

*ALIENATION AND LIBERATION OF WOMAN IN THE CHURCH:
A TREATMENT OF THE EROTIC IN THEOLOGY*

*Let him kiss me with the kisses
of his mouth.*
Song of Songs 1:2

*How can this come about, since I
am a virgin?*
Luke 1:34

My topic is very important for Latin America in general and the church in particular. My topic is woman's place in the church; my problem is how to phrase the question.

In the Latin American church there are 140,000 female religious. Think what it would mean if such a huge number of persons would dedicate themselves to the liberation of the people!

On the other hand, since theology has rarely been done by laity, the erotic question has been badly put for

centuries. Indeed, there are questions that simply have never been brought up in the history of theology .

To pose this question of woman's place in the church, we must begin with the face-to-face, the original experience of Moses who came face-to-face with God. This experience can be described or analyzed on three levels because there are three possible kinds of relationship of person with person (we are reminded here analogically of the three persons of the Trinity). They are male-female, which becomes father-mother, parent-child, and brother-sister. The first is an erotic relationship, the second pedagogical, and the third political. And this applies even to the relationship of the totality of humankind before God, which is humankind's theological position, but always through the mediation of people, through "the poor, the orphan, or the widow ," as the prophets say.

Let us now take up the first of these relationships, which even genetically is first.

TOWARD A HISTORY OF THE EROTIC

How has the male-female relationship fared in history? For ten thousand years practically all the cultures that dominated the makeup of the Latin American world were patriarchal. The Indo-Europeans, as I have indicated, saw the God of heaven as a father God and not a mother God, and this tells us a great deal. Of course, as a French Protestant philosopher and theologian has told us, the category "father" is a symbol of the divine fecundity and creativity. Actually God is not a father or mother in the ontic sense because obviously God is neither male nor female. God is God, from the beginning, but was given the paternal symbol by a patriarchal culture that saw the father as having maximum authority. And be-

cause he had authority, he also had power, strength, the aptitude for violence. At the same time, all these cultures saw the father as the initiator of the procreative process. Thus God as Creator had to be viewed as the Father. The Indo-European culture is ruled by male symbols that are in evidence on all levels. I propose now an example to think about: Consider Plato's book called the *Symposium* (or *Banquet*), a book well known in philosophical circles that treats of beauty, love, eros. I studied it in a seminar three years ago with a group from my university. We wanted to go on to things other than those immediately apparent. The conclusion was quite unexpected.

In the beginning of his dialogue, Plato tells us what eros, or love, is. There are five myths, or symbolic accounts, handed down by the sages of the past. He accepts that there is a heavenly Aphrodite and an earthly Aphrodite; that there is a goddess of supreme love and a goddess of common love. Love is the tension of "the same" for "the same." It's as when someone says, "There is my type" to a girl or a boy; my "type" is "the same" as I. In other words, we love "the same"; eros is love of the same for the same, and therefore Plato says that the heavenly Aphrodite is the goddess of homosexuals. Plato held that the highest form of sexuality was to be found among the Spartan soldiers. Remember that the Spartan aristocracy was made up of a small number of men addicted to war who dominated nations much larger than themselves. Young men until their thirtieth year were alone in the army; they were homosexuals.

So we have here a defense of homosexuality, love of the same for the same. But, he tells us, the man comes to the woman anyway and for that he proposes another myth, the myth of the androgyne. One of the sages who is

recounting ancient beliefs says that in the beginning there was a being who was both man and woman. But the gods saw how strong this being was and divided it. Those who proceed from the androgyne are the males who love women; they adore the earthly Aphrodite, and this is vulgar. Plato believes, then, that the love of a man for a woman is secondary, and if the man must come to the woman, the reason is that "the same" would remain "the same." "The same" is the human race and remains the same through a new individual. Thus the man comes to the woman so that the man remains through the mediation of the woman. The man is interested in the male child. Thanks to the woman, he has a male child. The woman is of no consequence to him.

