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Anthropology and Theology in the Age of Globalization:

Reflections on Theological Method

There are three parts to my presentation this evening. In the first part I argue for the importance of philosophical anthropology or ontology of human existence for theological construction and for the imperative to self-consciously clarify the content of that anthropology at the outset of such construction. The fact is that this anthropological content often remains merely assumed and concealed in so many theologies. I am contending that in this sense a clarification of the underlying anthropological “preunderstanding” is an essential part of an adequate theological method. So much of the success or failure, the adequacy or inadequacy of theologies depends on, among other things, the adequacy or inadequacy of their underlying anthropology. In the second part I discuss the relationship between theology, anthropology, and historicity, and how a sense of historical crises determines the task of theology as well as how such a task requires an anthropology adequate to such a task. Here I use the example of the challenge of globalization and ask what kinds of tasks such a challenge poses to theology. In the third part I outline an anthropology of infinity, totality, and solidarity in their mutual dialectic as the anthropology required by such theological tasks in the age of globalization, and show how we can develop the theology of sin and grace on the basis of such an anthropology. I end with a brief reflection, both critical and appreciative, on Whitehead as a possible resource for contemporary anthropology.

The Importance of Anthropological Preunderstanding

Let me begin, then, with the importance of anthropology and the imperative of anthropological clarification in systematic theology. Here I want to use Paul Tillich, traditional theologies of the Holy Spirit, and the struggle between liberation theology and the Vatican as three counterexamples. In his celebrated Terry Lectures of 1951 at Yale, subsequently published as The Courage to Be,¹ Tillich provides an interpretation of contemporary historical crises in terms of the psychology of “anxiety.” Anxiety is the threat of non-being to our self-affirmation that belongs to human existence as existence, and there are three basic types of anxiety, depending on which dimension of our existence is threatened by non-being. “Ontic” anxiety is the experience of the threat of non-being to our ontic self-affirmation or our desire to be or to exist. It is experienced “absolutely” in the anxiety of death and “relatively” in the anxiety of fate, the contingency, unpredictability, and irrationality of our existence. “Spiritual” anxiety is the experience of the threat of non-being to our self-affirmation in the sphere of meaning in which we participate through creativity and sharing in original creations. It is experienced absolutely in the experience of meaninglessness due to the loss of a spiritual center and an ultimate concern and relatively in the experience of emptiness due to the gradual erosion of the special contents of spiritual life and the tradition under the impact of personal, existential doubt. “Moral” anxiety is the experience of the threat of non-being to our moral self-affirmation, our responsibility for our own destiny under the conditions of finite freedom. It is experienced absolutely in the anxiety of condemnation, the feeling of self-rejection and self-condemnation, arising from the despair of having lost our destiny, and relatively in the anxiety of guilt, the sense of ambiguity between good and evil that permeates everything that we do.

For Tillich, these three types are mutually immanent and reinforce one another. However, one type may be predominant in a particular historical period; for example, ontic anxiety at the

end of ancient Western civilization, moral anxiety at the end of the Middle Ages, and spiritual anxiety at the end of the modern world, that is, today. The central crisis of today is the crisis of skepticism and meaninglessness consequent upon the loss of God in the nineteenth century. This spiritual crisis has its “sociological presuppositions” in the breakdown of absolutism, the development of capitalism and liberal democracy, and the dominance and disintegration of a technical civilization. Humanity have lost their subjectivity in a world they have created. This spiritual crisis is best expressed, for Tillich, in Existentialist literature, art, and philosophy such as that of Heidegger and Sartre. For Tillich, however, the existentialist heroism of the “resolute” individual to create one’s own essence by one’s own existence ultimately fails as a response to the spiritual crisis of our time. The self, without participation in the world, is an empty shell, and human freedom is not the creative freedom of God but the responsive freedom of the finite creature who has not created but only received the structure of his or her own being and freedom. Collectivism is not the solution either since it purchases the security of participation at the expense of the self.

For Tillich, human existence is bipolar in structure, consisting of self and world, individuation and participation, but both poles are under threat. The solution to the crisis of human existence, therefore, can only be found in a courage rooted in the power of being-itself that supports, unites, and transcends both self and world and overcomes the power of non-being in both. However, the way of mystical pantheism with its emphasis on participation will not do because it tends to deny the reality of the finite world. Nor does the way of personal faith in a personal God because it remains vulnerable to the attack of doubt and meaninglessness. Tillich’s ultimate solution, then, is “absolute” faith that neither dismisses the reality of finite experience nor reduces God to an object among objects, which can always be doubted, but which is a state of being grasped by the

power of being-itself, a power that cannot be defined either in pantheistic or in personalistic terms but only as “the God above God.”

