very personally as a judgment upon one's self. . .
. . . We value community, friendship, oneness, and being part of something larger than ourselves. . . we are trying to fill the empty spaces within ourselves with relationships and friendships rather than material things.”²⁰

Many Xers are “former Christians” (raised in Sunday schools and summer church camps) for whom religion became irrelevant as institutional Christianity grew less and less distinguishable from its larger cultural context,²¹ and the difference between it and Christ's radical message became more obvious. Generation X has been identified in large as “post-Christian” since they identify the Christianity introduced to them with the moral content which shaped the society of the preceding generations, a society which aborted them together with their hopes and birthrights to innocence and affection.

Yet, Xers are concerned with spirituality and religion (as long as it is not institutionalized), which is also widely reflected in and through their pop-culture. They explore the notion of religiosity in the light of their deconstructive philosophy toward religious institutions, and pressing beyond the disillusionment, they appeal for “reconstruction of religious alternatives.”²² The Generation X's Cyber-space dwelling

²⁰ Mahedy and Bernardi, p. 57.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Tom Beaudoin, Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), pp. 37, 52. The author discusses “virtual

offers a fertile experimental ground for such alternatives. Cyber-space levels the religious institutions and their hierarchies since its very nature is hostile toward control and hegemony.

At the same time, as a construct, which offers a habitat of virtual transcendence to time, space, and culture, the Cyber-reality is a deeply religious social phenomenon. In its intensifying omniscience and omnipresence, Cyberspace exposes our natural human limits and sums up the contemporary human quest for the divine. As Marc C. Taylor emphasizes: "The increase in [virtual] speed creates the hope of breaking the barriers of space and time and entering a fourth dimension where it is possible to experience an eternal now."²³ Summoned by Cyberspace's embodiment of their religious aspiration, Xers create within it virtual religious communities in which visions of larger communal renewal are often being generated.²⁴

The Xers' spirituality shapes before us the allusion of an inclusive *eucharist*. They are anxious to build community (which will shelter them with a therapeutic and nurturing presence) through extending relationships of trust by sharing oneness – breaking one bread, drinking from one cup, sitting around one table. Yet, they are

religiousness" and "virtual liturgy" as being the trade mark of the Xers pop-culture. "Virtual liturgy" is being described as a hybrid between performance and worship. Beaudoin identifies four main themes in it, which represent standards of "lived theology," namely: deep suspicion of religious institutions, emphasis on the sacred nature of experience, the religious dimension of suffering, and unique ways of being religious. (pp. 41-42). As the author further points out: "Religious imagery bestows its blessings of religious simulation on the popular culture, and the culture bestows on the religious its own blessings of relevance."

²³ Mark C. Taylor, *Notes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 186.

²⁴ Beaudoin, pp. 89-90. In addition to the communal context, Cyberspace offers an alternative for spiritual solitude. "The Net is increasingly becoming a virtual monastery for the spiritually dispossessed." Further, "there are even on-line monasteries, in which users listen to chanting monks, gaze on brilliant iconography, and read holy manuscripts without interruption."

willing to make a place at the table for the hungry, the poor, and the different. Their spirituality is an expression of the generation's protest against the rationalized fragmentation of reality. Being themselves victims of abuse, negation, and resentment, they exemplify an unprecedented tolerance attributed by their critics to Postmodern relativism and social apathy. But perhaps, it can also be viewed as an expression of their longing for personal relationships and their sympathy toward the outcasts as a natural consequence of their social self-identification with them. The issues of gender conflict, ethnic, and racial struggles, denominational hostility are irrelevant to the Xers' communal understanding which promotes unprejudiced unity and cohesiveness.²⁵ The *koinonia*, which invites its members to become partakers of one another, brings the Xers into a position of transcendent vision of life which is simple and clear, namely: life together.

Could the so described Generation X embody and deliver a resourceful capacity for lasting social transformation? Potentially, yes! However, a more un-hypothetical sociological conclusion based on their profile would be to perceive them as the parents who will nurture and motivate a new, truly transformative generation, leaving them the legacy that: giving birth to a new more hopeful social order requires us to rediscover one another's humanity and personhood in an unprejudiced way – liberated from institutionalized scruples, clichés, and fragmentations, destined toward affirmation of one another in love and care for people and their cultural contexts.

William Strauss and Neil Howe are among the ones who also suggest that Generation X will parent the new "civic generation" – "who would be able to shoulder the burden of the next great national crisis and then assume leadership for a long time."

²⁵ Mahedy and Bernardi, p. 147.