Plato, the wisdom of the Greeks! But Plato is not as clear as Aristotle. A pupil of mine is doing a study on the theme of property in Aristotle. And perhaps when he finishes his study, he will have to entitle it, *Aristotle, the Reactionary*. When you get deep into Aristotle, you are astounded at how oppressive of women was Greek wisdom. Aristotle, in both his work on economics and his work on politics, takes up the matter of the family. This is what he says at the outset: "Man is a political animal." Is he talking about every man? No indeed! For him the only political animal resides in the *Greek Polis*. The barbarians are not men because they do not reside there. Neither are the slaves. Only he is a man who is a free male in the Greek city: Less than one out of every thousand of the people living at that time.

Woman, says Aristotle, does not have fullness of choice and therefore cannot buy or sell property or have slaves. Only the male can have them. Nor is the male child yet a man, because he is still on the way to becoming one through the educational process.

This kind of anthropology is strictly oligarchical, subjugative—a small percentage of humanity are men and the rest are not.

For Thomas also not all men are such *simpliciter*. In the *Summa Theologica* I, question 57, he maintains that only he is a man who has no one over him (that is, a feudal lord) and therefore has "dominative right" over the servant. There is also a disciplinary right over the child and a kind of domestic right over the woman. This means that for Thomas also the male is the one who has full responsibility because he has achieved full liberty. He says that Adam committed the sin, and not Eve, because she did not have "full freedom of choice." In the *Summa* itself there was a certain medieval *machismo*. Sociologically it was bound to happen. Thomas was a man of his times, conditioned by the existing culture. It is interesting to note that this same doctrine was used to defend pedagogical domination. In the *Symposium* Plato says just that as the same remains the same thanks to procreation through the woman, so the teacher produces the same in the pupil. The pupil had contemplated divine things and then forgot them. It was the task of the teacher to remind him of these things. In the myth about the cave and in all the other Platonic myths we are told of everyday man who forgets the ideas he had about the gods and has to be reminded of them by the teacher. This is clearly a matter of pedagogical domination.

Socrates made his disciples believe that they were contemplating divine things that really were nothing more than constructs divinized by Greek culture. The soul, it was said, had seen divine ideas and then had sunk into the body. Socrates made them remember the things they had seen. But this process is a coverup. Socrates, with his subtle questions, gets them to answer in a way that someone of Greek culture would answer and makes them

believe they are on the threshold of the divine. He divinizes Greek culture and prevents his disciples from taking a critical look at what is Greek. This constitutes the second part of the *Symposium*.

The domination of the woman--erotic domination-is followed by the pedagogical domination of the child.

THE EROTIC IN LATIN AMERICA

We come now to the modern age. The modern man who arrived in America was a "lord of conquest," the conquistador who lived in concubinage with the Indian woman. The Indian male did not live in concubinage with the Spanish woman. We have here not only political, cultural, and economic domination but erotic as well. Therefore, the American mother, the mother of the mestizo, is Indian. She is not Spain but Amerindia. The father is almighty Spain. Spain, therefore, is not the "motherland" but the father.

There comes to mind here a verse of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz: "You men, you accuse women without any reason!" She, a woman well rooted in her epoch, rebels against the male who not only dominates the woman but makes her believe that she is well off being dominated. Sor Juana, on the other hand, as a virgin and a woman of culture, can rise up against the male because she is untouched by his domination. Here we can see the prophetic sense in being a consecrated religious who consecrates her liberation. This does not mean being married mystically to a "spouse" who spiritually oppresses her, as frequently happens. Jesus is celibate and not polygamous. He has no spouse. The nun's "wedding" ring will cease to have meaning when she comes to think about human liberation and not about darning stockings in a convent. This is the problem of 140,000 female religious in Latin