This, very briefly, is Tillich’s interpretation, his diagnosis and prescription for the crisis of the contemporary world. In 1951, when he gave these lectures at Yale, his theological existentialism was hailed as the good news of relief for many American and European Christian intellectuals struggling with the problem of defending the Christian faith in a world of increasing meaninglessness and despair. I am quite confident that today, some half a century later, we too still have a lot to learn from Tillich in this regard. In this particular presentation this evening, however, my intention is to use him as an example of what an anthropology should **not** be, as a counterexample, and therefore to critically focus on a particular point within his larger corpus without in any way claiming to evaluate his theology as a whole.

Tillich’s celebrated hermeneutics of contemporary crises is remarkable for a number of things he does **not** consider. In order to appreciate my concern, I invite you to refresh your memory of some of the major events of the time. Just six years before, World War II had ended after some six years of the most gruesome and bloodiest fighting in all parts of the world causing a human suffering simply unprecedented till then for its sheer magnitude and utter brutality, killing some 60 million people, counting only those actually killed, not to mention those hundreds of millions wounded and displaced, all the property damages, all the cultural treasures, ways of life, and human relations irreparably damaged and lost. Only thirty two years ago, World War I had ended, killing some 21 million people. Since 1945 the absolute majority of humanity, residing in what was then called the third world, were struggling to liberate themselves from decades and centuries of Western colonialism. In 1951, the very year in which Tillich was giving those lectures, the Korean War was raging in all its murderous brutality and violence, a most painful

symbol of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, between capitalism and socialism, killing some three million people. Even in Europe itself, the countries were just recovering from the sheer devastation of World War II, with the lion's share of that burden lying on the poor and working classes. In such a world with all these painful economic, political, and military conflicts going on, Tillich curiously limits himself to the intellectual crisis of doubt, skepticism, and cynicism. Such a crisis, we can say, is indeed radical in its atheism and critical to the integrity of the Christian faith. Still, one would recognize that it is a phenomenon limited to the narrow circle of European middle class intellectuals. It is rather baffling that he fails to see either an ontic or a moral crisis in the worldwide massacre of human lives and the immorality of economic and political imperialisms underlying it. His anthropological vision, to say the least, is peculiarly elitist and ethnocentric.

Furthermore, his hermeneutics is limited to the general ontological analysis of anxiety taken as a **psychological** phenomenon of **individual** existence. When he does attend to the social dimensions of such anxiety, he either limits himself to the "social-psychological" or cultural "expressions" of such anxiety in the fields of literature, arts, and philosophy, or takes the economic and political conflicts of the century only as the "sociological presuppositions" of the crises not worth analyzing in themselves. He fails to consider the economic and political contradictions precisely as the shaping and concretizing dimensions of the very spiritual crisis and its cultural expression, as the very concrete human content of the crisis. His analysis of the ontic anxiety of fate and death singularly fails to ask whether a death is caused by atomic bombs, indiscriminate aerial bombing, mass slaughter, forced starvation, politically motivated torture, gradual emaciation in a concentration camp, or by the natural process of aging, all of which would make important moral as well as psychological differences. In this systematic abstraction

from the concrete socio-economic and political content of the crises and confining himself to the psychology of individual existence, Tillich comes dangerously close to spiritualism. How, one may ask, is absolute faith in the power of being-itself a solution to the hundreds of millions of human beings killed by systematic bombing, racist genocide and mass slaughter, deliberate starvation and hunger in the economic, political, and military conflicts of the twentieth century?

Tillich's hermeneutics is governed not only by the anthropology of elitism, individualism, ethnocentrism, and apolitical spiritualism, but also by an anthropology of intellectualism. His main concern, like that of his contemporary demythologizing and transcendental theologians, is how to make Christian faith **intelligible** to skeptical, atheistic intellectuals by "revising" or reconstructing our **understanding** of God, not how to transform and redeem the scandalous reality of global human suffering by revising our **praxis** of faith in God. As Descartes tried to meet the skeptical challenge of the seventeenth century by a transcendental deduction of the Cogito from the very conditions of doubting, so Tillich tries to respond to the skepticism of the twentieth century by deducing "the God above the God of theism" from the transcendental conditions for the very possibility of the experience of doubt and meaninglessness. He is interested only in the intellectual, metaphysical conditions for the possibility of the experience of meaninglessness, not also in the concrete historical conditions that generate such experiences, only in a **theoretical** critique of the intellectual conditions, not also in a **practical** critique that transforms the historical conditions. No wonder, therefore, that he sees in the contemporary world only a spiritual and intellectual challenge to change what we **think**, not also a moral and practical challenge to change what we **do**.²