They portray, on the other hand, the Xers as a “reactive generation,” which lacks a distinct capacity for social impact and dominance.²⁶ There are two basic problems with this theory. First, under this generational classification, it is suggested that a generation of despair and disillusionment (namely the Xers) can raise a generation of hope. However, a generation of hope cannot be raised without a parental legacy of hope (a quality that we should not deny to the Xers). Second, in the light of the present work’s thesis, we can conclude that by being incorporated into the Kingdom, each generation can break the cultural stereotypes by embodying the transforming vision and resources of the Kingdom’s social reality, thus, transmitting and mediating its hope and inducing a social motivation and energy for an authentic transformation. The Xers, with their hunger for community and transcendence, resentment toward institutions, and distinct ecumenical inclination, are primary candidates to become the first “post-Constantinian”²⁷ generation, exemplifying a radical commitment to the Kingdom’s life-style of witness. Being disclaimed as unproductive, socially unimpacting and unnecessary by the Boomers, the Xers have yet a distinct, indispensable destiny in the providence of God, who is always ready to use a generation for the advance of His Kingdom on earth.

The hope of this social vision could be theologically questionable, but it gives a civic response to one of the most troublesome questions of contemporary humanity, namely: how can we make it without destroying ourselves as a civilization? How can

²⁶ See William Straus and Neil Howe, *Generations* (New York: Morrow, 1991), pp. 69-110, and *Thirteenth Generation: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). The authors offer a rather pessimistic account on inter-generational relations and transmissions, trapped in the circles and cycles of statistical predictability and scientific theoritizing.

²⁷ The term appears so coined in Mahedy and Bernardi, p. 50.

we overcome our own madness and arrive beyond our adolescent temperament? The basic unpretentious answer of the Xers is: life together in a holistic community with an attitude of humility and mutual appreciation.

In the light of this social profile of Generation X, we can raise the legitimate question: How can the Church reach out and minister to this generation? Or formulated otherwise: what should the strategy of the Church be in the midst of the Postmodern setting?

The Strategies of the Church in the Postmodern Setting

In answering this question, it would be useful to summarize the characteristics typical of the Xers as compared to the Boomers and the related to ~~them~~ church strategies, since presently they are largely modeled after the profile of preceding generations. The following basic table makes an attempt to present such a summary in a simplistic, accessible way (see page 208 in the present text).

In spite of the fact that the table is quite self-explanatory, it will be used as an opportunity for a few additional comments.

	Boomers	Xers	Characteristics of the Present Strategies of The Church	Characteristics of the Strategies needed In the Postmodern Setting
1.	Confidence in their social dominance	Survivalism in a hostile environment	Triumphalism	Servanthood to all humanity and the rest of creation
2.	Confidence in the political process and the social arrangement	Disillusionment with the political process and resentment toward the status quo	Emphasis on theory; sermonic and liturgical approach toward reality	Emphasis on praxis; engagement through adequate social action, motivated by Kingdom ethics
3.	A spirit of conquest	Building and sustaining community	Mass evangelism	Personal approach in communal incorporation; enculturation into the community of faith
4.	Individualism	Relationships	Sunday-morning congregational worship	Daily community center
5.	Rationalism	Realism with longing for transcendence	Institution	Faith movement in and through the Spirit
6.	Fragmentation and compartmentalization of reality	Holism	"Guarding" denominationalism	Renewed vision of ecumenism

In the last few decades, institutional Christianity has made various adjustments to its theology and praxis in an attempt to stay relevant to this age and its cultural metamorphosis. It has invested paramount of energy and resources to translate its

“meta-narrative” (the Gospel) into the languages of the Cold War generations, and to rationalize and present as intelligible and logical the need of its presence in the cultural context of the Modern and (presently) Postmodern times. It did not hesitate to ally with the political avant-gardism of its day in order to maintain its possibilities for social influence and triumphalism.

The aspirations of the institutional Church toward a new socio-political renaissance of her indispensability from the power-factors of this world, brought her into a peculiar alliance with “this worldly” structures and constructs, namely: liberalism and rationalism in the West/North, and nationalism, Marxism, various totalitarian dictatorships, and genocide in the East/South.

