

LIBERATION THEOLOGY ‘VERSUS’ PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

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Abstract: Theology and politics are disciplines that stem from the human need to question the future. Both respond in the same way: by promising paradises in this world and/or the next. In this sense, both aim to fulfil faith, offer hope, and encourage people to adhere to certain beliefs and ideas. It is therefore not surprising that throughout history we find instances where theology and politics collaborate and/or compete. In the ‘modern’ era, we can observe this phenomenon in the Americas. There, the Bible has been used from the 17th century to the present day as part of the political debate on how the social order should be structured. This has given rise to two opposing theological-political visions: liberation theology and prosperity theology.

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I. THE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Rationalist liberalism *believed* that a ‘perpetual peace’ based solely on reason was possible¹. That a *general, rational, formal ethics* would put an end to the disputes caused by differing human *beliefs*². Among other consequences, such naivety led many to *believe* that *legislation*

¹ Kant, I., 1999. We believe that Kant’s choice of title for this short work is highly significant. It serves to contrast with the perpetual peace promised by religion. Note that the idea of ‘perpetual peace’ has its origins in Isaiah (*Isa.* 9:7).

² Kant, I., 2001.

based on this kind of ethics would serve to organise society without regard to political and religious *beliefs*³. Thus, 'modernity' placed society at the mercy of the experiments of the so-called 'social scientists'. So-called 'political science', 'sociology', 'social psychology', 'econometrics' and 'positive law', amongst other disciplines, replaced 'political theology', 'moral theology', 'anthropological theology' and 'law'. Similarly, the ancient *sage* was replaced by the 'positivist jurist', the 'econometrician' and the 'political scientist'. We are already familiar with the result of subjecting human practical action to hollow formal principles, to number, weight and measure. There is a straight and direct line linking '*modern*' secular ideologies to the massacres of Catholics during the French Revolution, the camps at Auschwitz and, more recently, the legal acceptance of euthanasia in Europe and the declaration of the so-called right to abortion in the reform of the French Constitution in March 2024.

The lesson we should take from this story is as follows. Human beings cannot have a '*worldview*'⁴ without *beliefs*. Thus, when people decide to stop worshipping God (in Europe's case, the Christian God), they immediately fall to their knees before the worst of men (the politician) and/or an animal and/or a stone and/or a tree and/or Pachamama. So, rather than placing our trust in human reason alone, or hoping that a world without human beings would be much better than one in which we exist, we must examine our *beliefs* very carefully. And, of course, because we are necessarily beings of *belief*, we are the only *theological* and/or *political* beings on earth.

A) Faculties involved in the examination of beliefs

Given everything that is at stake if our *beliefs* are incorrect, the truth is that there are certain difficulties when it comes to examining their plausibility. One of these is that both *reason* and the *heart* play a part in this inquiry. I am not being sentimental when I refer to the 'heart'. I am being very precise in pointing out that *beliefs*

³ Kant, I., 1998, (preface) B134, note k). See also Comte, A., 1982.

⁴ Atticus, C., (2), 2025, p. 211.

about what *the future ought to be* like necessarily entail a *volitional commitment* on the part of human beings. This is so important that, when human beings adhere to certain *beliefs*, they form groups of like-minded people and, let us note, from within these groups, they promote actions to achieve their objectives or, where appropriate, fight against other groups that may oppose them. The model of how ideologies function that we have proposed takes this phenomenon into account⁵. Nor would I wish for my reference to *reason* and the *heart* — as faculties involved in the analysis of *beliefs* — to give rise to the idea that this examination involves a *rational* part and an *irrational* part. Such a judgement would imply that the *volitional* aspect of human nature is always arbitrary, whilst reason is always very sensible. And that is not the case. *Reason* can be highly irrational, just as the *heart* can be orderly⁶. Therefore, the idea that it is *reason* which always governs the *heart* is not true. This assertion presupposes the questionable claim that reason is a higher faculty than the will and, furthermore, overlooks, amongst other things, all those situations in which *reason* seeks the paths and means to achieve the end proposed by the *heart*⁷. This is so important that, to a very large extent, it is in the human heart that the ends each person *believes* necessary for their happiness arise. The (all too common) misconception stems from the rationalisation of morality. At least since the myth of the charioteer in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, a framework has been employed in which *correct practical action* is that in which the will obeys reason. Yet, on even the slightest reflection, there are just as many reasons to regard both reason and the heart as *essential* to the human being. In fact, the very same argument used to identify *reason* as an essential human quality also serves to highlight the *heart*; that is to say, the emotional spectrum of human beings is incomparably broader and more sophisticated than that of any animal (just as is the case with reason). This brief digression, on which I have dwelt a little, is relevant to our topic for the following reason. I would like to high-

⁵ Atticus, C., (2), 2023; LVII, 2024; (2) 2025.

⁶ St Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, XV, 22.

⁷ "Man not only lives, but loves and reasons; in him, biological life reaches its highest level" (Lewis, S.C., 2006, p.170). See also Atticus, C., 2024.

light that both *reason* and the *heart* need to be *cultivated* in order to function properly and, in this way, to be able to assess the plausibility of certain *beliefs*⁸. To use Plato's metaphor, the charioteer must be trained as such and, in this way, *believe* that he will succeed in the race, *devise* a strategy to win it and, of course, ensure that his two horses are trained (tamed) to pull the chariot. The Hebrews integrated these two dimensions of the human being very well through the word '*lev*' (*Deut.* 6:5; *Prov.* 13:22, etc.).

It is at this point that we come face to face with the question that dominates all *practical-social disciplines* and, naturally, *political theology* as well: What *should we believe*? Not what should we think! For, as we shall see, the sole function of reason, at the very heart of the *practical-social disciplines*, is to provide a framework of *ideas* for *beliefs*. Now, when we seek to answer the question of what we ought to *believe*, we realise that there are no educational institutions dedicated to *the heart*. Or, when some do attempt something of the sort — what is termed 'values education' — one might well suspect that such institutions *are indoctrinating*. This situation brings us back to the importance of religion and politics in education and, of course, to the need to correct our *beliefs*. The solution to this issue is very difficult. As we shall see throughout this article, it is all too easy for a person to end up losing their way amidst false or even perverse *beliefs*.

Well then, now that we know that politics and religion are directed towards human *beliefs*; and that we also know that *beliefs* form a fundamental part of any 'worldview' and determine how ideologies function; let us examine which human faculties are responsible for driving human beings, spurred on by these *beliefs*.

B) The human faculties that are the focus of politics and religion

Despite the fact that it is commonplace and a constant occurrence for those in political and religious power to *err* and *deceive* by

⁸ Atticus, C., 2024, pp. 24 ff.

exploiting people's *beliefs*, the question is why human beings — even though we see this happen time and time again — continue *to believe* and, naturally, expose ourselves to the *errors* and *deceptions* of those in power. I believe the answer lies — though it may not be definitive — in our nature as beings who '*construct*' themselves towards the *future* alongside others⁹. If the *future* were not so important to us (both individually and as a community), political and religious *promises* would certainly not affect us in the way they do. Yet, from the moment we are born, we are beings in a state of constant *construction*. We do not reach the fullness of our being in the same way as, for example, a cat does (within a year of birth). Rather, throughout our entire lives we are constantly contracting or expanding our being. For this reason, unlike the cat, *truth*, *goodness* and *beauty* form part of the future horizon of every action. So, from the moment we come into this world, we are propelled forward in life by *promises* of future rewards and/or punishments (concerning what is true, good and beautiful). And, naturally, it is our adherence—or lack thereof—to these *promises* which, through *trust*, shapes within each of us many of our judgements about what is true and good. And this is something so essential to our human condition that there is a set of *faculties* designed to ensure that the *promise* has such an effect on us. It is precisely these faculties that both politics and religion address: *hope*, *faith* and *love*. So, in line with what we have said, we can similarly say that civil and religious leaders become a kind of 'father' to others in adult life¹⁰. Everyday language tells us a great deal about this. We speak of the 'father of the nation', the 'fathers of the constitution', we refer to certain political or religious attitudes as 'paternalistic', or we use the word 'mother' to refer to the Virgin Mary or the Church, or the word 'father' to refer to priests — even though the Lord warns us not to call anyone by such titles (*Mt 23:9*), etc.

The substance of political and religious *promises* is very similar. Both offer us a *paradise* on earth or in heaven — or even on earth and in heaven. And, of course, from there on, their entire line of

⁹ Atticus, C., 2024.