I use Tillich as a contemporary example of how one's anthropology, in this case, the existentialist ontology of human existence, guides and shapes one's theological concerns and

even theological conclusions, showing at the same time how the limitations of that anthropology lead the theologian to completely ignore or remain blind to many other concerns. I would like to briefly discuss two further examples of how anthropology conditions theology, pneumatology and liberation theology. Traditional pneumatologies typically assume an anthropology that places the center of being human in the spiritual, intellectual inwardness or interiority of the individual. This is due to a number of influences. Paul himself speaks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit “in” or inside us, especially in our “hearts,” and of the fruits of the Spirit in the life of an individual in opposition to those of the flesh. The “Spirit of truth” spoken of in John has been interpreted as the source of the intellectual virtue of wisdom. In recent years, with the flourishing of the charismatic movement, the tendency has been to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the various gifts, but these gifts are still understood as gifts of individuals. When the sociohistorical dimension of the Holy Spirit was recognized, it was only in its ecclesial form, in its guiding and sanctifying presence in the church, in its sacraments and its teaching office. Virtually nothing has been said about the life-giving, liberating, and transforming activity of the Holy Spirit in secular history and the cosmos. The Holy Spirit has been reified and limited to the personal dimension of spiritual and intellectual inwardness, and recognized at best in the ecclesial dimensions of the sacraments, teaching office, and the various gifts. In short, traditional theologies of the Holy Spirit simply ignore the historical, political, and cosmic roles of the Holy Spirit.³

In my book, Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation,⁴ I argued that the struggle between liberation theology and the Vatican was in fact a struggle between two different anthropological horizons. The vision of liberation theology is the dialectical vision of the Hegelian, Marxian tradition with its emphasis on the conflicts and reconciliations of our socio-

historical existence, while the vision of the Vatican, of Popes John Paul and Benedict XVI is that of the Augustinian, personalist vision with its emphasis on individual inwardness and relation to God within that inwardness. For the former sociality is primordial, individuality derivative; for the latter, individuality is primordial, sociality derivative. The different horizons make it very difficult for each to talk to the other, and the result of such difference in the respective anthropological horizon is that each side sees in the dimensions emphasized by the other only an expression of an unchristian ideology and a source of the contamination of authentic Christian theology. It goes without saying that each anthropological horizon also assumes an opposing interpretation of the nature of the contemporary crises. Liberation theology locates the great crisis of our time in the human suffering caused by the evils of capitalist economy; the Vatican locates it in the destruction of personal authenticity and Christian faith brought about by capitalist culture and increasing secularism.

Theology and Historicity

These reflections show not only that anthropological presuppositions do precondition the theological outcome but also that one's sense of the historical crises determines what kind of anthropology one wishes to adopt, while one's anthropological presuppositions likewise predetermine what will count as crises. Not every anthropology is capable of grasping the magnitude of the historical challenges posed to theology, and an essentially ahistorical anthropology can easily end up misreading the signs of the times, just as appreciation of the magnitude of historical crises leads one to abandon traditional anthropologies and adopt new ones. What kind of an anthropology one should develop as a prolegomenon to theology thus depends on what kind of historical crises one proposes to address by means of her theology.

This leads to the further question of the relationship between theology and the anthropology

that seeks to serve as theology's methodological prolegomenon. I approach the issue in terms of matter and form or the hylomorphic composition of theology, as many liberation theologians do. Anthropology provides the basic structure of human existence, a description of the space and dynamic in which we carry on our concrete existence as human beings, which in turn serves as the material, matter, or substance demanding interpretation and illumination in its transcendent significance, which theology provides sub ratione dei or in terms of the relationship of human existence to God. Theology provides the form or perspective, anthropology the structure, of the human experience that serves as the material of theology. Theology, like human beings in Aristotle, is essentially hylomorphic. For example, what passes for crime in human societies is interpreted as sin in its transcendent, theological significance. Sin does not have an object or sphere of objects of its own apart from the realm of human experience; it is simply the theological interpretation or form of the culpable evil committed by human beings in the ordinary material of human existence itself. All objects and all aspects of human existence are potentially theological in their significance. This hylomorphic view avoids the dualism of nature and grace, as it also avoids the extrinsecism of much traditional theology. The realm of grace is not a separate realm or a separate object but simply the transcendent, theological significance of what happens in our natural experience, as our natural experience is precisely the substance or content of theology. This hylomorphic view of theology keeps nature and grace in mutual relationship and mutual openness, making grace humanly significant, while also making nature theologically valuable. This is also the point of Rahner's transcendental theological method and Tillich's method of correlation.⁵

Given this relation between theology and anthropology, it is imperative to clarify the role of the historical crises that we seek to address theologically, because it is this sense of historical

crises that in turn determines the content of the anthropology that will serve as the methodological prolegomenon to the theology we wish to develop.⁶ What, then, is the relationship between the sense of historical crises and the anthropology appropriate to that sense? All contemporary theologies exemplify this relationship from the theologies of existence, hope, and liberation to the rhetorical, narrative, feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial theologies. There is always a correlation between the interpretation of the nature of the crisis and the kind of underlying anthropology to serve as the matter of its theology. For example, it is not by accident that the crisis of the erosion of Christian identity leads to the narrative form of anthropology and theology; narrative is especially well equipped to promote continuity and tradition. Nor is it by accident that the crisis of patriarchy leads feminism to espouse an anthropology of relationality and that the crisis of oppression leads liberation theology to espouse an anthropology of praxis.