In the process, the Church forgot the exhortation to exercise the gift of spiritual discernment, and thus, became confused in her ability to distinguish between “friends” and “enemies.” As a result, the Western church found herself pressing forth to make her space at the table of the ones who declared in a Postmodern fashion that God does not matter, for His “to be or not to be” is an issue of personal, human choice and cultural up-bringing. She forgot that ‘common enemies’ (e.g. sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, etc) does not mean common war strategies, or common ethical interpretations.²⁸The Western Church focused her apologetical effort on convincing her political allies of the fact that she presents a perfect feat within their philosophical concepts and utopic visions, and therefore, should be accepted and treated as equal.

²⁸ See Stanley Hauerwas, *No Enemy, No Christianity: Theology and Preaching Between Worlds*, pp. 26-34 in *The Future of Theology. Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, edited by Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg and Thomas Kucharz (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), p. 29-30.

In similar manner, the Eastern Church did not hesitate to take advantage of the escalating socio-political discontent, nationalistic and chauvinistic passions of the post-Iron Curtain Eastern-European society, in order to regain its status as an official state religion. It undertook a passionate endeavor of politicizing religion and hermeneutically usurping history and the right of its public interpretation. In most of the Eastern-European countries, the Orthodox Church used the Post-Communist identity crisis and disillusionment of society and their consequent refocusing on nationalism (as an expression of the people's desperate struggle to discover a platform for their identity-reintegration), and proclaimed herself as fundamental ally of democracy and single guardian of the national ethos.²⁹

With such an unannounced portfolio, the Orthodox Church started a vicious attack against Protestant denominations, involving a rigorous media campaign for the manipulation of public opinion toward the negation and social excommunication of Protestantism (presented as the disintegrator of national identity and a mechanism of luring the believers away from the true faith through a unscrupulous proselytism). The institutional Orthodox Church did not hesitate to make an ally of the former Communist Parties in the Eastern-European countries, in order to secure the necessary support for its political aspirations centered around the legalization of its status as the only official national church.

With an attitude standing in complete incompatibility with notions of human

²⁹ For an insightful reflection on the development and present stage of the political and religious function of the Orthodox Church in the Countries of the Former USSR and Eastern Europe, see Vigen Gurian, Ethics After Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), especially chapter 5.

rights, religious freedom and tolerance etc., the Orthodox Church contradicted her self proclamation as a supporter of the democratic process, and associated her methods with the painfully familiar propaganda and political strategies of the old totalitarian, and communist era. Her campaign of misrepresentation of the Protestant churches was very fruitful however, as the Protestant denominations felt alienated and resented by most of society. In some of the Eastern Block (e.g. Russia, Armenia), the parliaments passed laws which gave priority to the Orthodox Church, while significantly limiting the legal rights and representation of the rest of the Christian traditions. This fact pushed the Protestant churches deeper behind the walls of their social ghetto: some raptured in eschatological escapism and became unconcerned with the demands of their exterior context; others became frightened and doubtful in regards to their social survival.

Should we conclude, after this negative account, against the political and social activism of the Church? This would certainly be inconsistent with the theological claims made in the earlier sections of the present work. No doubt that authentic, Biblical Christianity is socially responsible and politically relevant, clearly aware of the social implications of the truth about sin and grace.³⁰

Its vision of the Kingdom is indivisible from a present passionate praxis of the Kingdom's socio-political nature of justice, love, and reconciliation. Its ethos is inseparable from the exemplification of social holiness, self-giving in service to others. Its teleological journey is illuminated by the inbreaking of the hopeful eschatological end

³⁰ John Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society*, vol. 1 (Old Tappan, New Jersey: A Crucial Questions Book, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1995), p. 19. As the author points out, "... in His Public ministry Jesus both 'went about ...teaching ...and preaching' (Mt. 4:23, 9:35) and 'went about doing good and healing' (Acts 10:38). Consequently, evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the Church..."

in the midst of the present existence. Obviously, the problem does not consist in the Church's political and social activism per se, but in their moral content and motivation.³¹

The mission of the Church to incarnate the Word in the midst of each generation demands a continual critical self-examination in regards to her motives for socio-political involvement, her passions and commitments toward genuine social transformation.

This critical reflection involves the evaluations of the Church's institutions in the light of the Word (and thus, the extent to which they reveal and exemplify the Kingdom). It further requires their reformation in conformity to the eschatological vision of the body of Christ, thus witnessing to the authenticity of the Christian hope.

Most sociologists agree that ever since the '70s there has been a strong general trend of public disengagement and negativism regarding institutions and institutionalization, due to disillusionment about their functional and moral resources. One of the consequences of this trend was the shift "from managerial society to an entrepreneurial society."³² The organized (institutionalized) forms of religion did not make an exception in this general social development, which brought about a distinct decline in the institutional authority of the Christian Church.