America who really are not what they should be because they are "mystically alienated" within the convent; nevertheless, they have been consecrated precisely to work for the pedagogical liberation of the child and the political liberation of the brother. Yet they remain alienated with a male who does not exist because Jesus is simply not an ontic spouse. Jesus is the teacher, the brother. In Latin American history women enjoyed more esteem before the conquest than after it because our peoples-Aztecs, Chibchas, Incas, and almost all the Tupi-Guarani-were *matrilineal* but not matriarchal. Among us today to be the son of an unknown father is an insult. Poor mother, poor child if the father will not declare himself. The father is all-important; if the father is unknown, the child is a nobody. How much further can alienation of the woman go?

In all the Indian cultures, however, it is the other way around-to be the child of an unknown mother is an insult. In fact, the insult of the pre-Hispanic epochs is "son of an unknown mother," because the mother determined one's place in the family tree. She was held in high esteem. A man once said to a Mayan king, " And you who boast so much, nobody knows who your mother is." The poor man was liquidated. In the *Popol Vuh* we read: "The mother and father of all have made all things. " First the mother, then the father, as a couple. The gods are referred to in order as the mother gods and the father gods. Even in reference to persons they speak of grandmothers and then grandfathers. The same is found in all the great pre-Hispanic books. The females are named first because they are matrilineal. This means the woman enjoyed a higher religious esteem.

But then came the Semitic and Indo-European conquerors-Columbus, Cortes, Pizarro, Juan de Garay

-for whom the father was the origin of all things. They did away with esteem for woman in America and introduced *machismo* on the continent in a way that so far has been irreversible.

If we ask now what is the place of woman in our society, we can get an answer from someone like the Argentinian folk figure Martin Fierro, who says: " At that time I had my ranch, my children, and my woman." He puts his ranch first, his children second, and his wife in last place. He possesses the three as things and the last of the three is the woman.

There are even more interesting aspects to this question. Consider the tango, a song form indigenous to the people of our area and immensely popular. Millions of Latin Americans sing the tango verses. Medellin is the tango capital of the world. The tango is an erotic song with overtones of justice. One of the great tangos of 1918 is "Margot." It is a lament sung by a young lad from the slums. He is a nobody from the "periphery." He sings about his girl who was taken from him by an aristocrat who plied her with champagne. He is tormented by loneliness. The aristocrat makes a kept woman of the girl from the slums; ironically he demands that his aristocratic wife be a virgin because the women of aristocrats ought to be virgins. He then takes the girl to bed. The victim, of course, is the young man from the slums—a figure of oppression and despair. The tango is erotic social protest. The girl's name, Margarita, is changed to the French Margot—"now they call you Margot." She drinks champagne with the aristocracy while the young lad remains in the slums. He recalls the evenings with her and his mother, who worked by the light of a kerosene lamp, and he remembers when Margot was called Margarita. He is prepared to forgive the girl for her prostitution with the aristocrat. He will wait for her to return,

even though she be old and gray. This is a clear instance of how the injustices suffered by the people find their way into popular songs.

THE BEING OF WOMAN AND HER ALIENATION

Ortega y Gasset says, "The being of woman is to be seen by the male." And women are to be seen half naked, in pinups and everywhere you look as "things" ... because, say the commercials! "the best *thing* in life is a car and a woman to go with it." The male is the subject in all this. The male is the one who gapes at pornographic pinups; the object, the one gaped at, is the female. Nowhere to be seen is the male. Ortega y Gasset has hit the nail on the head as far as woman's alienation is concerned. In the world of striptease, the male is in the "center" and the woman is a "thing" to be viewed. Right away, *iPso facto*, the woman is alienated by this because she is treated as an object, not as the other, not as exteriority. But what we see is not what is. Mystery lies beyond our vision; the other is beyond Our vision. Ortega is simply being a masochistic philosopher in his flippancy toward women, indicating that he has not begun to understand the question. It is just as bad to say cute things about women as it is to say things against them.