¹⁰ The concept of 'authority' is central to this whole subject. C.S. Lewis says: "Nine-nine per cent of the things we believe, we believe on authority" (Lewis, C.S., 2006, p. 79).

argument consists of inspiring *faith* in certain *beliefs*, so that the human *heart* may align itself with its *will* — by adhering to a *person* (hence the word ‘authority’) — in order to share (with others) in a *hope* that serves as the driving force for one’s life project towards the future. In light of this, one can perfectly understand the scenarios in which politics and religion have either allied themselves or fought against one another.

We do not wish to conclude this section without addressing a question that the reader may well have asked themselves. I am referring to whether what we have stated leads to the conclusion that religion is an *ideology*. To put it another way, in the worst sense of the term ‘*ideology*’, whether religion and politics are, in any case, a *deception*. Paul VI, for example, sought to distinguish the *Catholic religion* from *ideology*¹¹, implying that the deceptive phenomenon of *ideologies* has no place in religion. The Holy Father was not particularly subtle on this point. We need to clarify our thinking somewhat regarding the notion of ‘*ideology*’¹². Religion entails a ‘*worldview*’ and, as such, becomes ‘*ideological*’ the moment it clashes with other, distinct ‘*worldviews*’ (whether secular or religious). Now, just as with political ideologies, there are religious ‘*worldviews*’ that are truer and better than others. And, of course, in this sense, there is no question of ‘*deception*’ in religion or politics. Rather, as we said at the outset, what we must be very conscious of is the truth and goodness inherent in what *we believe*.

More precisely, in the case of the *Catholic Christian faith*, it is the only one which, from its very origins, has subjected its *beliefs* to the scrutiny of *reason* and the *heart*. It alone has analysed the plausibility and goodness of its beliefs by weighing them on the scales of the heart and reason. This has been the case ever since Saint Justin (2nd century) stated that ‘*all truth belongs to us*’¹³. This has, natu-

¹¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975. One of the most confusing developments to have emerged from the Second Vatican Council is the so-called dialogue with the ‘modern world’ (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965), ecumenism (see *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1964) or ‘interreligious dialogue’ (see *Nostrae Aetate*, 1965). This attitude dissolves the Good News entrusted to the Catholic Church like a sugar cube in a glass of water, amidst the proposals of a ‘brave new world’ put forward by secular politics and other religions.

¹² Atticus, C., (2), 2025, p. 211.

¹³ St Justin, *Second Apology*, XIII, 4.

rally, led to Christianity playing a part, in one way or another, in all the philosophical and scientific debates that have taken place in the West. And, in the same way, it has meant that it has been affected by schisms caused by *ideological* differences. This situation explains why we are able to address a topic such as that of this article (in which we shall examine two very distinct positions regarding the political use of the Bible).

We already know how important *beliefs* are in relation to the practical and social disciplines. We have also seen how politics and/or *religion* become fundamental in these matters by proposing visions of the future in which human beings are united as groups through the faculties (theological virtues) of *faith*, *hope* and *love*. Furthermore, we have explained why it is within the Christian religion that different interpretative approaches to the Bible can emerge. In short, we have thus far provided a full explanation of why both *Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology* are possible. Well then, the first step in our analysis of these two *political theologies* will also be something common to both. I am referring to the biblical text that both theologies will use in a more general sense to explain their *political proposals*. This is the Book of Exodus.

II.

THE BOOK OF EXODUS, 'LIBERATION' AND 'PROSPERITY'

In a very recent speech by the President of Argentina, Mr Javier Milei, at the Davos Forum (January 2026), we saw him turn to the Book of Exodus in the Bible to illustrate the evils of socialist ideology on society. To many (especially in pagan Europe), the choice of the Exodus might seem eccentric, somewhat out of place. But President Milei was being entirely consistent with the political arguments commonly used in the Americas. The fact is that the Exodus has been used throughout the American continent since the 17th century to lend weight and credibility to certain political ideas.

Well then, in line with the political frameworks of our time (*liberalism* versus *socialism*), in the Americas we can distinguish between one interpretation of the Exodus based on *Liberation Theology* and another, very different one put forward by *Prosperity*

Theology. So, before examining the very different ways in which these two political currents use this text, it is worth asking ourselves: 1) What epistemological elements have been used to shape the *political archetype* of this myth (*reason, imagination, history*)? 2) How does this myth use political *power* and *freedom* as key elements of the *political archetype* it embodies? 3) What place do *law* and *money* occupy amongst these elements? 4) How does the Book of Exodus deal with the issue of *violence*? We shall answer these questions very briefly.

- 1) *The epistemological dimension of the Exodus.* The *historical-political myth* of the Exodus is very different from those found in the cultures of Mesopotamia and, more generally, in the cultures of the so-called 'Fertile Crescent' (to use James Henry Breasted's apt expression), in Egypt, in Greece or in Germanic culture. The Exodus *rationaly* weaves together *imagination* and *history*. In it we find historical figures, specific places and peoples, and verifiable events. And indeed, the narrative also contains many more elements than those that are strictly historical. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the reason for this is that the aim is to provide a *convincing archetypal explanation*. This is achieved by drawing on reason, reality and imagination; yet, far from presenting something false — and this is the fundamental point in myth theory — what is presented to us is a *true archetype applicable to any era and society*¹⁴.
- 2) *Key elements of the political archetype found in the Book of Exodus.* The Book of Exodus presents us with a situation that we can recognise in many societies throughout history. The *Hebrew people* are being oppressed by the *political power* of the Pharaoh. This takes us straight to the *ideological core* of the story: the dialectic between *political power* and *freedom*. It should be remembered that the Hebrew people are not demanding better wages, nor do they wish to subvert the Pharaoh's power, change the Egyptian

¹⁴ Hence it has been said that it is a story that has survived the social process of political secularisation (Walzer, M., 1985, pp. 184—185; Hendel, R., 2001, pp. 601—622).

social order or replace his gods with the worship of Yahweh. None of that. The Hebrew people *wish to be free*. And here we see the common thread we have observed between politics and religion: the *hope* for the *promise of a paradise* different from that of the Pharaoh. God *promises* his people a '*new land*'.

From this point onwards, a whole series of lessons begins on *freedom* in relation to *political power*. Lessons which, as they are embodied in an *archetype*, are open to different interpretations. I would like to highlight one that will help us to define the *conceptual frameworks* with which we will explain both *Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology*. I focus on the situation in which the Hebrew people begin to grow weary on their journey through the desert and fondly recall their condition of servitude under Pharaoh's rule. It is not that the Hebrew people have ceased to believe in God's promise of a new land; rather, they no longer wish to continue striving to cross the desert. Well then, this fact leads us to a relationship of profound significance: *political freedom* and *effort*.

- 3) *The place occupied by the Law and money*. Next, the Book of Exodus distinguishes the *true Law* from any other kind of *law*. In other words, it brings into play another set of concepts fundamental to political theory (authority and power). We can consider this idea in conjunction with what we have seen in the previous section. God's Law is given to Moses during the *Hebrew people's struggle for freedom* at the very moment when they succumb to that struggle. In this way, we can expand our conceptual framework for a *theory of politics* and *law* to include: *freedom*, *struggle* and *Law*. This sequence of ideas is sure to be sparking in the reader's mind a host of arguments and theoretical possibilities concerning politics and law.

The scenes of *the golden calf* and the *violent entry into the Promised Land* are used in the Book of Exodus to make assessments regarding *wealth*. Very briefly—as we shall examine this in greater detail later—we note that *Liberation Theology* will use the scene of *the golden calf* to argue how

pernicious wealth can be for human dignity¹⁵. Conversely, *Prosperity Theology* will use the scene of the *violent entry into the Promised Land* to argue that wealth is the reward God gives to those who strive¹⁶.

- 4) *The treatment of violence*. The Exodus myth could not be interpreted in political terms without this final element. Indeed, *violence* is present throughout the entire narrative. To leave Egypt, the Hebrew people must face the wrath of the Pharaoh. And, naturally, when they decide to return to Egypt, the Hebrew people will have to face the wrath of God. In addition to these two key scenes involving violence, the scene in which the Hebrew people reach the Promised Land is also very important (see the Books of *Joshua* and *Judges*).

Therefore, using our methodology¹⁷, the following *dialectical relationship* and the following *ideographs* will be key themes in our explanation of *Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology*:

- a) **Dialectical relationship**: *Political power versus freedom*.
- b) Ideography (A): 'Paradise' (wealth as the promise of a new land).
- c) Ideogram (B): 'Violence' in its relationship with authority.
- d) Ideography (C): 'Law' (the relationship between freedom and effort).

III.

FROM THEOLOGY TO POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Political theology has sought to supplant the metaphysical perspective that dominated *scholastic theology*. By this I do not mean to suggest that *scholastic theology* had nothing to say about politics. It did

¹⁵ Trebolle, J., 2008, pp. 309—310.