As this trend intensifies and deepens, the Church should redirect her attention from striving for institutional survival toward her Biblical mandate to be a body - a community illuminated by carrying forth its God-given mission to the world.

³¹ Thomas C. Oden, After Modernity ..What?, pp. 95-99.

³² H. Snyder and D. Runyon, Foresight (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1986), p 146.

As H. Snyder and Daniel Runyon state: "The best and most redemptive role of the church in society has never been as an institution, but rather as a community."³³ If the Church intends to fulfill her mission among the Generation Xers, she needs to recollect her social meaning and significance as a family and community; drawing its content and identity from the character and mission of Christ. It has to exercise sensitivity and commitment to the needs of its immediate social environment, nurturing within it communal ties motivated and driven by genuine Kingdom ethics.

Therefore, the Church should undergo a reconstruction of her traditional social image from the institutional monument (identified with both triumphalistic illusions and political manipulations) into a community center where (in the midst of a deconstructed, confusing Postmodern context) the basic human needs of her contemporaries are addressed: a reintegrated identity (through communal belonging); holism; transcendence and coping with death and pain; hope and a future.

This image emphasizes the primacy of the local Church as the Body of Christ present and committed to the social transformation of its concrete context. A transformation based on the hopeful eschatological vision of the Kingdom, as the Church incorporates this context (through mediation of God's grace, love and providential care) into her spiritual, teleological journey, while raising as a social standard its incarnated end in the midst of the Postmodern generation.

Obviously, this image also reflects a shift in the general trends of evangelistic strategies. In the light of the social profile of Generation X, there is an obvious incompatibility between the Postmodern setting and the popular Christian methods for

³³ *Ibid.*

mass evangelism, (such as mass crusades accompanied by distribution of tracts and other Christian literature, or a Sunday morning pulpit approach).

Generation X confronts the Church with the challenge to exchange the conventional sermonic emphasis with a focus on a transforming praxis, addressing both the concrete individual and his/her socio-political environment. The Church should perceive them not as territory for an overnight conquest, but as a field for cultivation and mutual growth, requiring a long-term commitment to vulnerability, honesty and humility within the context of a lifelong process of connecting with and patiently reshaping the elements of her context, one piece at a time.

Yet, in serving the needs of the Xers, the Church can explain the reason for her existence and social significance only if her Christianity has "something to offer that cannot be found in the culture at large," namely hope versus despair.³⁴

The Church is able to retain her social influence in the midst of this world only when her essence reflects the otherworldly reality of the Kingdom. Thus, the strength and vitality of the Church's social position is rooted in the paradoxality of the Kingdom, which simultaneously is already present (in the Body of Christ) and yet to come (to its final consummation in God). In light of that, the Church should guard the authenticity of her peculiarities and nonconformity to the cultural context, in order to be able to usher into it the inbreaking of the reality of her eschatological hope, inducing a genuine social transformation.

Shaped and led by the Holy Spirit, the Church should reflect its movement and direction, becoming herself a teleological movement of transforming hope, not willing to

sacrifice the authenticity of charisma for the predictable security of the institution.³⁵

Further, the accomplishment of the mission of the Church among Xers also requires critical revision of the current denominational fragmentation in Christendom, in the light of the Word. It calls for a renewed vision of the communion of the saints as Christ's global Body, inspired by deconstruction of the pre-existing, divisive stereotypes and their influence (on the basis of political, economic, cultural, ethnic, racial, etc. aspirations). It demands an honest re-evaluation and reconsideration of the ecumenical process in the light of a commitment to this vision.

Denominations must analyze and face with honesty and soberness their 'ecumenophobias', confess their superiority and inferiority complexes, and focus on the development of Christ-centered identity and affirmation of His cosmic Lordship. They should be willing to examine their traditions in light of Scripture, discerning between God's words and their own, and restructuring their resources for networking. Further,

³⁴ Jimmy Long, pp. 21-22.

³⁵ On the topic of denominational struggles toward achieving a balance between institutionalization and charisma, see: Margaret H. Poloma, The Assemblies of God on the Crossroad: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 1989), part II, pp. 99-207. Also, on "routinezation of charisma" Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. (New York: Free Press, 1947) and The Sociology of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). Weber points out that charismatic leadership inevitably undergoes a process of routinezation into a traditional, legalistic and bureaucratic structure with standard procedures and codes. He contrasts the institutional role of the priest with the charisma of the prophet. While the prophet proclaims salvation by virtue of his mission, the priest dispenses salvation by virtue of his office, thus establishing it as an organized enterprise. (pp. 334-440).

