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Editorial

Since the 1960s we have been accustomed to thinking of the world as divided into three parts: the First World (the developed capitalist countries); the Third World; and the Second World (the communist countries—or at least those of the northern hemisphere). One basic question about the Second World was implied in its numerical position: had it in fact found its own way forward, overcoming the contradictions of capitalist exploitation, or was it going to come to resemble ever more closely one or other of its 'First' and 'Third' companions? Now, for the time being at least, it is clear that the Second World is scheduled to move rapidly towards the First World, or, if it fails in that endeavour, to join the Third World. Is the Third World, then, going to move much closer to home—into Europe itself?

As the Second World begins to cease to be that, and to evolve rapidly into one of the other two Worlds, the question arises as to how those doing theology in the countries involved will respond to the challenges those changes present. Over the last two decades theological debate in the global framework has involved the First and Third Worlds, but not to the same extent the Second World. Conditions in the communist countries have not generally allowed theologians from those countries to contribute in a systematic way to that debate. Things are now changing, however. A long-overdue theological cross-fertilisation involving all three Worlds is inevitably about to begin.

One of the most important themes on the global theological agenda of the last 25 years has been 'liberation theology'. This is rightly thought of as a product of the Third World. Yet as 1989 clearly demonstrated, 'liberation' has been an aspiration of the peoples of Eastern Europe for almost as long, and as I attempt to show in my article in this issue of *RSS*, it is an aspiration which has inspired the practical activity of diverse groups of Christians in communist countries and which has been the subject of much fruitful theological reflection there.

There is one basic misunderstanding in many quarters which could usefully be cleared up at this point. It is widely believed that while 'liberation' Christians in Latin America are committed to action which will transform society, their counterparts in Eastern Europe have been concerned primarily with 'saving their own souls' and have cultivated a pietist exclusivism. In my own article I try to show that this contrast is not a valid one; and some of the other contributions shed light on its falsity. Arguing that a theology which dispenses with the idea of self-sacrifice is one which simply supports the secular powers, Hugo Assmann invites us to envisage 'what the implications of a soteriology without sacrifice would be'. Joseph Pungur's article does just this: he describes how in the officially approved 'Theology of Diaconia' of the Hungarian Reformed Church during the communist period 'the concepts of the suffering Lord and of the disciple who suffers with his Lord are . . . ignored'. Pungur quotes a young Reformed theologian who criticises the 'Theology of Diaconia': 'Instead of promoting witness, this theology promoted . . . a pseudo-pietist attitude and a fatalist passivity'. It was amongst the established church hierarchies in communist countries that tendencies towards pietism were to be found, while Christians seeking to advance

'liberation' through political or social action were frequently persecuted by their own church leaders as well as by the secular authorities, as Géza Németh's article in this issue of *RSS* vividly illustrates.

'Liberation', then, has been a call to active witness for Christians in Eastern Europe as it has in Latin America. The idea of devoting an issue of *RSS* to the meaning of 'liberation' in the Second and Third Worlds arose out of a conversation I had with James Penney, and I would like to thank him for his enthusiastic cooperation. His article and mine are meant to complement each other. They aim to examine what the different understandings of liberation have been as developed separately in those two Worlds, and whether they share any common ground.

Looking into the future, we face an obvious question: what are the implications for 'liberation theology' of the collapse of the socialist systems of Eastern Europe? The three Brazilian theologians writing in this issue of *RSS*—Assmann, Boff and Betto—all welcome the end of these oppressive structures which they see as socialist in name only; they are very much afraid that western capitalism and its values will now triumph by default; but for them all the challenge confronting liberation theology is to continue to demonstrate that authentic Christianity implies authentic socialism and vice versa. From Eastern Europe, meanwhile, it is perhaps too early to expect coherent theological responses to the challenges presented by post-communism: communism has after all never collapsed before, and there are no historical precedents or even analogies.