I happen to think that the greatest crisis today and therefore the most significant challenge to theology today is the crisis and challenge of globalization. What kind of an anthropological preunderstanding, then, does a theology of globalization demand? In order to be able to answer this question, we have to know the nature of the many crises and challenges posed by the phenomenon of globalization. To just summarize the vast critical literature on the subject, in my view, there are six basic challenges: (1) the increasing economic inequality between rich and poor nations and between rich and poor within nations, (2) the gradual erosion of the sovereign authority of the nation state as the ultimate promoter of the public interest, (3) the scandal of differences among different human groups, cultures and religions, (4) the intensification of the ecological crisis, (5) the increasing relativization and trivialization of human values, especially human identity, dignity, and commitment, and (6) lack of an effective sense of human solidarity across the globe.⁷

These, in turn, pose six theological tasks, again to just summarize: (1) the formulation in global terms of the preferential option for the poor and marginalized, involving the empowerment of the poor to liberate themselves and the commitment of the affluent to political solidarity with the poor; (2) renewal of political theology to promote the integrity and efficiency of the state as the ultimate guarantor of the common good at the present time, emphasizing the role of citizens in promoting that integrity and efficiency in their own nations and especially the role of the citizens in big nations to restrain the imperialist ambitions of their own nations; (3) the reintegration of humanity as part of nature with emphasis on the responsibility of humans as guardians of the integrity of nature; (4) the positive appreciation, not mere toleration, of differences in cultures and religions; (5) the protection, against the disintegrating, relativizing, and trivializing forces of globalization, of a sense of identity, dignity, and commitment; (6) the persuasive articulation of a sense of human solidarity and human transcendence in, through, and beyond these travails of the globalizing world.

I want to reflect a little on the last task, articulating a sense of human solidarity and human transcendence. We today hear so much about difference. And it is only imperative to take difference seriously if we are interested in human liberation; so much oppression is due to the repression of differences. On the other hand, it is self-defeating to absolutize or overemphasize difference at the expense of the denial of all human solidarity. At its extreme, it is simply nihilistic. This is the paradox of globalization. By bringing peoples, religions, and cultures together into the common space of the world globalization makes us aware of the **differences** among peoples of different religions and cultures and at the same time of the compelling practical necessity of peoples finding a way of living **together** in common political space with all their differences, for all their differences, and despite all their differences. Living together in

common space involves recognizing a common destiny on this planet in which our lives are inextricably interwoven in an infinitely complex network of interdependence at the level of economics, politics, and culture, recognizing similarities among human beings despite all their differences in terms of their basic economic, political, and cultural needs, and working together to institutionalize the provision and protection of such needs in the laws and structures of nations and global organizations, and reflecting together on the absolute future of humanity.⁸

What the times call for, then, is the renewal of a sense of the universality of human nature and human destiny. We remember that from Plato to Existentialism Western philosophers and theologians have variously discussed and characterized the constitution of human nature or its variation, the human condition. We now also know how ethnocentric, sexist, and classist such discussions often have been. This does not mean that we have to do away altogether with the sense of human universality that we share as human beings. It does mean that this time it will have to be a universality with a difference. It will have to be a universality that allows itself to be expressed with all the concrete differences that we find in the many nations, cultures, and religions of the contemporary world, a universality that operates through the concrete movements of interdependence and cooperation among them, and a universality that does not lend itself to the tyranny of essentialization to which the normative group can always subject all others. It will be a universality that is concrete because differentiated, effective because expressed in concrete movements, and transcendent because it is by nature indefinable and unessentializable. It will have to be a postcritical, even postpostmodern universality because it will preserve legitimate differences but also transcend them in a solidarity that also connect different nations and cultures in mutual cooperation for the recognition of a common dignity beyond all essentialization and the creation of the common conditions to protect that dignity by

providing the basic economic, political, and cultural needs of all.

Without some sense of universality and solidarity as human beings, we may ask why we should engage in a preferential option for the poor rather than keeping our resources just for ourselves, why we should promote the common good of humanity rather than seek our self-interests, why we should be concerned over the looming ecological disaster rather than simply enjoying the comforts and luxuries of the day, why we should love and welcome those who are different rather than simply leaving them alone, and why we should bemoan the trivializing and corrupting impact of so much media on our sense of dignity, identity, and commitment rather than simply enjoying some of their thrilling aesthetics for ourselves. All the compelling tasks facing us today demand that we go beyond our self-interest, that we recognize our mutual dependence, and that we realize that we share a common destiny and that we cannot do without one another.