Thomas F. O'Dea, Five Dilemmas of the Institutionalization of Religion. *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, No. 1 (October): pp. 30-41, and Sociological Dilemmas in Sociological Theory, Values, and Sociocultural Change, ed. Edward A. Teryakian (Glencoe, New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 71-89. In relation to the routinezation of charisma, the author points out five dilemmas, namely: mixed motivations, administrative order, power, delimitation, and symbolic. (pp. 59-77). These dilemmas place under question the moral capacity of an institution and the degree of its ability for objectivity and authentic spirituality.

they should be willing to turn away from denominational competition and mutual proselytism and focus on joint efforts toward and actual demographic growth of the Kingdom.

The Western Church should explore resources for charismatic renewal through forsaking her ethnocentricity and sense of cultural superiority and strive for genuine internationalization, listening to and taking seriously the voices of the "Second and Third World" Christian community.

The international ecclesiastical structures must be capable of facilitating the unhindered flow of the Holy Spirit throughout the entire global Body of Christ, thus bringing the overflow of the revival in the Second and Third World's Christian community into the Western Church. This process should provide a free flow of charisma and preservation of its authenticity.

**Instead of Conclusion: The Postmodern Reconstructions of Reality and the
Relevance of the Church**

Today's society feels more finite than ever and seeks ways for self-expansion and self-globalization. This process is associated with prehending the need of transcendence of our historical burdens and liberation from their pressing weight as a prerequisite for survival.

Contemporary Europe feels more cosmic in its concerns than ever before. The state borders are gradually melting within the geo-political strategy of the vision of United Europe. The first Eastern-European countries have already crossed these borders, leaving behind their old socio-political meaning and context, where the "realization" of Marxism brought the end of the utopic hope through its trivialization. Since humanity desperately recognizes the need to be saved from itself and from the world, which it constructed through moral compromises and phobias, it longs for its dematerialization (for its spiritualization). The contemporary person is crucified between the temptation for the reduction of humanness into painless, abstract, sterile internet images, and the longing for liberation from its social alienation. Neither the modern version of Marxist utopism, nor its Capitalistic alternatives (revised in the light of the notions for democracy in the context of market economy), offer acceptable models for humanization of society in overcoming the estrangement and alienation within it. The modern "rational" world has exhausted its dialectical resources for scientifically proven "faith" in the progressive evolution of humanity. It finds itself in the midst of an overwhelming shock, provoked by the statistics of transcontinental ethnic cleansing campaigns, neo-colonialistic savage exploitation of third world countries, world-wide terrorism and the countless numbers of its innocent victims, and teenage massacres in prosaically normal High Schools throughout the conservative small towns in the United States of America.

More than ever the human being associates its personal salvation with that of its context, which is more global and cosmically interrelated, for the era of contemporary technology brought the reduction of space, time and memory to the size of an electronic

chip. Humanity's historical trajectory for self-identity is becoming more unclear after finding itself in the midst of the hell on earth which it created, surrounded by images of destruction of apocalyptic proportions.

Where is the Christian Church standing within the process of religious development in one world trapped in its post-utopic experience, desperately trying to express its need for transcendence, for a new horizon of hope and a humanizing touch? A significant part of the world will answer that the Church is lost in its own social ghetto, guarded by the more or less defined institutional walls, irrelevant, inadequate, infertile, handicapped, claiming to possess the peace of the Kingdom and therefore being unconcerned with the wars and trials of the world.

The truth is that the Church is busy striving for clarification of its own social position, identity and significance, fighting the doubts about its degree of relevance, debating the possibilities for translating the Gospel into the language of her contemporaries, and thus for opening its doors and recycling the bricks of its walls into a material for building bridges on which humanity may arrive into the Kingdom. In this process of the reaffirmation of her identity, the Church is crucified between her sociological tendency toward institutionalization and her spiritual vocation to preserve the authenticity of Charisma. She struggles for balance between the stereotypes of organized religion and sectarian separatism, between fragmentation and holism, between a form fixed in denominational concrete and being freed for ecumenical initiatives.