¹⁶ For this reason, some oppose the use of the Exodus as an archetype of liberation: "As long as there are people who believe in the Yahweh of liberation, the world will not be free from the conquering Yahweh" (Coffe, J., 2014, p. 14).

¹⁷ Atticus, C., (2), 2023; LVII, 2024; (2) 2025.

indeed; but in a manner derived from *fundamental theology*, *dogmatic theology* and *moral theology*. However, as I say, from the 17th century onwards, the fact is that *political theology* began, for many, to become the dominant approach to reading the Bible. To understand the causes of this phenomenon (and why we can speak today of *Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology*), we must look at two parallel developments: a) subjectivist intimism in the *spiritual reading* of the Bible; b) '*scientism*' in the reading of the Bible. From this point onwards, the Bible ceased to be a source of knowledge for the development of social life (e.g. Europe) or, as we shall see, the Bible became subject to *political hermeneutics* (e.g. America).

A) 'Modern' subjectivism, the death of God and political theology

In the 'modern' era, Luther put forward the arguments for confining the Christian religion to the privacy of the home¹⁸. Protestant ideas, in a sense, aligned with the secularist ideas of many French Enlightenment thinkers ("*the enemy of my enemy is my friend*")¹⁹. Consequently, at a certain point, the *Catholic Church* found itself ideologically besieged by the Protestant and secularist *beliefs* and *political ideas* of the French Enlightenment²⁰. Both, we emphasise, agreed on one point: *the Catholic Christian religion should not play a relevant role in the organisation of society*.

Kant's genius succeeded in giving systematic coherence to these two currents. The philosopher from Königsberg, who wept whilst reading Rousseau, devised a philosophical system (both theoretical and practical) in which *formal reason determined the world and human action*. The system produced the following results:

- a) By establishing the *formal practical laws* of human conduct, he believed he had 'scientifically' discovered (e.g. categorical imperatives) that which philosophers had

¹⁸ Bolch, E., 1968, pp. 152—181.

¹⁹ Many of the theologians to whom we shall refer declare themselves heirs to the Enlightenment tradition (Metz, J-B., 1968, p. 390; Rendtorff, T., 1972, pp. 73—74, etc.).

²⁰ For further details, see the first part of the article: Atticus, C., (2) 2024.

been discussing since ancient times, namely, *natural law* in human beings.

- b) On this basis, the Bible had to be interpreted by confining it to *natural law* (according to Kant), that is to say, within the limits of a priori practical principles²¹.
- c) And, based on (a) and (b), the *positive law* of the State and *practical law* could not contradict one another.

The significance of Kant's system lay in the fact that it applied the principle of 'modern science'—that of prioritising 'method' in order to arrive at the truth²²—and, as we have said, it appeared to rationally articulate the *natural law* in human beings²³. Consequently, not only Protestants in Europe, but also many secular pagans and even Catholics, were dazzled by Kantian philosophy. The spell continues to this day. However, there was a fundamental and very serious problem in Kant's system. The a priori and general principles he found in practical reason were *formal*. Thus, if one felt that, for example, the abolition of private property was a good thing, one could use Kant's formal imperatives to legislate on this matter for others. Kant, contrary to what even he might have expected from his system, had paved the way for *moral relativism*. It was Max Scheler's *Philosophy of Values* that highlighted this Kantian shortcoming²⁴. The consequence of all this was that the new battleground for politics and ethics became that of 'values'. Everyone — and this is a view that prevails today — ended up convinced that the law of the State was the ethical law (that what was good was whatever the State said it was). Thus, it is to the so-called 'fundamental rights' (of different 'generations') that 'modernity' would direct the ethical-political debate. Obviously, it is an outrage to take for granted and regard as indisputable that whatever the state says about the number

²¹ Kant, I., 1995; 1996.

²² Atticus, C., (2) 2024.

²³ It should be noted that this issue became very important following nominalism. Duns Scotus had argued, contrary to St Thomas Aquinas, that of the Ten Commandments, only those relating to the respect due to God were moral absolutes (*Ordinatio*, III).

²⁴ Scheler, M., 1922.

and content of fundamental rights is correct. Rather, a complete rethinking of how Kant framed the issue is required. But that is not the issue here. What we wish to highlight with the above is the way in which politics gradually encroached upon religion in Europe and shaped the interpretation of the Bible on the American continent.

Well then, in this context, the Bible ceased to be treated as a revealed Text and came to be treated as a collection of texts (genre theory), from different eras (historical method), which could be useful for understanding history in general²⁵. And, of course, along these lines, one might well question the 'positive authenticity' of its accounts. This is how Protestant and Enlightenment studies of the Bible began to proliferate, in which Christ came to be treated as if he were a politician. The linguistic and historical analyses that had begun during the Renaissance (Erasmus, Cardinal Cisneros, Spinoza, etc.) and which, in some cases—such as that of Spinoza—had taken a very clear political direction²⁶, now, driven by the secular impetus of the Enlightenment and the introspective approach of Protestantism, saw the political focus on the Bible come to the fore.

The first disastrous consequence of all these converging factors occurred during the Romantic period. Hegel, the most influential atheist theologian of that era (and in many respects to this day), spoke of the death of God²⁷, presented the State as a divinity amongst men²⁸, referred to the supermen destined to save

²⁵ Thus, Reimarus, H.S., 1768; far more biased: Thiry, P.H., 1769; see also Bauer, B., 1840; etc. These books are a prime example of an approach to the life of *Christ* in which his divine dimension has been entirely disregarded. See the critiques of these works by Schweitzer, A., 1906 and 1913. This author emphasises the idea that the historical method can vary greatly and, in this sense, the method is often chosen to suit what one wishes to say beforehand. A very balanced book, which highlights the need to integrate the historical aspect with that of faith, is Kähler, M., 1896. We would like to recommend reading the introduction to Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007); in it, the reader will find the accurate and balanced perspective that must be maintained on this subject.

²⁶ Spinoza, B., 1976. This approach endures in the works of such important recent authors as Schmitt, C., 1922

²⁷ Hegel, G.W.F., 1993, ch. VII.

²⁸ Hegel, G.W.F., 1830, §279

humanity²⁹ and, following Kant, defended the superiority of the German people³⁰.

B) Economists as ‘social scientists’ and interpreters of the Bible

With the Bible now open to the political interpretations of the age, it was only a matter of time before the approaches of the new ‘social sciences’ were used to select biblical texts for political ends. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the new emerging ‘social science’ with a quantitative capacity was economics. Utilitarian liberalism had followed in the theological footsteps of Protestantism (nothing good could be expected of man); thus, it reduced human action to a single principle: *selfishness*. Building on this, and treating social life as a market, it arrived at quantitative results that could be assessed in terms—let us note—of *efficiency*. Thus, the very philosopher who had proclaimed the death of God (Hegel), drew attention to the fact that Economics was the ‘most *modern of the sciences*’³¹ and, following in his footsteps, as is well known, Marx, using the empirical method (commodity = atom), developed a system in which the *market*, far from achieving efficient equilibria, led to a dialectic or struggle between social classes and, in its ultimate development, to *economic collapse*³².

Obviously, the debate between *liberals* and *socialists* became particularly heated over the question of method. It should be remembered that ‘modernity’ had reduced the question of truth to a problem of ‘method’³³. And, of course, it was inconceivable that these two secular ideologies should propose such vastly different earthly *paradises* — whilst both supposedly employing a scientific

²⁹ Hegel states: ‘Such are the great historical figures, whose very missions involve these great matters, which are the will of the world spirit’ (Hegel, G.W.F., 2003, p. 30)

³⁰ Kant, I., 2000, p. 43 ff.; Hegel, G.W.F., 2003, p. 208 ff. Drawing on this intellectual framework, the biologist Haeckel declared that the three levels of individuation are the cell, the individual and the state (see Haeckel, E., 1907, chap. VII).

³¹ Hegel, G.W.F., 1830, §189; 2000, §526.

³² Atticus, C., LIX, 2026.

³³ An example of this debate is that which took place within the Austrian School: Menger, C., 2006.

method. Adam Smith, John Locke, David Hume and, naturally, Marx and his followers, came to be regarded as the 'authorities'; the people to *be believed*. St Bonaventure, St Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Francisco de Vitoria, etc.—that is to say, all those who conceived of economics or law as a branch of theology—were deemed 'outdated'. This delusional *belief in politics* reached its peak amongst those who regarded atheism (e.g. '*scientific atheism*') as part of the solution. One need only read Engels' eulogy at Marx's grave on 17 March 1883; no further comment is needed.

