THE RETRIEVAL OF SUBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the impact of Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Christian theology has come to criticize its own ideological heritage. In particular it wrestles against the privatistic orientation encouraged by dialogue with existentialism and psychotherapy. Pietism has also helped to privatize the Christian self-understanding. The task of theology today is to 'de-privatize' Christian teaching, to move beyond private man to the recognition of political man, and to recover the radical social meaning of the gospel. Yet after the assimilation of these neo-marxist principles and the elaboration of a politically responsible theory of man, human subjectivity does not disappear. People still search for the meaning in life, people still have depressions and are in need of therapeutic counseling, and people still have a life of interiority. This article is concerned with the recovery of a politically responsible subjectivity, especially in the context of a psychotherapeutic practice aware of the political reality.

Christian theology in dialogue with Critical Theory has discovered that religious statements and religious attitudes have political meaning. They contribute in one way or another to the building of society (*polis*). The first effort of this 'political theology' has been to overcome the individualism implicit in much of modern Christian life and thought. This first phase consists of the 'de-privatizing' of the recent Christian tradition¹. Political theologians try to recover the social dimension of the Christian message. Yet after the negation of individualism and the recovery of the social, the issue of subjectivity remains. People still ask questions about the meaning of personal life, people still have to cope psychologically with their existence, people still yearn for inwardness and prayer. Political theology must, therefore, enter into a second phase, the negation of the negation, that is to say the politically responsible retrieval of subjectivity. This intellectual endeavour is of interest to the secular Left as well. In this article I wish to give a brief account of the two phases, de-privatization and retrieval,

and then elaborate on what this retrieval may mean for psychotherapy.

CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIAN INDIVIDUALISM

In this section I wish to show, at least in outline, how existentialism, psychotherapy and pietism have made Christian thinkers focus on the human person in abstraction of his or her social condition.

1. Existentialists, be they religious or secular, make personal anxiety the stepping stone for the true understanding of human life². Anxiety reveals to people the inauthenticity of their lives. To be truly human, to live authentically, means to affirm oneself in freedom, to assume responsibility for one's life. But since society has such a powerful hold on us we easily succumb to the temptation of living inauthentically; we let ourselves be determined by external causes, we forget ourselves in the tasks of everyday living, we follow the drift of society without making responsible personal choices. We live in the world not as persons but as things, as objects, carried forward by

the cultural stream. The inauthentic mode of existence is troubled and anxious. We are challenged by the possibility of authentic existence. We are not left alone by the summons of the truly human. What does a person do in this state of anxiety? The temptation is to escape this anxiety by hiding more deeply in inauthentic existence; we turn to compulsions, to power, to sensuality. Yet another choice is available to us. We may recognize the true nature of human being, the need for decision, the call to affirm ourselves in freedom. As we assume responsibility for our life, and commit ourselves to live as free subjects, we overcome anxiety and enter upon the authentic mode of human existence. While secular existentialists believe that this passage from anxiety to freedom is wholly self-induced, religious existentialists hold that the Christian message, or, more widely, God's gracious call, is operative in this transition.

The existentialist analysis has greatly influenced Christian theology. The analysis of anxiety as outlined above has been used to clarify the human situation by theologians as different as Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Rahner. Paul Tillich (in his American phase) and Reinhold Niebuhr had their own existentialist analysis of anxiety and liberation; they differ among themselves and differed from the Heideggerian approach utilized by Bultmann and Rahner. All existentialist theologians, however, analysed abstract human being, a person as such in history as such. The troubled and searching subject was defined without reference to the historical conditions of his or her concrete situation.

While political theologians admire existentialists for the discovery that the human subject is not a substance but must be constituted through commitment and affirmation, they regard the existentialist analysis of anxiety as false, illusory and politically irresponsible. It is wholly misguided to understand people's anxiety in abstraction from the concrete conditions of their lives and move directly to the elevated plane of

subjectivity. If a man, the sole bread winner of his family, holds a job without security, unsafe in times of unemployment and economic decline, he suffers from anxiety because he does not know how he will feed his family if he loses his job. When a Pakistani woman brings up her children in Canada, she is filled with anxiety because her sons and daughters will have to face the racism of contemporary society. It is ultimately irresponsible to argue that the anxiety of the colonizer and the colonized is in essence identical, that their human predicament must be analysed in the same fashion and that the overcoming of this predicament follows the same spiritual path. The situation becomes absurd when we regard as in principle identical the anxiety experienced by the inmates of a concentration camp and the anxiety of the commandant. It is not possible to speak of the common human need for salvation, shared by the executioner and his innocent victims.

It could be argued that the existentialists address themselves to the class to which they belong, to the middle class, to people whose social location does not damage their basic humanity and who for this reason firmly believe that they can define themselves as subjects and free agents by an act of interiority. Existentialists might admit that in situations where humanization demands the transformation of society, people need a more collective self-understanding and can become subjects of their own history only as they act together in solidarity. Is it possible to defend the existentialist analysis as appropriate for the middle class? I think not. For the bracketing of the concrete conditions of human existence only confirms the indifference of the middle class in regard to the oppressive conditions inflicted upon the lower levels of society: the impact of unemployment and inflation on the workers and their families, the harmful effects of racist and sexist discrimination, especially among the poor, and the conditions of exploitation in the Third World upheld by Western capitalist society. It is irrational to

admit that the existentialist analysis is not useful for struggling peoples in situations of oppression and at the same time to recommend its usefulness for the middle class.