The Dialectic of Infinity, Totality, and Solidarity

Such being the case, then, we may now ask what kind of anthropology such historical crises and such theological tasks require. Here I submit the triple dialectic of infinity, totality, and solidarity as the defining content of the anthropology most appropriate to such crises and such tasks.

By virtue of their transcendence human beings share a dignity that resists all arbitrary desires and all empirical essentialization, a dignity sovereign and indefinable and infinite in this sense. This dignity is expressed in Christian terms in the belief that human beings are created in the image of God, in Kantian terms in the imperative that human beings are ends in themselves and never to be treated as mere means to the satisfaction of arbitrary desires, and in Levinasian terms in the discernment of the imperative, “Thou shalt not kill,” in the “face” of the Other. Human

beings, however, cannot **live** on dignity. As embodied entities, human dignity requires the support of economic, political, and cultural means to become aware of itself and realize itself. It needs the provision of basic material needs, guarantees of political freedom and equality, and the availability of cultural means and opportunities, in order to enjoy the freedom of meaningful life in dignity. Without the provision of these economic, political, and cultural means we remain vulnerable to the degrading humiliation of material starvation, political exploitation, and cultural manipulation. Providing these supports is precisely the way of respecting and promoting human dignity. We provide these supports through various systems of totality, that is, through economic, political, and cultural systems and laws that apply to all. We can provide these supports only together or only through mutual interdependence and cooperation. None of us can provide these economic, political, and cultural supports by himself or herself. We are thoroughly, through and through, dependent on one another. Only through this practical solidarity can we provide the totality that we need in order to actualize our transcendent dignity as embodied entities.

Let us look a little more at this triple dialectic of infinity, totality, and solidarity. Without a liberating totality, a system of identity that provides the basic economic, political, and cultural needs, infinity remains merely ideal and exhausts itself in the unrelieved negation of mere transcendence without objectifying fulfillment. Without such a totality solidarity too becomes mere talk of “community” and lapses into ideology. On the other hand, without the infinity that alone provides both the moral encouragement for positive political praxis and the moral protest against oppressive politics, totality becomes totalitarian, and solidarity becomes mere collectivism. Without solidarity, the conscious recognition and praxis of our mutual dependence for both the appreciation of our respective ethical infinity and the establishment of a liberating

totality, infinity itself becomes merely egoism absolutized, and totality becomes a war of all against all.

Authentic human existence thus depends on the triple dialectic of infinity, totality, and solidarity, infinity as the self-transcending principle, totality as the actualizing principle, and solidarity as the socializing principle. Only through such a dialectic can a community of Others, something our age seems to cry out for, become possible. The great challenge of our time is to maintain the tension and dialectic of infinity, totality, and solidarity, of transcendence, history, and sociality, and create, through a politics of solidarity, totalities that liberate us for our shared infinity.

Such an anthropology must possess certain characteristics. It must be **socialist** in the ontological, not political sense, as opposed to individualist, in that it takes our interdependence as constitutive and as something prior to our individuality. Without denying the relative validity of substantial identity it goes beyond all philosophies that begin with the isolated individual, whether conceived as a substance or a self, even beyond all philosophies of intersubjectivity or I-Thou relationship that celebrates interpersonal relations in social isolation. It is not deceived by the illusion of equality linguistically expressed in the conventional contrast of “individual **and** social.” Sociality in the sense of the totality of constitutive historical relations is ontologically prior to individuality. Individuals are born into a society already existing, and nourished and sustained throughout their lives by its resources, opportunities, and ideologies. We both benefit and suffer from our social existence. Social cooperation and a sense of solidarity with one another is an inherent demand of our constitutive interdependence, not an accidental event, a dispensable option, or an aberration of atomistic individuals.

Our anthropology is also **materialist** in its sensibility in the sense that achieving economic

equality takes precedence over achieving equalities in gender, race, and religion. This is not because economics is more important than gender, race, or religion, but simply because sexism, racism, and discrimination against other religions are normally concretized in an economic form, that is, in oppressing the other by economic means, by discriminating in hiring, threatening layoffs, systematically excluding the other from promotions, etc. Achieving economic equality, then, means depriving sexism, racism, and religious discrimination of the most potent tool of oppression, economic power. This does not mean that with economic equality sexism, racism, and religious discrimination will disappear. It does mean that while people may still hate the opposite gender, other races, and other religions, they will do so under conditions of equal economic power and therefore without the benefit of the economic weapon. Such hatred still remains undesirable, but it will be quite bearable. It certainly will not be as humiliating as when one has to fear the deprivation of the very means of life and thus feels pressured into submitting oneself to the most degrading treatments in the most helpless way.