This situation created a huge conflict with the *promise of paradise* conveyed by the Catholic Church. In terms of its *political offering*, Catholic Christianity promised only a better eschatological future (Rev. 21—22), whilst *Marxism* and *secular liberals* promised *paradise* here and now. The Catholic Church could promise no more. It was far more realistic than the Enlightenment thinkers of the century. The situation led the Catholic Church, on the one hand, to react against '*modernity*'³⁴, but, on the positive side, to initiate what is known as the social doctrine of the Church³⁵.

C) From economic Marxism to existential Marxism when interpreting the Bible

Liberation Theology not only reads the Bible in *Marxist economic* terms, but also — and this has been less widely highlighted — through the lens of *Marxist existential philosophy*. Let us examine this.

The influence of economic Marxism continued well into the period following the Second World War. The situation of the victors — both the United States and the USSR — gave the impression of a stalemate in the ideological struggle (*economic liberalism* versus *economic socialism*). But it did not take long for it to become clear to everyone that it was the citizens on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain who were fleeing to the West in order to survive. The failure of the socialist economy was obvious. Neither had the five-year

³⁴ St Pius X, *Pascendi* (1907).

³⁵ Leo XIII, *Libertas* (1888) and *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

plans brought greater prosperity to the Soviet Union, nor had capitalism collapsed — as Marx had ‘scientifically’ predicted. Yet this situation did not lead the socialists to abandon their *beliefs* and *ideas*. On the contrary, they transformed them, shifting from the *economic question of capital* to the *existential question of capital*.

For socialists, the argument could no longer be that capitalism produced structural poverty. Now the argument was that *economic prosperity led to the degradation of the individual through consumption*. Just as Hegel had declared the *death of God* to pave the way for economic Marxism, certain French and German ‘intellectuals’ were joining forces to *kill off humanity* and continue to fuel socialist *beliefs*. Among the most prominent philosophers in this vein are Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre is the linchpin around which Marxism revolves, from its *economic* premises to its *existential* ones. He is the author who reconciles existentialism with socialism in his works *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). For his part, Heidegger had reduced the world to a relativist ‘circular’ interpretation³⁶. Thus, Marxist existentialist ‘intellectuals’ relied on these intellectual ‘authorities’ to—take note—attack the very *substance of the human being* under the pretext of liberating them from *capitalist cultural oppression*. Michel Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, and, in general, the entire *Frankfurt School* (Adorno, Habermas, Fromm, Marcuse, etc.) are authors whom we can classify within this trend. I am by no means exaggerating when I say that they advocate the *death of man* as the foundation of their new *socialist existential philosophy*. Here are some quotes from these philosophers: ‘the death of the second (God) is synonymous with the disappearance of the first (Man)’³⁷; ‘it is not possible to constitute man without dissolving him’³⁸ or ‘it is not possible to know anything about man except on condition that the philosophical myth of man is reduced to ashes’³⁹.

Against this intellectual backdrop, in the 1960s, the influence of political ideologies on theology in universities (including Catholic

³⁶ Heidegger, M., 2016, p. 312.

³⁷ Foucault, M., 1966, pp. 353 and 396.

³⁸ Lévi-Strauss, C., 1964, p. 357.

³⁹ Althusser, L., 1967, p. 236.

ones) was unstoppable. It no longer affected only societies steeped to the core in Protestantism and French secularism. The Second Vatican Council opened on a — mark my words! — 'modernist' note⁴⁰. Leading theologians at the Second Vatican Council, such as Karl Rahner—among others—an intellectual disciple of Heidegger, would form part of the so-called 'Catholic School of Heidegger' and, under the so-called '*anthropomorphic turn*', would extend Christian citizenship to all people of 'good will'⁴¹. Political correctness had become a criterion of the Catholic Church's magisterium (e.g. 'ecumenism', 'dialogue with other religions', etc.).

D) The '*anthropomorphic turn*' in the Catholic Church

When authors refer to *Liberation Theology*, the focus always falls on the Catholic Church. We have already explained the reason for this. However, it must not be forgotten that, before Marxism wreaked havoc on the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, it was within Protestant thought that Marxism took root without any difficulty. It is essential to bear this in mind, for it was through the influence of Protestant theologians on Catholic theologians that Marxist *economic* and *existential* delusions began, in fact, to spread through Catholic universities. This influence began, more or less, in the 1920s. Around that time, a significant movement of Catholic theologians emerged who ceased to focus on how *God can be understood by human beings* and — note the shift in focus! — turned their attention to *the idea that it is we humans who explain God when we speak of ourselves*⁴².

This hermeneutical approach combined — in different ways, according to the authors — *historical research* on Jesus of Nazareth, the findings of *the so-called 'social sciences'* and *existentialist philosophy*.

⁴⁰ See John XXIII's opening address to the Second Vatican Council (11 October 1962) and Paul VI's closing address to the Council (8 December 1968).

⁴¹ The expression used by Karl Rahner is '*anonymous Christians*' (Rahner, K., 1984, VI).

⁴² The phrase is from the Protestant theologian Bultmann, R., 1966—67, vol. 4, p. 33.

The blending of historical studies with those carried out *by the 'social sciences'* is quite natural. After all, history serves as a framework for drawing inferences and, where appropriate, for validating the findings of any supposed 'social science'. However, with regard to biblical studies, the *existentialist perspective* brought all these findings together in order — depending on the ideological slant — to present the biblical text as leaning towards one political current or another. If, when speaking of God, what really matters is what we say about Him — according to Bultmann and his followers — then it is clear that the *political promise* becomes the central focus of the biblical message. And so, one of the most influential Catholic exegetes began his work *A Marginal Jew* with the following hermeneutical criterion: '*The real Jesus is not the historical Jesus; the historical Jesus is not the real Jesus*'; and, later on, he points out that the '*real Jesus*' is not the '*theological Jesus*' either⁴³.

This approach led to a series of far-reaching consequences. The most significant for us is that it paved the way for politics to occupy the entire realm of theological *beliefs* and *ideas*. Thus, not long after the historical interpretations ranging from Reimarus's work to that of Bultmann (the period of the so-called 'first quest' for the historical Jesus), Catholic theologians began to echo Protestant slogans regarding the Bible in a relativist or political vein. Just two examples. Josep Dalmau states: "Every ideology sees God in a different way"⁴⁴ and, for his part, José Miranda asserts in his book *Marx and the Bible*: "It is not a question of finding parallels between the Bible and Marx, but simply of understanding the Bible (according to Marx's ideology)"⁴⁵.

In short, the antagonism and control that the *Catholic Christian religion* had, in many cases, exerted over secular political power was, and still is, in danger of disappearing. Indeed, upon examining the texts of that era — and indeed many of those of today — we see that they are full of 'modern' expressions and terms; the most disastrous and dangerous of these all (as we have discussed above)

⁴³ Meier, J.P., 1998—2005, I, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Dalmau, J., 1968, p. 138.

⁴⁵ Miranda, J., 1972, p. 16.

is that of *'human rights'*⁴⁶. In short, the saddest aspect of this story is that, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, many Spanish theologians acted as mere accomplices to Protestant thought, forgetting the successful Spanish Thomist intellectual heritage of the Council of Trent.

IV. LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The term "*liberation*" characterises *Marxist political theology* from the "*anthropocentric turn*" to which we have referred. What is the deeper meaning that socialist theologians ascribe to this term? God is not the fundamental Subject of *Theology* (quite literally, and I am not exaggerating); thus, His action — the primary one for the good of humankind (that of *'saving us'*) — is irrelevant. Consequently, the initiative in action and the means — for salvation lie exclusively in human hands. Hence, they substitute the word *'salvation'* with *'liberation'*⁴⁷.

What are the pillars of *Liberation Theology*? What leads a priest such as Camilo Torres to promote armed struggle in Colombia as a means of bringing about socialist social change? I would suggest that the reader recall the outline with which we concluded point II of this article (The *'Exodus'*, liberation and prosperity). We shall draw on it in the following explanation and, similarly, we shall use it when discussing *Prosperity Theology*.

A) The ideology of a socialist *'paradise'*

We have seen how the story of the Exodus gives rise to a *political archetype* in which the key element is the *liberation* of a people from the *political oppression* of the Pharaoh. The dialectic between *political power* and *freedom* is resolved in the fulfilment of *God's promise*

⁴⁶ *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Gaudium et spes* (1965), *Centesimus annus* (1991), *Dignitas infinita* (2024), etc.