A freedom for which others must pay with their subjugation, is not true freedom at all. Human freedom is indivisible. A person is ultimately able to affirm himself (herself) in true freedom before God and society only when there are no more slaves and captives left in the world. Political Theology, therefore, regards existentialism as an influence that threatens to transform Christian theology into an ideology of the middle class and an expression of mainstream culture.

The psychotherapeutic approach to the human person differs considerably from existentialism. It is less abstract, it takes into account the psychological history of the individual, it focuses on the interpersonal relationship through which, from infancy on, the person has constituted himself or herself. Still psychotherapy in its effort to overcome the brokenness in people's lives abstracts from the wider social context and the historical conditions which shaped the family and affected interpersonal relations. Psychotherapy regards people as individuals who bear an illness, or at least who have been wounded by their inability to deal with interpersonal relations, especially at an early age. Psychotherapy holds that people can be liberated from the compulsions or the paralysis produced by their past experiences only through the resolution of the old conflicts, the release of repressed energy, and the entry into creative responses. Psychotherapy looks very closely at the history of a person's relationship with others and at the psychic powers that inhibit and release human action; in this sense, psychotherapy is less abstract than existentialism. Yet psychotherapy is still caught in contemporary individualism, still abstracts the person from his (her) place in society, still perpetuates the idea that it is possible to understand people's suffering by focusing on their personal biography, abstracted from

the history of their social class. Psychotherapy 'privatizes' the perception of human life³. By locating the source of anxiety in the unresolved conflicts of infancy, it makes invisible the contradictions of society that tear at people's lives.

When people perceive the relationship to their social environment as neutral (and the middle class are taught to think of themselves in that way) then the significant story of their lives begins with birth. The factors that shape their personal experiences and affect their consciousness appear to be all in the family. But when a person belongs to an oppressed class or a colonized people, then the factors that shape personal life are recognized as antecedent to the family, as conditions of oppression that color every aspect of family life and influence every stage of personal development. Such persons realize very well that it is impossible for them to come to self-knowledge, to deal with their brokenness and reach out for personal freedom, by concentrating on their personal biography abstracted from the concrete conditions of their oppression. Such persons recognize that authentic self-understanding demands a critical analysis of the social reality and a clear understanding of the conditions of inferiorizations.

Middle class people think that their relation to society is neutral, and that they are able to define themselves and become free subjects independently of all political considerations. It is only after they have become true selves, only after they have matured in their personhood, that such persons may decide to turn to the political order, concern themselves with justice in society and play an active part in public life. Their relationship to the political order is perceived as optional. But is this true? In fact, the experience of middle class children and the relation to their parents are shaped by the structure of middle class society. Mother and father have socially defined roles, the family exercises an economic function in society, childhood experiences prepare boys and girls for their roles in the social

and, at the same time, recover the power of earlier affirmations extended to them in infancy and childhood, affirmations since forgotten or repressed, which now become the source of vital energies. The encounter with Christ leads people to a new, more healthful and creative relationship to their own drives. And yet, while this sounds attractive, the psychotherapeutic model becomes a spiritual instrument of privatization and generates a theology that legitimates the individualism of contemporary culture.

A third 'privatizing' influence on Christian theology is pietism. Originally pietism was an imaginative, creative response to highly formalized religion, in which subjectivity received little attention. Pietism was a spiritual movement based on the soul's private encounter with God. Its anti-hierarchical, democratic spirit often made it into a progressive force in society. And yet the emphasis on the soul had cultural consequences in the long run that were not intended. In pietism the person experiences himself (herself) as separate from the body and its concreteness, separated from other people and the political community, separated even from the divinity, who is conceived as the invisible Other drawing near at times of prayer. Prayer is the meeting of the alone with the Alone. The soul is here perceived as a spiritual monad, constituted by factors wholly intrinsic to it, to which other people are external and incidental. The soul is most itself when it shakes off its bodily insertion into the historical community. The self gains access to its deepest meaning to the extent that it brackets the human history to which it belongs. Only the soul that has successfully detached itself from world and worldly care, is made ready to welcome the merciful Godhead, itself living beyond history.

Political theology must ask to what extent the experience of oneself as separated soul is grounded in particular historical conditions. At one time it may have reflected a political movement for greater personal

autonomy against the collectivism of traditional society; at a later time, when this struggle had been won, it became the reflection of modern, economically-based individualism. From the perspective of political theology, pietism falsifies the self's relation to the community and to history. Since other people and in fact the community are in very concrete ways constitutive elements of a person's historical self-making, one does not see how they can be discarded at a moment of heightened self-awareness. Such an artificial purging of one's self-experience breaks the links with the historical matrix of personal existence and fails to recognize the triune God present in history as the ground of life, as the love that binds people together, and as the word of faith communicated among them.