In addition to being socialist and materialist, our anthropology must also be **practical** and **liberationist** in its sensibility. It is a vision of humanity that is confident and committed to producing and maintaining the historical conditions of liberation through human praxis and therefore sensitive to the possibilities of liberation and oppression in every important social change, especially to the repression of the Other in classism, sexism, racism, imperialism, and colonialism, as well as to the violation of nature. Instead of seeking social change through purely individual effort and then despairing, it will emphasize the socialist imperative of cooperative praxis as an effective sign of solidarity in resisting oppression and establishing liberating forms of totality. It is not naively optimistic, but it is not fatalist either.

This socialist, materialist, liberationist, and practical vision must also become a **historical**

sensibility, that is, an awareness of the fact that there are no societies in general but that each society is always determinate, with its determinate mode of the production and consumption of economic, political, and cultural power, with its determinate ideologies, with its determinate stage of consciousness, and with its determinate contradictions and tensions. Societies are not just “becoming” in a very vague, abstract sense but changing under determinate circumstances in a direction which is not just indeterminate with certain determinate consequences. It is crucial to always think of society in this very concrete, determinate way because it is under these determinate, changing social conditions that we must seek to actualize the liberating economic, political, and cultural conditions or totalities worthy of the infinite dignity of human beings and do so precisely through the effective solidarity of human praxis. The possibilities of liberation and praxis must be sought in concrete, determinate history. Without effective relevance to determinate history praxis becomes ideological. Without real possibilities of liberation in determinate history praxis becomes utopian. The socialist praxis of solidarity seeking liberating totalities, therefore, must always be sensitive to the signs of the times and study their possibilities for liberation and oppression. In short, liberating praxis must be informed by social analysis or a socio-analytic mediation, as liberation theologians have been emphasizing.⁹

Our anthropology must also be **cosmological** in its sensibility and consider human beings as part of nature. Human beings, however, are not part of nature in the same way that trees and rocks are part of nature. They are part of nature as nature’s self-conscious and responsible members. Human beings can never achieve the immediacy of harmony with nature simply because they are self-conscious and self-critical beings and because nature in its immediacy is not always kind to human well-being, as witness Hurricane Katrina and the many wildfires in Southern California. Often enough, human beings must conquer and master nature in order to

extract their livelihood from nature. Still, they are part of nature and must learn to live in harmony with nature. Without denying the benefits of modernity and its emphasis on history as the realm of human achievements, we must now learn not to pit history against nature but rather to locate history itself within nature without simply identifying the two.

Finally, our anthropology must be **contemplative**, not only practical. In confronting us with the challenge of helping the huge numbers of the poor in the world, in compelling us to think of the common good of humanity and the common ecological disaster facing all humanity, in forcing us to find a way of welcoming those who are different in religion, culture, and nationality, and in making it urgent to find new bases and sources of human solidarity and to do all of these on the global level, globalization compels us to stop merely acting and really stop to think about or contemplate our fundamental relationships with one another, the profound meaning of difference, and above all the place of humanity in the cosmos, or to rethink the fundamental position of humanity in light of the totality of things and the creator of that totality, that is, as St. Thomas put it, sub ratione Dei, under the logic of God. This fundamental or radical rethinking of the place of humanity in the total scheme of things, beyond all preoccupation with our own purely individual, sexual, economic, national, religious, or cultural particularities, is precisely what contemplation means. As such, it means being wise, and it is important to remember, in the early centuries the Christian faith was itself called true wisdom.

Globalization forces upon us the imperative of contemplating the place of humanity in the total scheme of things, in light of God. It means recognizing that human beings are more passive than active with regard to the basic conditions of life, the fundamental structures, needs, and limitations of human life, that we have not created these conditions by our own choice and therefore must learn to respect and appreciate them. Human beings must contemplate and

rediscover their relatively modest place in the vast universe and act accordingly, not with hubris but with moderation, not with the arrogance of domination but with the humility of service. It is precisely this contemplative vision of the whole and our humble place in that whole that the contemporary activist world solely lacks to its own self-deception and schizophrenia, to its many debilitating neuroses and anxieties. The contemporary world cries out for the wisdom that only such a contemplative vision can bring.

Such a wisdom and such a vision are precisely the correlative of the dialectic of human transcendence. As the entire Christian tradition has been testifying from Augustine to Tillich and Rahner, human existence is not only finite but also in-finite in its very recognition, both theoretical and practical, of its own finitude as finitude. The whole dialectic and dynamic of human existence is the quest for the fullness of existence beyond fragmentation, alienation, and mortality, and, therefore, for a wholeness or harmony with all creation and all humanity, and for union with the infinite, transcendent source of all created things. A quest for wholeness and totality is inherent in the human capacity and desire for transcendence.