⁴⁷ Gutiérrez, 1972, p. 194.

of a *new land*; of an earthly *paradise*⁴⁸. Well then, liberation theologians use this *archetype* in a similar way to refer to the '*paradise*' that human beings must strive to achieve in this world. And, like *Marxists*, they will use the term '*social justice*' as the cornerstone upon which to justify their actions and the use of all means necessary to achieve it. Victimhood leads to a constellation of words through which they manage to lend weight to what they call '*social justice*'. Thus, the articles and books by these authors are rife with words such as 'the poor', 'the dispossessed', 'the marginalised', 'the discarded'⁴⁹, the 'Church of the poor'⁵⁰, and so on. Through all this, they seek to highlight the supposedly unjust situation of many people from which they must be liberated. Thus, having emotionally prepared their audience, they go so far as to state, in no uncertain terms, that God has taken the side of the poor and against the rich⁵¹. Along these lines, and from a Marxist perspective, of course, they justify violence as a method of social revolution⁵².

The principle of '*social justice*' is not only used by *liberation theologians* in its economic dimension to attack *private property*. Whilst '*surplus value*' is a fundamental concept in *Marxists'* economic analysis of social structures, in the *existential dimension of Marxism* the key term is '*surplus repression*'. And from there, another constellation of terms re-emerges: '*r consumerist indignity*', '*vital alienation*', '*critical spirit*', '*dialectic*' or '*deconstruction*'⁵³ to challenge any *stable personal, social, intellectual or even linguistic structure*. Indeed, the so-called *Theology of Revolution* (ideologically linked to *Liberation Theology*) emerged amongst French authors influenced by the May

⁴⁸ With regard to the Exodus, Miranda states in *Marx and the Bible*: "The fact that the God who intervenes in this way is the creator of all things and of all peoples lends enormous strength to this intervention in the cause of justice, and also gives it universal scope. But the plan to save people from injustice and oppression is the defining feature of every description Yahweh makes of himself" (Miranda, J., 1972, pp. 102).

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *Angelus* in Cartagena 2017 (among other texts by the same Pope).

⁵⁰ Gauthier, P., 1969, pp. 190—201.

⁵¹ Lutte, G., 1971, p. 21.

⁵² On violence in *existentialist socialism*, see Marcuse, 1970, pp. 143—145; many theologians follow this line of thought; for example: Cámara, H., 1970, pp. 19—23; Fierro, A., 1972, pp. 223—227 (in his 1975 book, this author states that he follows Marcuse directly (p. 248)); Díez-Alegría, J. M^a, 1972, p. 80, etc.

⁵³ Derrida, J., 1967.

1968 Revolution⁵⁴. And it is in these authors that the ideas of such radical and pathological thinkers as, for example, Marcuse, Fromm or Derrida take root. In line with them, they will advocate *beliefs* regarding the advent of a civilisation built upon — watch out for this expression again! — the '*maternal principle*'⁵⁵ and, on that basis, they will abhor the figure of the father (and with it, God the Father). They will claim that God is female⁵⁶, defend the Malthusian idea of zero population growth⁵⁷, advocate the orgiastic use of sexuality⁵⁸ and, ultimately, lead people into paganism by exalting Pachamama and animals as deities.

In short, by applying the *purely negative dialectical principle* characteristic of the Frankfurt School⁵⁹, it will be argued that the best society is something like a madhouse. I am not exaggerating here either. It is the ideas of these 'intellectuals' that claim, for example, that mental illness is caused by the social order and, consequently, that madness is a matter of public opinion ('Freudo-Marxism')⁶⁰.

Obviously, Catholic theologians influenced by these ideas will use Marxist frameworks to undermine tradition within the Church. Two examples. *Marxist economic* arguments will be used to denounce the Catholic Church for its alleged lack of commitment to the 'poor'⁶¹. Furthermore, regarding the defence of *existentialist Marxism* by certain theologians, the publication of Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) — which reacted against many of the ideas of

⁵⁴ Fierro, A., 1975, pp. 213 ff. (for an indication of the similarity between the two types of theology, see the same author's work, p. 236).

⁵⁵ Marcuse, H., 1968, p. 213.

⁵⁶ Stone, M., 1976.

⁵⁷ Meadows, D., 1972.

⁵⁸ Reich, for example, says of the individual's orgiastic potency: '(...) the capacity to surrender to the flow of biological energy without any inhibition, the capacity to fully discharge all sexual arousal' (Reich, W., 1957, p. 32).

⁵⁹ On how this principle is applied to *Liberation Theology*: Fierro, A., 1975, pp. 407 and 426.

⁶⁰ Osborn, 1971.

⁶¹ On the 'Kanapa test', see Dalnau, J., 1968, pp. 150 ff. The era was full of authors who, through their books, articles, lectures and classes, urged the Church to 'reform' itself. For example, Moltmann states: "*The Church has no right to a theology of revolution until it has itself been radically renewed*" (Moltmann, J., 1969, p. 68). And Helder Câmara: '*If the Church does not have the courage to tackle its own structures, it will not possess the moral strength to criticise society*' (Câmara, H., 1972, p. 21).

the 1968 Revolution — provoked furious opposition from these theologians (David Tracy, A. Auer, M. Vidal, J. M. Aubert, etc.).

All these *beliefs* and *ideas* about bringing about a new *paradise on earth* were theologically summarised in phrases such as: '(the) kingdom of God consisted in improving the world'⁶². All of these phrases, when examined closely, fitted like a glove with Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it".

In the year that the Second Vatican Council drew to a close (1965), the politicisation of the Church's magisterium was a reality. That year, Harvey Cox published *The Secular City*. This book echoes Feuerbach's thesis on Marx, which we have just quoted. We read: "For too long, theologians have merely interpreted the world. The time has come to transform it"⁶³. Naturally, the context of the so-called '*spirit of the Council*' was exploited to claim that when man speaks of God, he is addressing a political issue⁶⁴. At that time, Johann Baptist Metz, a disciple of Karl Rahner (I emphasise: a theologian of fundamental importance for understanding the Second Vatican Council), began to publish various works on *political theology*, arguing in favour of the Church's transformative political participation in society.

Concrete practical actions of a political nature were not long in coming. It was at this time that Christian-Marxist meetings became fashionable (in Lyon and Paris in 1964, and in Salzburg in 1965), when Marxists no longer encountered any obstacles to 'dialogue' with the Council⁶⁵, thus paving the way for the Medellín Conference of the Latin American episcopate to be held in 1968 (the year of the famous 'May' revolution) — a historic milestone marking the beginning of *Liberation Theology*.

Let us not forget that for a '*new world*', for a '*socialist paradise on earth*', Marxism called for a '*new man*'. Well then, if Marxism placed

⁶² Schillebeeckx, E., 1969, p. 15.

⁶³ Cox, H., 1968, pp. 572.

⁶⁴ Cox, H., 1968, pp. 271–278.

⁶⁵ In 1965, Roger Garaudy wrote the book *From Anathema to Dialogue*. The subtitle of this work is 'A Marxist Addresses the Council'. It is worth noting that Karl Rahner and his disciple Metz wrote introductory essays for later editions of this book.

its faith in the advent of a 'new man'⁶⁶ following the Marxist political formula to the letter, the argument became part of *Liberation Theology*⁶⁷. Let us recall that, according to Marxism, it is unjust social structures that make men evil⁶⁸ (and not original sin); thus, expressions from such as: 'in man we find God'⁶⁹ or that there is a 'humanism of God'⁷⁰, serve to assert that Christianity should be interpreted through a political-Marxist lens. We read: 'If a dogmatics constructed using categories and concepts from the pagan Aristotle has not caused offence thus far, there is no reason why a theology nourished by Marx's analyses should be alarming now'⁷¹.

B) The ideology of socialist 'violence'

We have previously referred to the way in which biblical studies of an exegetical and historical nature led some authors⁷² to refer to the political Christ, the Zealot Christ⁷³. We have also referred to how authors from the *Frankfurt School*, amongst others, used the

⁶⁶ Engels stated: 'As soon as there are no longer any social classes to oppress, as soon as class rule and the individual's legitimate struggle for existence amidst the anarchy that has hitherto reigned in production are abolished, together with the conflicts and excesses resulting from them, there is nothing left to repress, and so the special apparatus of repression, the State, becomes superfluous.' (The quotation from Engels is taken from Mises, L., 2019, p. 89). Kautsky also states that from socialist society "a new type of man will be born... a superman, a sublime man", and Trotsky continues: "Man will be much stronger, much more perceptive, much more refined. His body will be more harmonious, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The average human being will rise to the level of Aristotle, Goethe and Marx" (quotations taken from Mises, L., 2019, p. 170). On the 'new man' in existentialist Marxism: see Fromm, E., 1979 and 1980; Reich, W., 1957; Marcuse, H., 1968, etc.)

⁶⁷ Rahner, K., 1961, Vol. V, p. 157; Teilhard de Chardin, P., 1962; Chenu, M.D., 1966, p. 102.

⁶⁸ Gutiérrez, G., 1972, p. 269.

⁶⁹ Boris, L., 1971.

⁷⁰ Barth, K., 1957, p. 82.