The first task of political theology is to recover the social dimension of the Christian message and explore the social implications of personal experience, religious and secular. This task is by no means completed when the Christian message has been 'de-privatized'; this negation is only the first phase. The second phase is to retrieve the meaning and power of subjectivity, beyond individualism, in a politically responsible way. We must proceed to the negation of the negation. Even after existentialism has been found wanting and people have come to experience themselves as part of a societal project, they will still ask questions about personal meaning, still wrestle with personal failure, still deal with sickness and death. What should they be told? After anxiety and neuroses have been understood largely in social and political terms and people are engaged in the struggle to change society, they may still suffer from depression, they still may be prevented by psychological barriers from living freely and acting wholeheartedly. What should they be told? Is there a psychotherapeutic wisdom that is politically responsible? After pietism and its influence on theology have been overcome and people acknowledge the divine presence in their common struggle for justice and

order. Conventional psychotherapy easily disguises how much people are shaped by their class and its function in society. The neutral relationship of the middle class person to society is an illusion. Even middle class people cannot come to realistic self-knowledge without an analysis of the concrete conditions of their existence.

Psychotherapy has been as influential in Christian theology as existentialism. Liberal theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, have made use of paradigms drawn from psychotherapy, such as illness and health, resistance and growth, compulsion and freedom, to articulate the passage from sin to new life promised in the Christian message. Christ is healer; salvation includes personal transformation, the overcoming of self-destructive drives and entry into greater freedom. The encounter with Christ leads to self-knowledge. Because Christ affirms the faithful, they are able to face the truth about their destructiveness peace, the question of personal spirituality remains. What is a private prayer after the rejection of pietism? Political theology, in fidelity to its intellectual project, must deal in its own way with the quest for personal meaning, the struggle for psychological well-being, and the inner journey toward spirituality.

THE RETRIEVAL OF SUBJECTIVITY

The literature of the political left is on the whole quite insensitive to the personal dimension of human existence. This has had devastating political consequences. We must insist that the joint struggle for a more human society does not relativize the worth and dignity of the person. Even during and after whole-hearted political engagement, reformist or revolutionary, the personal factor remains. It seems to me that Christian thinkers of the Left are well qualified to recover, from a politically engaged position, the personal dimension of human existence. Christians cannot overlook the personal factor because the Gospel with its

social message is addressed to personal consciousness. Listening to God's word, believers discover themselves as subjects, as responsible agents called and empowered to act on behalf of themselves and of society. Overcoming individualism in the Church's message does not make less important the subjectivity of each individual. From the perspective of political theology, then, the quest for personal meaning, the struggle for mental well-being, and the journey toward interiority are meant to be exercises, not of individualism, but of social praxis.

It would be appropriate, if, in this paper, I dealt with the retrieval of the existentialist question, psychotherapeutic wisdom, and the search for spirituality. Yet there is no space for this here. What I will do instead is to make a few remarks about the social recovery of existentialism and spirituality, and then explore in greater detail how psychotherapy can be part of a responsible social praxis.

1. Even after the entry of people into a common historical project, even after the passage from the privatistic search for authenticity to the joint struggle for justice in solidarity with the oppressed, there do remain personal failures and frustrations, the experience of defeat, and the encounter with illness and death: there is, moreover, the realization that however successful the collective project may be, it still remains vulnerable to distortions produced by selfishness and corruption. Human anxiety cannot be totally accounted for by an analysis of the contradictions of society. Even in, through and beyond the historical project to rebuild society, people remain, time and again, threatened by the loss of personal meaning.

There are many ways in which an existentialist analysis of personal life could be fitted into a politically responsible perception of society⁴. A persuasive way of doing this as a theologian, i.e., as a reflective Christian believer, is to account for the rest-

lessness and the yearning experienced by politically alive men and women in terms of a summons (possibly with a capital S) ever present in their experience, a summons to care for other people, a summons to social justice for all, especially the poor, outsiders and marginals. This call is never silent in personal life. It prompts criticism of the prevailing order; and it is operative in the struggle to replace the present order by a more human one. This call demands that the end as well as the means of the struggle for justice respect the dignity of people, collectively as communities and individually as persons. This call makes people restless and alive; it inspires protest not only against the oppression experienced personally but also against the oppression inflicted upon others. This call prompts the mind to critical activity and prevents the heart from resting in happiness as long as injustice reigns in the lives of others. This call, moreover, is experienced not as an echo of one's own mental activity but as a challenge to one's mind and heart. It is a call that addresses us, to which we must listen, and without which we cannot fully define ourselves. This call reveals itself, at least for the Christian believer, as the divine Summons, the Word of God, operative in the raising of consciousness, made known in the scriptures, incarnate in Jesus Christ, and interpreted through the Church's experience, especially through its present experience.