What can the Church offer to the world and the Post-modern mind in her own identity-crisis? The social despair, which raptured Modernity in the midst of its

anthropological optimism was ushered in upon the Nietzschean proclamation that "God is dead." This was fundamental in the self-comprehension of the modern era (as the time in which the *new* - the *novum* appears), through the Hegelian incarnation of the *Absolute* within the dialectical development of the historical process. In this sense, the post-modern era represents a leap toward the spiritualization of reality above and beyond the finitude of the universe and its resources, into the possibility for existence transcendent to the alienating present, into holistic (all-encompassing) new order of cosmic solidarity and unity reaching to eternity. This is an expression of longing for a lasting wholeness in existence and meaning, against fragmentation and limitations within the global human socium and its future destination. This is why the oneness of tolerance, pacifism, pluralism, and geo-political emancipation into a one just world-order are typical for the post-modern aspirations, as well as the religious developments toward *micro* and *macro-cosmic* interpretations of humanity (in New Age and Scientology for example) as a part of the conquest for an eternal orderly meaning. The longing for transcendence is translated into the religious context of striving after the super-natural, paranormal, and metaphysical as a source of hope for self-therapeutic human expansion beyond the claustrophobic limitations of the modern materialistic rationale, and its depressing prognosis of the human end.

In the Post-modern deconstruction of reality (in its present and historical dimensions) it is natural that the Church, as a tradition and part of the historical formation of reality, is also a disposable object destined for deconstruction. Indeed, as long as the Church presents herself as an entity shaped and formed by the dialectical struggles of history (or advocates the philosophical rationale of their political

motivations), she remains disposable and irrelevant to the post-modern human project. The Church is so desperately trapped in the institutional, modern rationale (attending to affirming her right of space and political significance within it), that she is becoming consistently desensitized toward the spiritual journey of the contemporary human being, and his/her avant-gardistic expectations of escape from the familiar materialistic existence.

Theologically however, there is no difference in the capacity and nature of trans-generational relevance which the 1st century church had to offer as compared to the church facing the entrance of the 21st century. The Church is relevant to her historical context only so far as she is able to offer a social reality which has a source of existence and final destination transcendent to this historical context. She is then able to offer a liberating alternative, a human exodus from the bondage of social despair and dehumanizing alienation. The Church is relevant when she offers peace instead of war, love instead of hatred, a gracious embrace instead of societal ostracizing and stratifying. She is relevant only as long as she embodies the future of the world and its humanizing longings in the midst of the present moment. In other words, the Church is relevant only if she incarnates the Crucified and Risen Christ and His all-transforming sovereign rule in the *praxis* of the Kingdom.

The Church of Pentecost, or the Church in the Power of the Spirit, presents to the world the holistic trans-historical relevance of Christ and His Body; the unique context of which has the ability to transform the world by growing within it and confronting it with its humanizing reality. The *praxis* of the Kingdom exemplified by it involves the overcoming of the institutional fragmentation of the Body, as well as of its

domestication and trivialization. This requires an ecumenical vision of the Body in its totality and wholeness and demands repentance from the bureaucratic fervency of the denominational political self-interest. The spiritual precedent of the inter-denominational nature of the Charismatic movement presents a legitimate argument against institutional claims on eternity. The praxis of the Kingdom challenges us to be the community of the King; living out the Eucharist by repenting from not recognizing His body, sitting around one table, breaking one bread, drinking from one cup, and recognizing Christ in each other despite our human differences.

This is also a praxis of liberation and emancipation which proclaims over the marginalized and outcast their humanness, and embraces them into the community as an indispensable part of God's humanizing project for the world. It also involves educating the world about the meaning of humanness and its destination, by dispersing and mediating God's grace and presence in all social dimensions. For example: the socio-political structures maintaining economic injustice must be confronted by the just reign of God in His community. The structures producing and maintaining poverty must be confronted with the care for the poor and the needy through a responsible redistribution of wealth and investment in their re-socialization and enculturation in the Christian community (including their education and training), thus giving them a new social meaning, a tangible hope, a future and a personal significance for the community. The drive toward war and death must be confronted with the sacredness of life and its recognition in all of God's creatures. In other words, the Church must confront the dehumanizing powers (in their function of fragmentation, division, and exploitation) with the omnipotent, sovereign reign of God in her midst; confirmed with

signs and wonders, and, most of all, authenticated by love and grace toward "the unlovable," "the undeserving," and "the alien."

Christ taught His disciples to pray for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth and for the establishment of His will here (as it is in heaven), but He also taught them that His Kingdom starts from them and their life together. This is why the event of His ascension did not conflict with His promise, "I will be with you always." For as long as we are together with one another in Christ, accepting one another as part of our own being, then Christ is present, and the visibility and authenticity of His presence forms the future and transforms the present as we continue to travel to the horizon of our hope.

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