⁷¹ Fierro, A., 1975, p. 102.

⁷² See the convergence of views on this point between Lévi-Strauss and Bultmann (Lévi-Strauss, C., 1964, pp. 368—377; Bultmann, R., 1960).

⁷³ Dutheil, M., 1971; Gullmann, O., 1971; Kautsky, K., 1974 ; etc. We read: 'In principle, the entire representational arsenal contained within the Christian tradition can serve, suitably adapted, for the theological understanding of political realities' (Fierro, A., 1975, p. 266).

figure of Christ to advance their proposals within the framework of *existential Marxism*⁷⁴. Ultimately, the result of all this convoluted discourse, replete with supposed rationales, was to justify the use of violence to change social structures⁷⁵. Statements such as the following are common among liberation theologians: ‘The believer is not a revolutionary simply because they are a Christian; rather, being a revolutionary is their way of being a Christian’⁷⁶.

One of the most damaging consequences of this entire discourse was the portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth as a strictly negative political symbol or myth. He is invoked when *economic Marxism* challenges socio-economic structures⁷⁷, as well as when so-called personal existential situations of oppression are called into question (e.g. the family based on heterosexual marriage, the welfare of offspring, the upbringing of children within the family, etc.). In other words, according to this mindset, Christ has brought nothing more to the world than a *dialectical-negative* message. In this sense, just as Marx praised crime⁷⁸, the priest we mentioned at the start of this section, Camilo Torres—captivated by Marxist beliefs and ideas—went on to take up arms. The means were irrelevant as long as the result—paradise on earth—was achievable. Girardi would say: ‘It is certainly terrible to have to kill for love, but it may be necessary’⁷⁹. At a congress in Amsterdam in 1970, the so-called ‘*Christians in solidarity*’ set aside the Lord’s Prayer to pray as follows (read on, as it is well worth it): ‘Grant, Lord, that we may not fear the struggle, including the struggle between us, for you have made life such that nothing new, no progress, can arise without a confrontation. Guide us towards the essential struggles’⁸⁰.

The existential consequence of these ideas was that ‘conversion’ ceased to be an act of God’s grace in man and became an act of ‘affiliation’ with a political party. Indeed, setting aside the role of

⁷⁴ Fromm, E., 1979.

⁷⁵ Cox, H., 1968, pp. 47–48; Cardonnel, J., 1968, p. 123; Moltmann, J., 1969, pp. 425–426; Gutiérrez, G., 1972, p. 203; Santa Ana, J., 1972, p. 118.

⁷⁶ Blanquart, P., 1970, p. 147.

⁷⁷ Biot, F., 1972, p. 176; Chenu, M.D., 1970, p. 162.

⁷⁸ Marx, C., 2018.

⁷⁹ Girardi, J., 1971, p. 71.

⁸⁰ Taken from Fierro, A., 1975, p. 276.

charity in personal development (which they despised and, moreover, continue to question and criticise even today, targeting all religious orders that peacefully care for the needy⁸¹), liberation theologians emphasised the supposed need for *social structures to change* so that people might also change. As we have said, liberation theologians replaced 'original sin' as an explanation for evil in man with the Rousseauian and Marxist theory of the 'noble savage'. Man was 'evil' because society made him that way⁸². We quote Girard once more: '(the revolutionary project) entails a radical critique of moralism, that is to say, of that hope of achieving the transformation of humanity through the mere moral conversion of individuals'⁸³. It follows from all this that the first act of the 'convert' is to 'join' the party that aims to bring about social transformation. Of course, one might wonder, could these theologians actually go so far as to say that being a member of a political party is more important than being baptised? And the answer, unfortunately, is yes. To do so, they certainly did not have to contend with the Church's magisterium. It should be recalled that Karl Rahner, for example, spoke of 'anonymous Christians'⁸⁴, and that it was at the Second Vatican Council that it was stated that salvation was possible without baptism⁸⁵.

C) The ideology of socialist 'law'

Liberation Theology denies the *existence* of *natural law* in human beings. The only law it declares to be universally valid, both for individual and social existence, is *pure negativity*. In this way, it eliminates any possibility that *natural law* might be connected to the *Law of God* and serve as a moral foundation for the individual. Moreover, in many respects, both the Law of God and natural law are regarded as arbitrary, alienating and oppressive. We have

⁸¹ Fierro, A., 1975, pp. 56 ff.

⁸² Gutiérrez, G., 1972, p. 269.

⁸³ Girardi, J., 1968, p. 517.

⁸⁴ Rahner, K., 1984, vol. VI.

⁸⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, 16.

already pointed out the absurdity to which this leads: no law will be necessary once the *Marxist paradise* has been established in the world.

To conclude, I would like to raise one point. In *Liberation Theology* (in line with Marxist atheism), the social process of secularisation is approached in various ways. Some theologians use this social phenomenon to emphasise the need to engage in politics from a religious perspective⁸⁶. Others describe the process of secularisation and political theology⁸⁷. Finally, there are those who, following in the footsteps of Karl Rahner, refer directly to a '*secularised Christianity*'⁸⁸. Regrettably, in recent times, we have come across views which even suggest that we Catholic Christians have nothing to say in the cultural and political spheres. I was stunned to discover that, indeed, Pope Francis had stated in *La Repubblica* in 2013: "*Proselytism is utter nonsense; it makes no sense*".

V.

PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

Protestantism also lies at the origins of the *Theology of Prosperity*. However, in this case, the reference to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church is certainly less significant than in the case of *Liberation Theology*. On this point, the Catholic Church's tradition regarding the *virtue of poverty* has, to this day, very effectively defended the Church's magisterium against the tenets of the *Prosperity Gospel*. In fact, any influence that Marxism has had on the Catholic Church's magisterium has been precisely through the door opened to it by the virtue of poverty.

The belief that '*faith alone*' was what saved mankind led Protestants to *believe* that good works were not a sign of being on the path to the '*Promised Land*'. It should be remembered that Protestants replaced the veneration of saints with the veneration of translators (Luther made the translation and purification of the biblical text the

⁸⁶ Galilea, S., 1974, pp. 313—327.

⁸⁷ Metz, J-B., 1969, p. 271.

⁸⁸ Chaigne, H., 1971.

cornerstone of the *belief* in '*faith alone*'). Well then, within this theological context, it became a source of anguish for Protestants to ascertain whether or not they were predestined for *paradise*. Neither Luther nor Calvin go so far as to say that wealth is a sign of salvation. It is important for us to clear up this widespread misconception because it is relevant to our topic. What both did affirm is that the fulfilment of social duties is part of the Protestant ethic. Moreover, they attached paramount importance to *obedience to civil political authority*⁸⁹. This led to the view that the practical image of Protestants was that of people who were very hard-working and compliant with public order (the State). This undoubtedly led the economist and sociologist Max Weber to state that, for Protestants, wealth was a sign of salvation⁹⁰. Now, what is interesting about this idea for us is that, once again, we see how it is within the Protestant milieu that politics becomes the primary focus in relation to the Bible. From this, we can understand something we have referred to previously. By ruling out the possibility of charity in human beings, it was Prot-

⁸⁹ We read that Luther wrote: 'Someone must arrest, accuse, strangle and kill the wicked, and protect, excuse, defend and save the good (...). Therefore, if they (the princes) do so with the intention not of seeking their own interest but of helping to use power and the law to subdue the wicked, they run no danger and may exercise them just as anyone else carries out their office, deriving their livelihood from it' (Luther, M., *On Secular Authority: To What Extent Obedience is Due* (1523), 2016, p. 8). Commenting on Psalm 101, Luther goes so far as to extol the goodness of the prince above that of his subjects with these words: "God has established and ordained temporal power to be subject to reason, for it is not to govern the salvation of souls and eternal salvation, but rather bodily and temporal goods, just as God grants them. God grants them (the princes) intelligence, knowledge, languages and eloquence, so that their beloved Christians may be regarded as a multitude of children, fools or beggars". Thus, in Luther we find the embryo of all collectivist political ideas which have held that someone—in Luther's case, the prince—can organise society rationally and use unlimited force to that end. When, between 1524 and 1526, the Peasants' War spread across Germany, Luther had no qualms about sternly admonishing the peasants for rebelling against authority: 'How can you reconcile yourselves with these words (of the Gospel) and with divine right if you claim to act in accordance with divine right and, yet take up the sword against the authority instituted by God?' (Luther, M., '*Exhortation to Peace in Response to the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants*' (1525), in 2016, p. 11). Calvin's words in Book IV of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) are even more severe. He goes so far as to say that tyrants exist because they are a scourge sent by God against the people for their sins (Book IV, 20, 24—26). This is the kind of mindset from which Hobbes's political thought arises.