Fidelity to this call becomes a matter of authenticity and constitutes the meaning of personal life. This fidelity involves both action and interiority. The neglect of this call or willed infidelity to it, either by uncritical conformity to the existing order or by identification with a revolutionary movement not open to self-criticism, introduces inauthenticity and falseness into personal life. The flight from this summons, moreover, has political consequences; it will make people cling to the present order despite its injustices or make them fanatical supporters of radical movements. Fidelity to the summons, on the other hand, activates political

participation and produces a sense of personal meaning that remains intact even if the common project should suffer defeat for a time or if, through accident or illness, active participation is prohibited. Fidelity to this call nourishes a spiritual life that is not weakened as personal strength ebbs and death approaches. Why? Because the divine Summons in personal consciousness is identical with the call extended to all people, operative in history, empowering men and women to struggle against oppression and build a truly human society. God's personal call links us to others and to the whole of history. And since the efficacy of this call has been revealed in Christ's death and resurrection, the believer experiences consolation even in the face of failure and death. The divine call is unto life, in this world and beyond. In this perspective, the existentialist drama of authenticity and self-making has social meaning. The quest to become truly human is social praxis.

2. The preceding remarks also shed light on the search for a spirituality beyond pietism. The language of "God and the soul" has become of doubtful authenticity. At one time, soul language recorded the emergence of the autonomous self from a collectivist existence defined by tribal or feudal loyalties. Yet in modern times, the church's soul language reveals the isolation of the self from others and the breakdown of solidarity and participation. The divinity who addresses this isolated soul has itself been excluded from the world: it is no longer the God of the Bible, alive in the historical self-making of the human race.

The spiritual testimony coming from Christians involved in costly struggle for justice, reveals that religious experience explodes the illusion of the separated soul. Religious experience discloses the embeddedness of the self in the community and the dependency of the self on others in the struggle for personal freedom. Religious experience destroys the illusion of private life and assigns people their place in salva-

tion history. In prayer and spiritual 'highs' God does not appear as the invisible Other, speaking from outside of history but as the One who grounds the interconnectedness with others, illumines the meaning of the historical struggle and appoints the believers to participate in it. Even Christians who live in less endangered situations, middle class Christians who have become politicized, report that religious experience discloses to them their embeddedness in the historical community. Their encounter with God explodes the walls of the self. The others, especially the oppressed, become lodged in their heart and modify their personal self-experience: 'the others' are present especially in moments of spiritual encounter and contemplation. If prayer were simply the soul's encounter with God, the concern for others, even for the oppressed, would become a distraction. But in the emerging spirituality, the presence of 'the others' in personal consciousness mediates an abiding call to responsibility and casts a shadow of sadness, willingly received, over every aspect of personal life, even over the moments of joy. Contemporary religious experience will not allow that people create for themselves, through gifts of consolation, islands of happiness from which the memory of the afflicted has been banned. Contemporary spirituality has acquired a special note of seriousness. Even ecstasies of personal bliss and spiritual elevations take place under the shadow of the Cross: religious experience assures that 'the others' are never excluded from personal consciousness. Prayer assigns the believer his or her concrete place in the drama of the world's redemption. Prayer thus reveals itself as social praxis.

After these all too brief remarks on existentialism and prayer, we turn to the subject to be given special attention in this paper, namely the exercise of a politically responsible psychotherapy. Is there a therapeutic approach that refuses to promote the privatization of life and legitimate the obsessive individualism of contemporary culture? Is there a psychotherapy from the Left?

3. The question is not a new one. Wilhelm Reich, student, collaborator and eventually antagonist of Freud, raised this question at the outset of the psychoanalytic movement⁵. He clearly saw that the structure of the family, which according to psychoanalytic theory significantly affects the infant's unconscious, is not a given, not defined by human biology or natural law, but a product of the social order and the system of production. Psychic life reflects social structure. And in turn, the transformation of psychic life may challenge social structure and hence have political meaning. Between the two world wars, the social thinkers of the Frankfurt School tried to use psychoanalytic theory to gain a better understanding of the oppression operative in society and the increasing success of the fascist movement⁶. Their research produced such divergent readings of Freud as those of Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse. In a recent study, Gad Horowitz has carefully re-read the Freudian corpus to gain a deeper understanding of the social and political meaning implicit in the great psychoanalytic discoveries.⁷

My own concern in this article is not so much theoretical as practical. People committed to social movements occasionally do have anxieties and emotional disturbances that disable them. What should they do? To whom can they turn? Conventional psychiatry and psychology operate out of highly privatized presuppositions. Mainstream psychotherapy threatens to undo the patient's political commitment. Is there a psychotherapy of the Left?

A. The first remark I wish to make is that people, men and women, who struggle for social justice and resist institutional oppression of one kind or another usually belong to various groups and networks. They do not struggle alone. Sometimes the members of these groups live together; at other times they simply meet at regular intervals. Even if the politically committed belong only to loosely defined networks, they still rely on one another, they clarify their ideas in dis-

cussion, they arrive at their strategy in joint sessions, they find themselves bound to one another in solidarity. The raising of consciousness takes place in community. In third world countries, the struggle for justice is based on small groups or teams. In these countries committed Christians belong to grassroots communities, defined by common worship and common action. In one way or another, the struggle for justice takes place in community. The group, the team, the network are indispensable.