Lamentable as is this situation where the male does not respect the female as his equal, worse still are the many myths that have emerged from this situation.

Consider first how woman has become a sex object. Man is seen as active in his sex role and woman as passive; her essential obligation is to satisfy the sexual desire of the male, above all in a traditional marriage. This makes her a sex object to such an extent that not only does she have to watch her figure at all times-it's not supposed to matter if the man keeps himself trim or not-but she is

also assigned by myth the function of a "housekeeper ." Thus the male is the doer in the "world," the one who works, and the woman keeps the house. The world invades her home through television, radio, the press, but that doesn't matter. Her third function, mythically assigned, is to be the exclusive educator of the children. Then what happens? For example, a twenty-four-year-old boy marries a twenty-four-year-old girl. Both having passed the bar exam, they set up a law office together. But when they are twenty-six the first child is born and the "normal" thing is for the wife to take care of the baby for a year or more. Meanwhile, he is doing well. Then come the second and third children. When the couple reach forty, he is a famous lawyer and she is a failure, and not just in law but in everything. Even though she has educated the children, the latter have no longer any need for her after their fifteenth birthday.

When it comes to the "virtues" required of the perfect wife, we see that a mystique has built up around what is essentially the oppression of women. There is supposed to be a mystique about keeping the house clean, about having everything in order for the husband's return from work, and about who knows how many other things that are expected of the obedient wife. It is no more than a mystification of the vices of oppression.

If, for example, you ask a twenty-one-year-old girl why she left medical school, her answer will be, "I left because I got married." If we asked a boy the same question and received the same answer, we would laugh. Why? Why do we allow the woman to fail and demand that the man do what he must do?

All this starts with the education a woman receives as a child. The male is encouraged to fight his way bravely upward, whereas the female is encouraged to play with dolls. Right from the beginning she is trained to be alien-

ated for her future husband. Her whole acculturation brings her to this point. What then is woman? So culturally deformed has she become that the question is by now difficult to answer. Who are now the alienated ones in society? Women, 50 percent of humanity. And if the Bolivian miner is alienated, what about his wife? The man comes home with congested lungs, dying of hunger and cold. The only time he can be a "man" is when he beats his wife. How bad can things get for her-to be the oppressed wife of an oppressed man in an oppressed culture. Let us see how the church deals with this question.

Not too well. The oppression of women in the church is quite extensive, even among the religious, who for their part are dominated by their spiritual director or by their male superiors and on other levels. But the religious are essential to the liberation process; we must unleash all the strengths that our people and our church have if we are not to become mired in futility in sin.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

I believe that feminism, especially the North American brand, makes the following fundamental mistake: Feminists do not want woman to be dominated by man and to that end they call for "indistinctness." The Indo-Europeans said that "one" is good and "plurality" is evil. If plurality is evil, division is the origin of evil. Perfection, then, would be to de-divide or get back to the indeterminate original, to "nondetermination."

Feminism wants to do away with male and female and have only one sex. How is this to be done? For the answer we go back to Plato. The homosexual woman does not need a man because she can get her sexual pleasure in lesbian fashion. In the unisex world, all are the same, all comb their hair the same way. The women would want

nothing but test-tube babies to avoid even pregnancy. With everyone thus equal we arrive at sexual nondifferentiation and we are headed for asexuality. They will accept nothing less than *totality*.

How strange all this is. Sin lies in the fission of sexes. Good, then, can only be sexual indistinctness. At heart such feminists propose to do away with sexuality; although it might not seem so, they want a kind of asexual angelicism. Once sexual otherness is done away with, each one finds sexual fulfillment within the self. Love thus becomes the tension of the same for the same. This is all wrong, of course. Women's liberation will come not through indistinctiveness but rather precisely through distinctiveness. What has happened is that man has taken over woman, establishing that sex is properly masculine and that the woman has value only because she is castrated. It is the old problem of Freud. He says that a woman realizes that she is a woman when she discovers she has no penis and is therefore castrated by nature. Sexuality, seen from man's point of view, is exclusively phallic.