⁹⁰ Weber, M., 2000.

estant authors who replaced the *rational virtue ethics* (traditional in the Catholic Church and the School of Salamanca) with Kantian rational ethics — as we have seen — or, in the Anglo-Saxon context, with sentimental ethics⁹¹. And, of course, for those who have eyes only to see the evil in human beings, it is hardly surprising that they made ‘*selfishness*’ the cornerstone of the ‘*new science*’⁹². This new ‘*positive*’ practical-social discipline (along with others like it) — and its corresponding Nobel Prize — led to the imposition, in universities across the world, of the criterion, no less, that university education for young economists and jurists of calibre is immoral. ‘Modern’ economics is *Protestant Scholasticism* from start to finish. And, of course, it has its own theology.

Through ‘*selfishness*’, the Protestants treated all men as equal when it came to understanding their practical actions; yet, let us note, in doing so, *they treated them as unequal by focusing on the worst aspects of their nature*. Whilst the School of Salamanca argued that *friendship* enabled the highly capable individual to lead a sociable life in harmony with their fellow human beings⁹³, Protestant economists portrayed the prosperous man as someone whose relationship with others was based on a *self-serving contract*. It is worth noting that when Luther criticised indulgences, he used the argument, amongst others, that forgiveness precludes repentance. In other words, at the heart of Protestantism lies the idea that one must suffer the consequences of one’s actions *without any possibility of fairness*. From this, interpretations arose in which good faith, morality and good manners had no bearing on the obligation to fulfil what had been agreed⁹⁴. In other words, for Protestant culture, being ‘*self-*

⁹¹ Smith, A., 2017 and 2018.

⁹² Bentham, J., 1987, Ch. XII, 10; Smith, A., 2018.

⁹³ Among many others: Fonseca, C., 1592.

⁹⁴ See §241 BGB 1900. Let us consider some of the most significant amendments introduced to the German Civil Code (BGB) in 2002. The new §275(1) BGB excludes the right to demand performance where this is impossible (that is to say, previously, even if the debtor was unable to fulfil the obligation, they could still be required to do so). The debtor was also given the option to avoid performance of the obligation where it is personal in nature and the debtor faces certain impediments or where it would require a disproportionate investment on their part in relation to the creditor’s claim (in this regard, good faith is taken into account) (§275(2) and (3) BGB). In line with this approach of relaxing the strict enforcement of contractual obligations, the reform also

ish' became a legitimate way of prospering in life (good deeds did not matter), often at the expense of others. This mindset led to truly abominable consequences in Protestant theology which, incidentally, can still be observed today. Indeed, by *believing* that '*selfishness*' is the defining feature of human behaviour — and an irreversible one at that — they legitimise the *foundations of inequality in human dignity*. I am not referring to the acknowledgement of the real inequalities that exist amongst people, which are, moreover, legitimate and necessary. What these theologians are referring to is the fact that there are people '*chosen*' by God for salvation and, therefore, of *a higher and more dignified status than the rest*. In this sense, it is no coincidence that it is within Protestant circles that the very *goodness of slavery* is theologically justified. It was the Calvinists, and with them the Puritans and Congregationalists (in contrast to the teaching of the Catholic Church⁹⁵ and the authors of the School of Salamanca), who viewed the situation of slavery as a *state of nature* willed by God for some human beings in relation to others and, consequently, that slaves should be treated as contractual objects⁹⁶.

The biblical text most frequently used to justify the domination of some human beings over others is *Genesis* 9:20—25. In it, Ham, son of Noah, is cursed by his father for failing to cover his nakedness. Consequently, all his descendants were condemned to servitude. Drawing on the analogy of this text, many Protestant theologians would regard slavery as natural. Hegel (an atheist Protestant theologian), whilst not citing this text, and whilst idolising the State and defending the superiority of the German people in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, would say of the Black race: 'Anyone who wishes to see appalling manifestations of human nature can find them in Africa'⁹⁷.

"*Scientism*" in the sifting and interpretation of biblical texts, the glorification of "*selfishness*" in human beings, "*contractualism*" as an

allowed the debtor to avoid performance where they were unaware of the impediment to doing so (§311a(2) BGB), etc.

⁹⁵ See, amongst others, the condemnations of slavery by Paul III, Urban VIII, Gregory XVI, etc.

⁹⁶ Placucci, A., 1990, p. 114.

⁹⁷ Hegel, G.W.F., 2003, p. 274.

explanation for social relations, “*inequality in the regard for human dignity*” and racism are the guiding principles underpinning what is known as *Prosperity Theology*.

At present, Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements play a hugely significant role in spreading all these beliefs in countries such as Korea and throughout the Americas⁹⁸. The origin of all these movements lies in the very particular mindset that Protestants in the United States have come to adopt. We shall therefore focus on this country. We shall use the same *ideograms* that we employed when describing *Liberation Theology*.

A) The ‘paradise’ concept

Like liberation theologians, prosperity theologians and politicians have used the Exodus to justify certain political actions. However, unlike Marxism — which made ‘*social justice*’ the principle for achieving *paradise* on earth — *prosperity theologians* emphasise the importance of ‘*individual freedom*’ and ‘*self-interest*’ in attaining *paradise* in this world⁹⁹. These beliefs are enshrined

⁹⁸ “Pentecostalism has been one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary history, and it is not without reason that it is currently regarded as the most active and dynamic religious movement of the 20th century. Over the course of the century, it has grown to encompass 300 million followers worldwide; consequently, to consider the reconfiguration of Christianity and religious transformations at the start of the 21st century without taking the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements into account seems absurd. As for Neo-Pentecostalism, it is a defining feature of this historical period; on the one hand, it signifies integration into neoliberal modernity, and on the other, it has been a movement capable of re-enchanting the world, saturating the lives of vast sections of the population with religion, and reviving a traditional religious imagination” (Amestoy, N., 2009, pp. 55—56).

⁹⁹ Solano, A., 2005, p. 6. We also read: “Within the perspective of conservative North American neo-Protestantism, Prosperity Theology favours the individual — rather than the community — as the primary sphere of action, holding up poverty as an indicator of non-submission to God, which leads to the impossibility of salvation (...) Prosperity Theology aims to transform the individual so that this transformation may, in the long run, transform society. The individual’s social advancement is presented as the only possible vehicle for societal transformation, by legitimising, through divine will, the desired evolution. This explains its emphasis on moulding the individual within the neo-community formed by the Church” (García, 2014, p. 5).

in the *United States Declaration of Independence* (1776), which establishes as inalienable (individual) rights: '*life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*'. Now, this set of rights reveals something very distinctive about American Protestantism. We have seen that authors such as Luther and Calvin advocated submission to civil authority. Yet this idea was set aside when the *Pilgrim Fathers* (Protestants) left Europe from England. They did so — amongst other reasons — because they considered both the English Crown and the Church of England to be corrupt. In this context, they explained their journey to the *New World* using the analogy of the Exodus¹⁰⁰. In the *political archetype* of the Exodus discussed above, Great Britain took the place of the Pharaoh and the *Pilgrims* that of the Chosen People.

Understanding this is very important for grasping the differences, not only between *European* and *American* Protestantism, but also between *French* and *American political liberalism*¹⁰¹. So, what we find in the United States is a population that, by its very nature, is *suspicious of any form of political power*. And, of course, as a result, it expects little or nothing from the state and attaches great importance to the individual. The image we all might have of the sheriff, with a Bible in one hand and a revolver in the other, facing down any adversity, illustrates very well what I am trying to say.

The arrival of the *Pilgrims* in the United States, using the analogy of the Exodus, will result in these people — just as Joshua did with the land of Canaan — seeing themselves as entitled to usurp and conquer the lands inhabited by the indigenous peoples. Thus, the text of Exodus was accompanied hermeneutically by other biblical texts such as: '*God is a warrior*' (*Ex* 15:3) or the passage from Jeremiah: '*Cursed be he who keeps his sword from blood*' (*Jer* 48:10). Naturally, texts from Genesis, and Leviticus (*Gen* 9; *Lev* 25:44—46), in addition to the one we have seen from Genesis, were also used to justify slavery.

¹⁰⁰ Aguirre, R., 2025, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ Ronald Reagan, for example, at the 1984 Prayer Breakfast, drew a clear distinction between the secular liberalism of the French Revolution and that of the United States. Specifically, using the image of St Augustine, he said: "I think George Washington knew that the city of men cannot survive without the city of God..."

We see the same line of argument in the American Civil War. Both sides appealed to the Bible to justify their cause.

This way of justifying political actions persists to this day. For example, in 2016, Jerry Falwell Jr. compared Donald Trump to King David (recall this king's adultery with Bathsheba and how it led to the death of her husband, Uriah)¹⁰², so that the more conservative electorate would have no qualms about voting for a presidential candidate with a questionable moral reputation.