The common struggle in these groups or networks, I wish to argue, has been experienced by the participants as therapeutic. While there exists no systematic research to demonstrate such a claim, it is my impression, based on conversations with men and women from various parts of the world, that people experience psychological transformation through their participation in a joint struggle for justice. I have met missionaries who after years spent in Latin America or the Philippines return to their home in North America as liberated persons; their ministry in grassroots communities transformed them into warm, dedicated, expansive human beings, with flowing energies and a clear sense of themselves. Many people have told me that their involvement in groups and networks has led to personal growth beyond the self-doubts and inhibitions previously felt. Despite the abiding awareness of the structures of evil, people committed to the struggle for justice usually appear self-possessed, cheerful and energetic, free to respond to others and ready to extend their friendship.

It should be possible, it seems to me, to clarify the healing impact of these groups and networks with the help of psychotherapeutic theory. I wish to mention in particular three factors, the affirmation by the comrades, the struggle against super-ego and the entry into self-transcendence.

First, let us look at the affirmation by the comrades. Since people who have been oppressed or marginalized tend to become prisoners of their own imagination, and

passively accept their lowly position, the struggle for justice must begin with self-affirmation. It is generally recognized today that the structures of exclusion and inferiorization under which people live are internalized by them: they come to think of themselves as lacking in worth, as deserving contempt. They easily derive their self-image from the view the dominant society has of them. This phenomenon has been called 'self-hatred'. A recent study of oppression inflicted on Jews, blacks and homosexuals has described various psychic mechanisms of distortion, produced by the structures of oppression, which inflict uncertainty, anxiety, and inner conflicts on these groups, even as they seek to respond to their oppression⁸. The same study examines the efforts of these groups to break out of the distorted imagination, acquire a new self-understanding, and fight for a society in which they can live at peace. For most people subject to oppression, the entry into a new self-understanding takes place in groups and networks. The affirmation of the comrades mediates new power.

To be affirmed, in the face of negations uttered by society, has profound psychological consequences. If this affirmation is offered not only by one or two persons but by a community, the impact on one's self-perception is enormous. "Black is beautiful" was the slogan of the black movement that broke the false self-image created by centuries of oppression. We are told who we are by others, by parents, by culture, and by the social structure. For this reason the escape from self-defeating self-images demands the support of groups or networks. The affirmation of the comrades produces a rupture in one's self-experience.

Even middle class men and women who identify themselves with struggling groups experience the liberating effect of their comrades' affirmation. If these men and women have been uncommitted before, involved in pursuits of purely personal interests, then the affirmation of the comrades lifts them out of their isolation, inserts them

into a stream of energy, and expands their horizon in unanticipated ways. From reports of priests and sisters who have joined the struggling people of Latin America or the Philippines, it appears that the affirmation by the comrades broke the uncertain self-image they had of themselves and healed the ruptured relation to their own vital energies. Returning to their communities in North America, they appeared like new persons.

It has been argued that the early Methodist movement in 18th century England communicated a sense of dignity and self-confidence to the workers, the new class created by the industrial revolution.⁹ While these workers were negated by the class structure of society, the organization of factory life and even the customs of the established church, they were now affirmed by the Spirit of God. This affirmation was mediated through the Methodist prayer groups. Affirmed by the Spirit, the workers carried their head up high, encountered the powerful as equals, and created organizations to transform society. Contemporary liberation theology in Latin America follows the same theological perspective. While the wicked world negates the poor and destitute, God affirms them. God is on their side. God speaks to them through the solidarity of their comrades.

This leads us to the *second* therapeutic factor, the struggle against super-ego. Since the groups and networks of which we speak struggle against the established order and oppose traditional authority, they also wrestle, possibly unbeknownst to themselves, against their own super-ego. According to Freudian theory, super-ego refers to the psychic mechanism by which people insert into their psychic life, usually below the level of consciousness, the norms and precepts of society, mediated in infancy through the authority of the parents. Thanks to the infant's ability to pick up signals and directives from the family, he (she) enters into consciousness, learns the basic social skills, and becomes a member of society.

While super-ego is an indispensable mechanism, it demands a very high price. For even as we grow up and begin to make our own preferences, super-ego continues to be operative. It reminds us of the taboos of childhood and picks up present precepts from society, in accordance with early childhood experience. Super-ego tells us what to do, intimidates us, prevents us from following our deep desires and from realizing our highest aspirations. Super-ego makes us conformists, subservient to all forms of authority, repressed, cut off from our vital energies and from our imagination. Super-ego, in the Freudian perspective, is not only the law-giver operative in our psychic life, it is also the accuser, the judge and the punisher. While essential to man's entry into consciousness, super ego is at the same time the organ of repression. Super-ego creates feelings of guilt in us so that we willingly submit to the punishment. To become well, to discover one's own powers and talents, to get in touch with one's energies, to recover the hidden sides of one's personality, it is necessary to struggle against super-ego as the inner tyrant.

People who wrestle against external authorities often discover that another struggle has gone on in them, the struggle against super-ego. To their own surprise their personality changes: they overcome feelings of anxiety and guilt, gain access to libidinal energies, and experience new inner freedom.