But there is a sexuality that is originally feminine. If man opens himself phallicly, so to speak, to the world, the woman opens herself clitorally and vaginally. Freud says explicitly that sexuality is by nature masculine. In his mental patients he had discovered that the *father* was in command of everything sexual and conditioned his sons for *machismo*; and the resultant illnesses of his clients – their hysteria, their neuroses – grew out of their *macho* repression. Freud had to say what he said because he was right in *our* culture sexuality is masculine. But if he says *all* sexuality is masculine, he is wrong. Freud said what he did because he too was *macho* and he too alienated woman.

Women's liberation entails an opening of woman to the realm of distinctiveness. "Distinctive" is not the same

as "different." What is different is *within* "the same" or within the man-woman totality, it is *machismo*; woman is the nonphallus, the castrated one. Distinctive is what is originally other. True woman's liberation consists in announcing that *machismo* is unrealistic because the phallus is not the only expression of sexuality. The male is thus dispossessed not on the politico-economic level but on the economico-domestic level, dispossessed of his phallic domination in order to be an equal before woman, who has her rightful clitoral-vaginal position.

It is now well known that the woman is more sexually sensitive in the clitoris than in the vagina. This makes her just as active sexually as the man and has a lot to say about the position for coitus.

These things that were never breathed aloud in theology are of the very essence of sexuality. The woman has every right to be as active as the man but she has been conditioned by the culture to be passive and to be the slave of the *macho's* sexual act.

Because man all along thought the woman to be sensitive in the vagina and not in the clitoris, much frigidity has resulted. Ninety percent of frigid women are frigid simply because they do not know about the clitoris. Faced with the frigidity of the woman, the man subjugates the woman as a sex object.

We will need to keep these scientific and ever so simple aspects in mind in our discussion of the erotic in Christian thinking.

THE EROTIC IN CHRISTIAN THINKING. LIBERATION OF THE CONSECRATED WOMAN

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," says the Song of Songs. If you read it, you will notice that there is no visual representation. The woman is only a voice that

is heard. The voices of the lovers; perfume, warmth—all the senses except sight come into play. There is no description of the man or of the woman. The Song of Songs is a treatment of the erotic that is radically different from and opposed to Plato's *Symposium*. This then is our theme: Liberate woman not through asexual or homosexual differentiation but in sexual distinctiveness. Only then will she be woman. What follows is a description of three aspects of women's liberation.

Woman before a man is woman; before a father, she is mother. The first is an erotic relationship. Woman is mother before the child in a pedagogical relationship, a sister before a brother in a political relationship. These three relationships in turn are mutually affected. One relationship can condition another; the pedagogical relationship can condition the erotic, for example, and the erotic the political relationship.

This is to say that it is not just social or political conditioning that forces woman to live in alienation; it could also be that the mother, living this alienation, would train her daughter to be the slave of her sons, of the girl's future husband. The daughter is taught to accept a lesser salary than her brother in the factory in which he works or to accept that he will be a deputy and she not able to be, or president and she not able to be, or a bishop and she not able to be.

We feel confident that in the future we will see women priests, women bishops, and some day—and why not?—a woman pope. There is no theological or genetic objection: The woman is a human person.

Thus, since woman has a positive erotic role, she must liberate herself erotically from the male. Woman is distinct; she is as active as the male. Here there must be a strictly erotic liberation that will respect the mystery of each one.

Woman is also mother to her child on two levels-as a mother and as a teacher. But let us not forget that the father is father and also teacher to his children. The myth would have us believe that the mother is exclusively the teacher of her children; the truth is that the father should also be. What is lacking in child education in our culture is the male presence, leading the children to believe that everything about the home is feminine and their wanting to get away from family life. Husband and wife should give equal time to the education of the children, and this would enable her to devote time to her work and to her person.