Such a quest is possible only through contemplation, not action. Action is always necessarily situated; it is for a determinate purpose, under determinate conditions, at a determinate time and place. It is essentially determinate and particular in its concern, content, and horizon. Its vision is not that of the whole but that of what is possible here and now for the always situated praxis of transformation. It is only through the contemplative detachment from the here and now, from all determinacies, that we can achieve the vision of the whole in its ultimacy and depth to the extent such a vision is possible here below. Just as it takes a spiritual retreat or withdrawal from the world of immediate action and its urgencies for individuals to be able to look at, review, and reflect on their personal lives in their totality, ultimacy, and depth, it also takes the detachment of

contemplation from the world of praxis as such for human beings to be able to reflect on their place in the divine scheme of all reality and establish a sense of hierarchy of values and a sense of perspective and proportion. It is only through this contemplative vision of totality in God and our mutual relations in that totality that we can rediscover the foundations of human solidarity and human dignity and the place of humanity in the universe. Contemplation is essential to human liberation as its ultimate justification and as its constant critique.¹⁰

Thus far I have not even outlined the structure of an anthropology with its triple dialectic of infinity, totality, and solidarity but only some of the essential characteristics of such an anthropology. Such an anthropology is yet to be written, drawing from many diverse sources, theology and philosophy, social and natural sciences, eastern and western spiritualities, and especially the experiences of those whose voices have been absent from history.¹¹

Finally, what difference does this anthropology make to the theology of sin and grace today? How do we apply this anthropology here? Traditionally, sin means alienation from God, whether this alienation occurs by means of pride, unbelief, idolatry, or something else, and original sin means the wounding of human nature as such and the loss of the original integrity and harmony of intellect, will, and desire. Whereas the classical theology of Augustine locates original and personal sin in the “heart” or inwardness of the individual as symbol of the true depth of the person and abstracts altogether from its social origins and manifestations, our anthropology will locate sin as a characteristic inherent primarily in our social existence and derivatively in our personal existence. Sin throws into disorder not only our personal, interior existence but also and more importantly our social relations with others. It is these social relations—historically concretized—that condition and contextualize our personal, interior existence. Whereas Augustine locates the paradigm of original sin in sexual lust, our

anthropology will locate that paradigm in the most typical yet also most destructive social phenomenon, the tyranny of identity, that is, the propensity to exclude the other from our own identity group. This original sin then becomes concrete in social sins, i.e., sins that we commit through the structures, laws, and resources of social groups to which we belong, such as imperialism, which is nationalism gone mad to the murder and suffering of millions of fellow human beings. Social sins in turn provide the context of inducements and resources for personal sins, i.e., sins that we commit simply as individuals.

This shifting of theological focus from personal to social sin and to the tyranny of identity as the paradigm of original sin is of serious contemporary significance. We do far greater harm through the resources of the state of which we are members than we can ever do simply as individuals. States alone can kill millions through war, and enslave and disenfranchise millions through law and therefore wholly legally, which makes the atrocities of states all the more cynical and pernicious. No individual can do any of these things simply as an individual. To confine our attention to personal sins is to remain blind to the sources of the greatest sin and the greatest human suffering, social sins. Evil structures violate both our dignity and our solidarity to a far greater extent than any personal sin can. By the same token, the proper space or field for the operation of grace that heals our wounded nature and empowers us to transcend ourselves must be located primarily in our social structures and relationships, not, as in Augustine, in our “hearts.” We must look for the signs of divine grace more in the liberating transformation of structures and laws than in the conversion of individual hearts.

Let me end with a brief reflection on Whitehead. If we are looking in Whitehead for an example of a concrete historical anthropology to serve as a basis for a liberating theology of globalization, I think we fail. Look at his Adventures of Ideas¹² written only thirteen years after

the end of World War I, the bloodiest war up to that time, and dealing with civilization in Chapter IV in terms of truth, beauty, adventure, and peace. One would think that at least in the section dealing with peace, we would find some references to World War I. There isn't any. In fact, the whole discussion of civilization is carried out in the most abstract metaphysical language possible, in complete abstraction from economics and politics, without any reference to the concrete clashes of the actual world, to hunger, bloodshed, class struggles, social crises, military conflicts, imperialist atrocities, certainly something remarkable in a book on civilization.

We may turn to Part I of the same book explicitly dealing with things "sociological," but what do we find?¹³ Again, Whitehead proves disappointing to those looking for compelling, critical references to contemporary world events of great significance for human suffering, human oppression, and human liberation, such as World War I or the Great Depression or the great revolutionary struggles going on in Russia, China, and India, or the great struggles of the poor working classes in the United States. On all these issues Whitehead remains completely silent. Instead we are treated to the "history" of humanity but to this human history as basically "the history of ideas" or, as the title of the book has it, "Adventures of Ideas."¹⁴ It is essentially a history of how ideas and ideals have impacted the progress of human events and in particular how human history is a history of "the victory of persuasion over force."¹⁵ One is almost tempted to accuse Whitehead of reducing human history to an exclusively "intellectual" history, were it not for the fact that he does take the role of technology, commerce, and "the iron compulsion of nature" more seriously than a pure idealist would. Still, the overall standpoint of Whitehead is to "understand" human history as a whole in terms of the emergence of certain **ideas** about human relationships and human dignity, not about the concrete dialectic of structures that promote or destroy such relationships. His perspective is thoroughly "contemplative," not

“active” in the sense of analyzing contemporary history in terms of its possibilities of human liberation and oppression and providing vision and hope for the empowerment of the victims of history for collective political praxis. Whitehead does talk about slavery and capitalism, but with the perfectly detached attitude of a contemplative historian, not with the sense of urgency born of an enraged sensitivity to human suffering. His perspective is to “understand” the world, not to “transform” it, in the language of Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach.