There are groups and networks of people, united by the same spirit or the same commitment, yet not at odds with the *status quo*. Such people experience the affirmation of their comrades but do not find themselves wrestling against super-ego. They remain conformists. Religious congregations that approve of the existing social order or even wish to give it greater stability are likely to advocate life styles that are highly conventional. The attitude toward sexuality is here highly significant. Movements that do not challenge the existing order tend to stress sexual conformity, while

men and women involved in liberation movements often find themselves in sexual partnerships that contradict the moral code in which they have been raised. The struggle against super-ego seems to release sexual powers. It is not surprising that men and women who struggle against the conditions of their oppression perceive the ambiguity of the family, i.e. they become aware that certain aspects of family life legitimate oppressive structures in society, and hence they often seek new partnership relations that reflect their radical notion of social justice. Throughout Western history radicals and heretics have been accused by their enemies of practising 'sexual license.' On the other hand the great defenders of 'law and order' have desired strict control over the 'restless masses' as well as over their restless instincts. People's relation to their own sexuality becomes the metaphor of their politics.¹⁰

This leads us to the *third* therapeutic factor operative in groups and networks, namely the entry into self-transcendence. Already the affirmation by the comrades and the struggle against super-ego enable people to transcend the limitations of their personality. In a deeper way, in a manner not recognized by Freudian psychology, people imprisoned in self-preoccupation experience self-transcendence when their principal concern reaches beyond themselves to include other people or an historical cause. In capitalist society we are all turned into individualists. We are taught to promote ourselves, to look after our own affairs, to put ourselves (and possibly our family) first. For some people this means dedication to financial success; for the greater number it simply means dedication to private life, to the enhancement of personal existence. Capitalist society steers us into such high expectations of success or personal fulfillment, that we find ourselves constantly frustrated. We become our own principal pre-occupation, forever disappointed. The passage out of this prison through identification with a cause or soli-

darity with other people, in other words through self-transcendence, is experienced as liberating.

Identification and solidarity enable us to live for others, to serve a cause that transcends us, to see our personal problems in a new light, and to participate in new emotions, in sorrow, fears, hopes and joys, that connect us to society. Here life transcends middle class existence, be it scattered or frantic. The anxiety induced by the struggle for achievement, success or recognition gives way to care and openness to a more embracing reality.

The healing power of self-transcendence is not without its ambiguities. People have joined strange cults and irrational movements because they desired to experience personal liberation through identification and solidarity. Freud himself recognized this when he remarked that some people are able to transcend their personal neuroses by joining a religious tradition. He argued that through religion, which was for him a collective neurosis, individuals may well be delivered from the symptoms of their own emotional disorders. The entry into a great illness heals the little illnesses. While Freud's positivistic interpretation of religion is not convincing, his observation is nonetheless important. Self-transcendence is politically and personally dangerous, at least in the long run, when it takes place through identification with irrational and destructive powers. At the same time if it is in keeping with rationality — and movements for social justice and the struggle against oppression certainly are — then self-transcendence leads to freedom and personal well-being.

Self-transcendence is related to the old biblical world 'sacrifice'. Since this word has been used by those in authority to make people submissive, uncritical, and long-suffering under the burden of an unjust system, it is no longer acceptable to many Christians. Women rightly claim that the biblical concept of 'sacrifice' has been employed to undermine their own powers of

self-affirmation, make them feel guilty whenever they follow their own interests, and train them to become persons too prone to sacrifice themselves for others. Is it possible, we must ask, to de-ideologize the word 'sacrifice'?

Useful in this context are Hegel's reflections on the two meanings of the word 'alienation'.¹¹ There is an alienation, he argued, that is inflicted upon people against their will. The structures of society rob them of the space in which they may exercise their freedom and live a life in accordance with their gifts and aspirations. Society is here experienced as the enemy. But as the historical struggles for freedom change society, overcome the structures that inflict alienation and lead people toward greater self-possession, a point will be reached when, out of a solidarity with those who are still oppressed, the liberated shall voluntarily renounce some of the opportunities they now enjoy. The liberated will recognize that their liberation is partial as long as a single slave is left. Liberty here issues forth in sacrifice. Hegel calls this alienation. It is, however, an alienation that is not inflicted by society, but one that is freely endorsed out of inner richness and solidarity with others. Hegel believed that there can be no rational transformation of society without this sort of self-alienation out of love. By using the same term 'alienation' he indicated the double task a) to wrestle against sacrifices that are imposed and b) to gain the freedom where sacrifices do not undermine personal affirmation but in fact constitute it. At this level, then, self-transcendence does not break persons but makes them. The biblical language of 'bearing the cross' and 'following Christ' may therefore be de-ideologized. Sacrifice produces life.

This brief discussion of three factors offers psychological reasons why political commitment in groups or networks has therapeutic consequences. People are made well as they join the struggle for justice.