Here is the place to bring up the problem of the consecrated woman in the church,

The consecrated woman in the church makes the gift of herself to God through nonmarriage; the relationship of man-woman is consecrated to God and therefore, mutually, the relationship of mother-child. It can be said that the unmarried religious is not a mother to anyone, just as she is not a spouse, in a real and physical sense, to Christ because, as I said, Jesus *really* is not polygamous.

Why, then, the consecration? To acquire the virtue of purity? This is not even biblical. Purity is a Greek word-for the Greeks the body was rotten. The menstrual flow was a symbol of sin and from this we get our phrase "the stain of sin." The same with male "pollution." But in the Bible all things are holy. Love of man and woman is a "knowing," and the person in the carnal act itself knows the Other in a face-to-face analogous to the "knowing" of God. So we're not talking about consecrating something negative-sin. There is no sin in normal sex.

What is consecrated is the erotic relationship and actual physical motherhood so that on a pedagogical and political level the demands of faith can be met with the

greatest possible freedom. This is why St. Paul said, "I have no wife"-not because it is wrong to have a wife or because he did not want to be a father but because the constantly shifting demands of a highly dangerous prophetism would not allow this. He was a prisoner so many times, he was on the point of drowning at sea, he was beaten time and again; once he was lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus. All this coming and going on behalf of the gospel prevented him from being an at-home husband and father of children. Their education would have been seriously impaired.

Therefore celibacy is not just for the sake of being pure but, rather, it is a consecration to a dangerous prophetic life.

You could see immediately the meaning of celibacy when, for example, in Argentina under the dictatorship of Onganía, a group of "Priests of the Third World" criticized the politics of the president of the Republic and went to the city of Rosario with the express purpose of getting themselves jailed as a form of liberation protest. In a situation of this kind celibacy makes sense.

This is what celibates are for, so that a family will not be put in jeopardy. Because they are free, they fear nothing and, consequently, are to be feared. A father of a family can't really go that far. There are times when he has to cool his approach because there are a wife and children to think of. Thus the whole idea of consecration is to give a much broader scope to the prophetic, pedagogical, and political function of the eschatologically minded Christian.

But what in fact happens? A girl, already profoundly alienated by her culture, enters the novitiate of a religious order where frequently she is further alienated in relation to a mystical male who does not exist as such. She is given a mound of inconsequential tasks that necessarily

alienate her even more than the housewife. As I say, she ends up darning stockings, doing kitchen work, and sweeping the convent corridors. We never see her in any kind of prophetic posture, proclaiming the Word of God on television or in any of the media; she never gets elected to political office, never takes part in the labor movement.

Then why the consecration? The novitiate should be a time when this alienated girl is liberated first as a woman and then as a member of a society in which woman is still culturally alienated. Free at last, they can dedicate themselves to the liberation of humankind-woman, man, child, the elderly.

It is staggering to think what 140,000 free women consecrated to God and without family ties could do for the liberation of Latin America! By themselves they could liberate Latin America on all levels-political, cultural, economic, and religious.

All that remains for them to do is to go forth from their community to accomplish the work of pedagogical and political prophetism. Will enough go forth with a prophetic mission adequate to the demand of our time? Or will the majority remain trapped inside, to go on with their alienating domestic duties?

This is the problem of woman in general and, in particular, the problem of Latin American women. The woman religious is mystically alienated by a nonexistent male or by the spiritual director of the community. This spiritual direction should now be taking place in a community act called "revision of life."

In the long run, the woman religious must liberate herself from all masculine interference, even though it comes from the highest level. This is essential to the process of their liberation in Latin America. The poor,

above all, need her liberation efforts. The liberated religious are the poor's best hope.