If his social philosophy is disappointing because he uses abstract metaphysical categories or adopts a contemplative approach, a Whiteheadian might well reply that it was not Whitehead’s intention to provide categories for a concrete political philosophy of liberation, and I am inclined to think that such a reply is wholly reasonable. I do not think the greatness of his philosophy lies in providing concrete political categories for a philosophy of liberation. It lies elsewhere, in providing a comprehensive metaphysical perspective on the universe as a whole. In this sense his philosophy is a great example of contemplative wisdom, a contemplative quest for a hopeful vision of the whole which we also desperately need in our busy activist age. Beyond all our immediate urgencies and compulsions Whitehead invites us to contemplate human history as a whole, to discern the meaning of human destiny in that history as a passage from force to persuasion, and to appreciate the place of humanity in the vast “adventure” of the universe.

Even in Adventures of Ideas I have just been criticizing from one perspective, Whitehead calls our attention to the “inexorable law that apart from some transcendent aim the civilized life either wallows in pleasure or relapses slowly into a barren repetition with waning intensities of feeling.” He invites us to discern in history how a “bond of sympathy” has arisen beyond family affections, intellectual exchanges, and the practice of commerce. “This bond is the growth of reverence for that power in virtue of which nature harbours ideal ends, and produces individual

beings capable of conscious discrimination of such ends. This reverence is the foundation of the respect for man as man. It thereby secures that liberty of thought and action, required for the upward adventure of life on this Earth.”¹⁶ This vision of human solidarity and human dignity is rooted in a vision of the universe as an “upward adventure of life,” which in turn is interpreted in terms of the transcendent depth of all reality. Whitehead describes religion precisely as a vision of such transcendence, as “the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.”¹⁷ This religious vision is essentially universal and requires contemplation in solitude, “a disconnection from immediate surroundings. It is an endeavor to find something permanent and intelligible by which to interpret the confusion of immediate detail.”¹⁸

For Whitehead, it is precisely the task of theology “to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions.”¹⁹ It is safe to say that Whitehead’s whole philosophy was dedicated to this theological task and to the elaboration of this religious vision. As such, his philosophy was a rare example of contemplative wisdom in the contemporary world. No one can say that such a vision is irrelevant to an integral understanding of human liberation itself. The remaining issue is how to bring the contemplative and the activist vision together while also maintaining a fruitful tension between the two, without succumbing to the temptation to resolve one into the other.²⁰

¹ (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952). The following discussion of Tillich is based on chas. 2, 5, and 6.

² My interpretation of Paul Tillich largely repeats what I said in my “Praxis and Liberation: Towards a Theology of Concrete Totality” (Ph. D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1989), 38-45.

³ See Anselm K. Min, The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Word After Postmodernism (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 101-102.

⁴ (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1989), especially 117-156.

⁵ For this “hylomorphic” conception of theology, see Clodovis Boff, Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), xxiv-xxx and 29-34; Anselm K. Min, Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter Between Aquinas and Recent Theologies (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 16-26.

⁶ For a discussion of the theological significance of crisis, a typology of crises, and the ethical and theological criteria for the evaluation of crises, see Min, “Praxis and Liberation,” 15-73.

⁷ The literature on globalization is vast. Let me just mention one book that I think is perhaps the most comprehensive survey of the problems posed by globalization, David Held, et. al., Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁸ On a book-length discussion of the mutual implications of difference and solidarity in what I call “the solidarity of Others,” see my Solidarity of Others.

⁹ See Clodovis Boff, 3-66.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the relation between action and contemplation, see my Paths to the Triune God, 307-337.

¹¹ I tried to outline an anthropology of concrete totality in my “Praxis and Liberation,” 74-178.

¹² Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas ((New York, NY: Macmillan, 1933).

¹³ I thank Professor John Cobb for calling my attention to this section of the book, which I almost ignored.

¹⁴ Adventures of Ideas, 3 and 1 respectively.

¹⁵ Adventures of Ideas, 53.

¹⁶ Adventures of Ideas, 109.

¹⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: Macmillan, 1925; Mentor Book, 1962), 171.

¹⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 48.

¹⁹ Adventures of Ideas, 176.

²⁰ See Min, Paths to the Triune God, 307-337.