B. What happens if this therapeutic impact is not enough? What happens when en-

gaged people experience anxiety and feel their energies fading? What if they 'burn out'? Such men and women are indeed in need of psychotherapy. But if they go to practitioners trained in conventional psychiatry or psychology, will they find adequate comprehension? Will not the 'privatizing' trend built into psychotherapy render people's political commitment suspect in the eyes of the practitioner? Will their struggle be interpreted as a symptom of masochism, or as immature rebellion, or as an extended anal phase, or as some form of paranoia? What is needed is a psychotherapeutic wisdom from the Left. The primary therapeutic experience, I repeat, is the participation in a movement: there people find transformation, growth, energy, hope. If during certain periods in people's lives participation is not enough, then it is necessary to turn to an appropriate therapy, at least for a time. Is there a therapy from the Left?

It is possible to argue that traditional psychotherapy operates out of one of two models relating the person to society. One may speak here of models of 'social adjustment' and of 'personal integration'. Following the first model, the therapist tries to help the patient to come to terms with the demands made on him (her) by society. The patient learns to understand that his (her) profound desires are founded in childhood experiences and make no realistic claim on the present. If the origin of these feelings is recognized, if the patient relives some of the as yet unacknowledged pain, he may well leave behind his desires or fears. Having become more modest and more rational, it is now possible for him to live in society and assume responsibility for his life choices. Freud himself, by calling the demands of society 'reality principle' and the personal wishes and desires 'pleasure principle' promoted a therapeutic practice that aimed at adjustment and adaptation. The therapist helps the patient to abandon infantile dreams and illusions and accept the social reality as it is.

Yet it is also possible to read Freud differently. What the therapist tries to do, it may be argued, is to help the patient recover aspects of his (her) life that have been repressed, to re-assimilate the hidden wishes and desires, and to integrate them into his (her) personality. Here therapy intends to be liberating. What the patient has to learn is that the accuser and judge is not the parent nor even society but his (her) own super-ego, and that it is possible to wrestle against super-ego, lay hold of the repressed energies and become a bigger person, more rooted, more vital, more integrated. While the therapeutic model of 'social adjustment' corresponds to a conservative political outlook, the 'personal integration' model reveals a liberal political attitude to society. Here the therapeutic effort is not to adapt to society as it is, but to bracket society, to concentrate on one's personal journey, to grow into a rich and versatile personality, and to regard society as a remote framework, with which one may or may not be concerned, depending on personal taste. The quest for personal integration betrays middle class preoccupation. The people who suffer from structural oppression, especially the poor, are so deeply hurt and distorted by their experience of society that a purely private project of personal integration does not make sense to them. They simply cannot afford to bracket society; their primary task, on which depends their very survival, is to wrestle with society. Is it possible that the wounds the oppressed have received could become for them a vital source of social passion? Such a passion may make them one-sided and partial, but it would empower them to organize among themselves and change the existing order.

Is there a psychotherapy from the Left? Is it possible to approach personal healing in a manner that does not remove from consciousness the societal structures of oppression and hence foster a political indifference that serves the worst forces in society, and that at the same time respects the great mystery of personal life, the rootedness of

one's personal journey in a web of life, made up largely by interpersonal relations, especially those of early childhood, and inscribed, in part at least, in the unconscious? The theological task of recovering subjectivity in a politically responsible context includes such an inquiry.

What I propose is a psychotherapeutic approach that is willing, following the analytical methods of the great masters, to uncover the wounds received, mainly in the family, and the repressions and overcompensations associated with them, and then proceed to a socio-political analysis to locate the origin of these wounds in the social order. Why did parents treat their child in this manner? Why were they constantly fighting? Why did they encourage rivalry among the children? Socio-political analysis should be able to show that the roles played by father and mother were largely defined by the social order distorted by various patterns of oppression and exclusion. What was the parents experience of poverty, of insecurity, of failure? If they belonged to the middle class, how much were they caught in competitiveness, in the search for private enjoyment and the superficial life defined by commodity fetishism? Even the personal malice of the people who have hurt us in the past cannot be understood unless a socio-political analysis helps us to locate their malice in the historical predicament. What I wish to argue, then, is that a politically responsible therapeutic approach must include two analytical phases, the personal-familiar and the socio-political.

The struggle to be well, then, not only demands that we face and respond creatively to the wounds received in the process of growing up but also that we analyze and resist the structures of oppression, with which these wounds were connected. Personal wounds have social roots; and we do not overcome the effect of these wounds in a responsible manner unless we are willing to confront their social causes. A therapeutic approach of this kind reveals to the patient that the oppressive structures of society are

not external to him (her) but internal: they are part of his (her) personal history. To struggle for justice, then, becomes an existential necessity. A therapeutic approach of this kind is a social praxis.

Of crucial importance in a politically responsible psychotherapeutic process is the distinction, made with the help of an experienced therapist, between one's personal problems and one's opposition to the unjust social order. I wish to call this 'the therapeutic distinction'. Without the ability to make this distinction, patients would be led into total confusion. They would project their personal problems on their social environment, and use the struggle against this environment as a way of escaping from self-discovery. They would bring to the political struggle a false passion that must have destructive consequences. Any failure in the political project would make these people vulnerable to renewed depression and breakdown. Sometimes people speak at political meetings that make everyone feel uncomfortable. Their tone of voice, their gestures and their choice of vocabulary create the impression that these people are wrestling with profound personal difficulties. Because they have not been helped to make 'the therapeutic distinction' they create confusion for themselves and disturbances in the public arena. If they find such help, if they learn through therapy to see more clearly and sort out their feelings, then they may well reach a point where their struggle against oppression becomes their entry into personal freedom.