Clearly women's liberation is an important theme for any theology of liberation. Not that numbers are all that important, but 50 percent of the church's members are women and very little is said on this topic, mainly, I suppose, because very little theology is done by the laity. And they, having experienced the erotic, are the ones best qualified to tackle this subject. On the other hand-and this is paradoxical-no one speaks more lovingly of celibacy and virginity than the married Christian. But since the married Christian is seldom asked for an opinion, we are lacking a new approach in arguing for celibacy and virginity, an approach that would respond to the demands of Latin American liberation.

MIRIAM OF NAZARETH, VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE: A FREE AND FREEING WOMAN

Here are some closing thoughts on a woman of Israel who is also loved by the Latin American people. She was called Miriam in her town of Nazareth; Latin Americans, together with the Spaniards, call her Mary; the Indians call her the "dark Virgin."

Miriam, with a realism often lacking in so many false kinds of spirituality, clearly stated to God's angel: "But how can this come about [be a mother], since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1 :34). One can be a teacher, but to be a mother can happen only through an erotic relationship with a man. In a realistic and exact sense there is no such thing as "spiritual motherhood" but only magisterium. Among all creatures, Miriam is the most perfect expression of creation. She was conceived without the tension of totalization, without autoerotic love, without the pervers-

sion that would lead her to deny the Other, Abel, the poor; and while still a child, she would do no less than open herself to the Word of God. That village girl, sister to her sister, spouse to Joseph the simple carpenter, mother of Jesus, teacher of her son and, later on as an elderly lady, protector together with the apostles of the nascent church, is the prototype of anti-sin. Sin, we have said, is the totalization of the system, any system, any aspect of any system. Miriam is willing openness, and therefore radically poor, consecrated to prophecy, to the cause of the World, her Son. Miriam's fecundity is correlative to her openness: "Be it done unto me according to your World." It is for this reason that she comes forward as the "servant" (of Yahweh, a favorite theme of her son and disciple, Jesus) and yet able to admit that "the Almighty has done great things for me." Miriam is the finest expression of the soul of the Hebrew people.

Miriam, a free woman-because not alienated by a Man nor by any kind of pressure from erotic, pedagogical, or political systems-risks all she has for liberation. "he has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away" (Luke 1:52-53). "To put down those who are above" is rendered in Latin with the verb *subvertere*-to subvert. In these verses of the Magnificat, Miriam reveals herself to be a teacher of subversion, of prophetic criticism, defining ahead of time the function of her Son, the church, and the Christian vocation until the Parousia. Miriam knew the theological categories of the people; her healthy, clear intelligence, unfettered and uncompromised, allowed her to speak the truth, to uncover deceit even though the powerful, "the princes of this world," were scandalized.

Miriam came to America venerated by the poor of Latin-Hispanic Christendom. The Indians understood

immediately that she belonged to them, to the people. They honored her everywhere (as an assumptive substitution for feminine cults, a substitution that was correct and that preserved the historicity of their naturalistic myths), and they relied on her in their struggle to regain what was taken from them. They banded together in confraternities and Marian communities. The priest Hidalgo and, later, Morelos raised only one flag in Mexico-the flag of the "Guadalupana," the "dark Virgin." To the south Belgrano consecrated his army to Mary Immaculate and his flag bore her colors, blue and white, and those of the "Virgin of Buenos Aires," patron of sailors. Nevertheless that same Virgin of Liberation has been totalized by the systems. They have managed to identify her with sin, with oppression, making her into the "Mother of Resignation." Nothing can be further from the posture of Miriam of Nazareth, the mother of the man crucified for "stirring up the people."

Latin American liberation will be profoundly of the people when it is able to join the political proposals for liberation with the religious symbols that have formed the soul of the people. The secularization of the process of liberation is playing into the hands of the prince of this world, who is only too happy to abolish the religious tradition of a people. When the "Guadalupana," woman of the people and suffering with the people, again becomes the people's banner-as in the time of Hidalgo, who said, "The land belongs to those who work it"-then indeed liberation will arise from the very heart of the people.