Ultimately, it is within this historical and cultural context that expressions such as '*man is free*', '*freedom of conscience*', '*freedom of worship*', '*the right to bear arms*', '*free market*'¹⁰³, etc., resonate. And, of course, all of these will be used by *Protestant prosperity theologians* to reach conclusions just as surprising as those reached by *liberation theologians*, but, mind you, in the opposite sense; namely, that God has taken the side of the rich and against the poor¹⁰⁴.

All these *beliefs* and *ideas* about a *liberal paradise* on earth can be summarised theologically in a single phrase: '*the Kingdom of God is a personal right of a select few*'¹⁰⁵. Naturally, the '*Kingdom of God*' in this world concerns all the '*chosen ones*' and, of course, foremost amongst them are the pastors of those churches. Thus, it is a dogma of Pentecostal churches that God demands that tithes be paid to him. We find ourselves once again in the logic of '*selfishness*' in its '*contractual*' dimension: *God gives, if you give to him*¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Adams, S-L., 2004.

¹⁰³ "(...) capitalism has generated its own theological dogma—not merely an earthly one, nor a metaphor for concepts that indirectly allude to heaven—but rather it presents itself as a metaphysical truth: the metaphysics of the capitalist market, and it is into this that a spirituality seeks to be inserted" (Tancara, 2020, p. 164).

¹⁰⁴ Spadaro, A., and Figueroa, M., 2018, pp. 115—118. Prosperity theology entails a whole self-help theory for achieving success. In this regard, the importance of the book by Vincent Peale, N., 1952, is fundamental.

¹⁰⁵ We read that Harold Hill says: "The king's children are entitled to special treatment because they enjoy a special, living, first-hand relationship with their heavenly Father, who has made all things and remains their Lord" (Hill, H., 1976, p. 34).

¹⁰⁶ A text by Edin Macedo (Bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) states: "Tithes and offerings are as sacred as the Word of God itself. Tithes and offerings signify the servant's loyalty and love for the Lord. Tithes and offerings cannot be separated from the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus; they signify, in truth, the blood of the saved for those who need salvation" (quoted by Aguirre, R., 2025, p. 212).

When discussing *Liberation Theology*, we have seen that those theologians called for a 'new man' for their 'paradise' on earth. Well, in *Prosperity Theology*, it is exactly the same. But in this case, the 'superman' will not emerge after social transformation. He will be a 'superman' by upholding a certain ethical profile and having established himself above other men¹⁰⁷. In fact, ethics enters the realm of politics to divide people — not as Kant intended, as we have seen. Thus, for example, we encounter an ethic far removed from any form of charity, in which homosexuals or, in many cases, women are treated badly. It is not uncommon to find authors and pastors with large followings, such as Ralph Drollinger — founder of Capitol Ministries (which promotes the training of Christians to take up political office) — who, whilst being anti-Catholic and liberal, are opposed to recognising women's labour rights and fiercely criticise homosexuality. It is also true that they oppose the silent massacre of our century: abortion. Ultimately, it is this sort of 'superman' who will transform society¹⁰⁸. It is this 'superman' whom they call a 'saint'¹⁰⁹.

B) An ideology of 'violence' in the name of prosperity

Prosperity theology selects passages from the Old and New Testaments to make the Bible speak in political terms. And, like *liberation theology*, it selects certain passages to justify the use of violence (including: *Matt* 10:29—30; *Rom* 8:28; *James* 4:2, etc.). In this case, it does not merely justify the violence one might use to defend one's 'selfish' interests. It goes further. It declares that the situation of suffering in which many people may live is just. God wills it to be so for them. This leads to the belief that participating in *liberal capitalist ideology* constitutes, in itself, a state of salvation for the individual. And so, in a similar way to what we have seen Marxists of

¹⁰⁷ Sparado, A., Figueroa, M., 2018.

¹⁰⁸ García, J., Patrick, M., 2014, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ "Being prosperous is no longer a matter that cannot form part of being evangelical (...) humanity's projects for social progress are not open to question. Indeed, it is a way—at least one among many—of demonstrating holiness" (Seman, P., 2005, p. 77).

Liberation Theology believe when they say that ‘conversion’ is membership of the party, many authors of *Prosperity Theology* similarly suggest that political activism within the groups they form replaces grace in a person’s ‘conversion’¹¹⁰.

C) The concept of the ‘law’ of prosperity

Prosperity theologians maintain that there is a *natural law*—that of ‘selfishness’—and a *divine Law* which they derive from their particular interpretation of the Bible. Thus, within their system of *beliefs* and *ideas*, any *positive law* emanating from civil or religious authority (the Catholic Church) is viewed with suspicion. To put it another way, the best law is one that does not exist and leaves people free to do as they please (‘selfishness’). In line with this thinking, it is believed (and in this they are not entirely wrong) that it is regulation and political power which, on many occasions, thwart the individual’s chances of achieving happiness in this world. If, as we have seen, socialism believed that with *the ‘new man’* no laws would be necessary, prosperity theologians consider that it is precisely the absence of law that will lead *the ‘new man’* to a sort of what Hayek called a ‘*spontaneous order*’, or, theologically speaking, ‘*paradise*’.

VI.

CONCLUSIONS

- I. We have seen that both Theology and Politics address something fundamental in human beings: beliefs, hope

¹¹⁰ “Prosperity Theology thus operates as a theological mechanism through which every Homo Neoliberalis can see their longings for stability, health and economic abundance sanctified and spiritualised in a covenant with a God who does not call for structural changes to current socio-economic conditions and who is grounded in an optimistic view of Homo Neoliberalis’s capacity to receive God’s blessings. These blessings, insofar as they entail health and economic abundance, will be fundamental to Homo Neoliberalis’s path of constant self-improvement and social advancement” (Aguirre, 2021, p. 8).

and will. In this way, we have been able to see the reason why: a) these two disciplines are related; b) these two disciplines may come into conflict; c) the possibility of *political theology* exists.

- II. It has also been demonstrated that this situation is possible because human beings are the only beings on earth who develop within a community, looking towards the future. And, to this end, they are endowed with faculties such as faith, hope and the will.
- III. It is this unique aspect of human beings (existing for the future) that makes them so vulnerable to error and deception. These are fundamental considerations when analysing *beliefs* and, consequently, ‘worldviews’ and religious and political ‘*ideological*’ conflicts.
- IV. More specifically, the political interpretations of the Bible from the *perspectives of Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology* have been outlined. Summary outline:

<i>Dialectics: Political power</i>	<i>see Freedom</i>	<i>Ideographs</i>
Collective	Personal	<i>Paradise</i>
Yes	Yes	<i>Violence</i>
Yes	No	<i>Law</i>
Liberation theology	Prosperity theology	

V.
TAKING A STANCE

From a traditional Catholic perspective, *Liberation Theology* and *Prosperity Theology* must be traced back to a very ancient phenomenon that emerged from the very inception of the Catholic Church: *Gnosticism*. In its various forms, *Gnosticism*—particularly from the 4th century onwards—converges on the idea that God’s message is known perfectly by *certain special individuals*. In the case of our own century, these men are the ‘*social scientists*’. From those earliest

times, theology has always been tempted to fall under the spell of various Gnostic doctrines (Arianism, Manichaeism, pantheism, evolutionism, etc.) and, in the face of these, the Church Fathers never ceased to attack Gnostic beliefs and ideas and to defend the Church against such influences. In the 2nd century, St Irenaeus of Lyon) stands out. As for the theological ideologies we have discussed throughout this article, we have cited various documents of the Catholic Church in which they are rejected. But, returning to the Gnostic roots of these ideologies, in his address to the academics of the Catholic University of Lyon on 7 October 1986, Saint John Paul II said the best possible words to conclude an article such as this: 'The gnosis that Irenaeus combated appears to us today as a series of completely outdated speculations. Undoubtedly, they responded to a deep desire to understand the meaning of hidden things. But they were dominated by the temptation to attain this understanding solely through reason and the power of the imagination, and to limit this esoteric knowledge to a circle of initiates (...) It was a pseudo-Christianity, the dangers of which Irenaeus clearly foresaw. / In other respects, who would dare to claim that the Gnostic temptation is no longer an obstacle for the Church? Hegel's attempt to interpret Christianity was precisely a way of stripping the Christian faith of its substance (...) Even today, there is a widespread temptation amongst some Christians to interpret revelation and the formulations of the Christian Creed in a highly partial manner, allowing themselves to read the Bible according to presuppositions alien to the faith, to subject the faith to a system constructed outside it, and to retain familiar formulations from the Bible or Christian doctrine to underpin these heterogeneous currents of thought.'

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