The model of psychotherapy that is politically responsible, then, is not 'social adjustment' nor 'personal integration' but what I wish to call 'social praxis'. This approach to personal healing has been worked out first of all by groups that have experienced social and cultural oppression. They have made the discovery that conventional psychotherapy was in fact a bearer of symbols that contributed to their oppression. Women, black people, Hispanic Americans, homosexual men and women, each in

their own way, have objected to mainstream psychiatry and psychology. They have pointed to the unacknowledged ideological elements in these theories. In their search for greater personal health, these people learnt to relate their psychic wounds to the structural oppression inflicted on them. The struggle to be well for these groups demanded critical resistance to the dominant culture. Sometimes they angrily rejected the whole of the psychotherapeutic tradition. Yet when they realized that in order to be well and remain rational in the passionate wrestling for social change, it was of crucial importance to distinguish clearly between personal problems and public endeavours, they appreciated again, after the negation, the psycho-analytic approach with its emphasis on the unconscious and the years of infancy. What is important is that psycho-analysis be joined in tandem with socio-political analysis.

From the considerations offered in this article it is clear that the social connectedness of personal illness applies not only to the oppressed groups but also to the successful middle class. It is precisely the illusion of the middle class that a person's journey is only incidentally related to society, that a person is related to the political order only if he or she chooses to do so, and that it is possible for people to transcend politics by delving into the search for their soul, be it by therapy or religion. For the middle class, too, I wish to argue, psychotherapy must become social praxis.

Psychotherapy as social praxis abandons the ideal 'social adjustment' and 'personal integration.' There can be no integrated personality in a wicked and unjust world. In a society such as ours persons can be rounded, balanced, in harmonious possessions of all powers, only if they are willing to close their eyes to the existing oppression and their heart to the people pushed to the margin. Contemporary church teaching demands that we permit ourselves to be touched or even wounded by the misery in the world and then analyse its historical

causes. Personal integration is an illusory ideal. We are all profoundly hurt by the ever expanding power of economic exploitation, political domination, racist exclusion, and sexual discrimination. The answer to this is not to quest for a balanced personality but social passion. The effort to be well in a distorted world and to live with a sense of political responsibility may well turn us into one-sided personalities, into

people who lean against the storm, and renounce the exploration of some of their talents. The symbol of health in a sinful world may well be Jacob who limped after wrestling all night with the angel. Or Jesus carrying his cross. The measure of health then is not the successful adaptation to the environment, nor the achievement of personal integration, but the freeing of libidinal energy for social praxis.

Grâce à l'impact de la théorie critique (Ecole de Frankfort) la théologie chrétienne a commencé à critiquer son propre héritage idéologique. Elle s'en prend à l'orientation privatisant appuyée sur l'existentialisme et la psycho-thérapie. Le piétisme a fait sa part pour privatiser la conscience chrétienne. La tâche de la théologie d'aujourd'hui, est de 'dé-privatiser' la doctrine chrétienne, de dépasser l'homme privé pour arriver à l'homme politique, et de recouvrer la dimension sociale de l'évangile. Cependant après l'assimilation de ces principes néo-marxistes et l'élaboration d'une théorie de l'homme qui soit politiquement responsable, la subjectivité humaine ne disparaît point. Les hommes continuent à chercher la signification de leur vie; ils ont encore des dépressions et ont besoin de conseils thérapeutiques; et ils entretiennent encore une vie intérieure. Cet article cherche à retrouver une subjectivité qui soit politiquement responsable, particulièrement dans le cadre d'une pratique psychothérapeutique sensible à la réalité politique.

FOOTNOTES

1. For the new meaning of political theology and its de-privatizing task, see especially J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, Seabury, New York, 1973, and *Faith in History and Society*, Seabury, New York, 1979. For political theology in an American context see M. Lamb, "The Challenge of Critical Theory," *Sociology and Human Destiny*, ed. G. Baum, Seabury, 1980, pp 183-213.
2. Cf. John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann*, Harper and Row, New York, 1965.
3. This problem is dealt with by many authors. Cf. B. Brown, *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973, P.A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left*, Harper and Row, New York, 1969; M. Schneider, *Neurosis and Civilization*, Seabury, New York, 1975.

4. See, for instance, D. Soelle, *The Repression of the Existential Element or Why So Many People Become Conservative*, in *Concilium* Volume 141: *Neo-Conservatism: Social and Religious Phenomenon*, edited by Gregory Baum, New York: The Seabury Press, 1981.
5. *The Sexual Revolution*, New York, 1969.
6. M. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, Little Brown, Boston, 1973, pp 86-112.
7. G. Horowitz, *Repression*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1977.
8. B. Adam, *The Survival of Domination*, Elsevier, New York, 1978.
9. B. Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.
10. G. Baum, *Sexuality and Critical Enlightenment, Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, ed. D. Doherty, Doubleday, New York, 1979, pp 89-94.
11. R. Schacht, *Alienation*, Doubleday, New York, 1971.