Joseph Pungur refers to an article by the Croatian Protestant Professor Miroslav Volf entitled 'Democracy and the crisis of the socialist project: towards a post-revolutionary theology of liberation'. Volf was writing in October 1989, when it was clear that revolutionary change was in progress but not yet clear that the socialist systems were unreformable. Volf's 'theology of liberation' is indeed 'post-revolutionary'; but it is not yet 'post-socialist'. He argues that in the post-revolutionary period the 'liberation' programme will involve: a preferential option for the poor and oppressed; an analysis of the causes of oppression and immiseration precisely in *socialist* societies; and a commitment to appropriate socioeconomic structural change. Having learnt from experience, however, a post-revolutionary theology of liberation will not rely on Marx alone for solutions to socioeconomic problems; it will prefer the path of peaceful and persistent witness to that of violent political revolution, such witness to 'include dialogue and cooperation with all forces in socialist societies—whether in the government apparatus or not—which strive for peaceful reform of the system'; and it 'will not seek to elevate liberation from oppression to the methodological principle for the whole of theological reflection. It will not conceive of itself as a new way of doing theology as a whole, but will remain content to be a socially and economically informed theological (not merely ethical) reflection on particular socioeconomic realities.' 'Even more than Latin American liberation theology,' writes Volf,

> a theology of liberation for socialist countries must insist that socio-economic liberation should not be confused with the realization of God's new creation . . . Political and economic liberation will always remain a far cry from final salvation. At the same time, a post-revolutionary theology of liberation will also refuse to divorce socioeconomic liberation from God's new creation. For all their imperfections, societies in which rights to freedom and sustenance would be truly respected and in which the *lex charitatis* would be institutionalized in a democratic way would

> 'approximate, always in a small part, the freedom, peace, and justice for which we hope.'

In 1989, then, Miroslav Volf envisaged Christian participation in gradual peaceful reform in a pluralist but basically socialist society. Three and a half years later, it is clear that none of the formerly communist countries has in fact evolved in the direction of such a society—and, with hindsight, we can appreciate that they can hardly have been expected to do so. Over the same period, however, enthusiastic and rapid adoption of the practices and values of the western market economy has not proved to be the foolproof alternative route to the building of just and free societies which many expected.

In his article in this issue of *RSS*, Hugo Assmann observes that capitalism has discovered a way of 'getting the best out of original sin'. According to the first bourgeois economists, 'the passions govern human beings; the productive passions (ambition, greed, self-interested effort) are directed to the common good. Then came the great "discovery" that self-interest, in the clash of competition, is a sure guide to the common good.' In this way, says Assmann, 'incredible as it may seem', the positive side of original sin is shown to be 'substantially the same thing as the dark side'. Assmann's insight will certainly ring true for large numbers of people in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe in 1993 as they experience the workings of the market.

Over the past decade, the world has come to understand the full extent of the failure of the communist experiment. At the same time, serious questions are being raised about the appropriateness of Western European capitalism for the Second World. These considerations are in turn leading to a reassessment of the nature of the relationship of all three Worlds to one another. In these circumstances, the way is wide open for creative collaboration amongst those doing theology in all three Worlds with the aim of shaping a new 'theology of liberation' for the twenty-first century.

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Frei Betto is a Dominican friar. A journalist by training, he is a frequent contributor to the major Brazilian daily newspapers. He works in popular education and with base communities, and is the principal assessor of the 'workers' pastoral', with a particular commitment to the team in São Paolo, the industrial heartland of Brazil.

Clodovis Boff OSM teaches in the Franciscan theological institute in Petrópolis, and in CESEP, a centre for training pastoral agents, priests and laypeople in São Paolo, Brazil. He spends at least three months a year working with base communities. He is the author of several books, notably his doctoral thesis translated into English as *Theology and Praxis*. He has also written several books on liberation theology with his brother Leonardo.

Ian M. Fraser was formerly Dean and head of the Department of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. He was also responsible for the 'Participation in Change' programme at the World Council of Churches. Since retirement in 1982 he has served as a voluntary research consultant to what is now Action of Churches Together in Scotland.

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Géza Németh studied at the Reformed Seminary in Budapest in the 1950s. He was dismissed from the ministry by the leadership of the Hungarian Reformed Church in 1971 and subsequently became leader of the Community of Reconciliation, an ecumenical base community. He was rehabilitated by his church in 1988 and is now pastor of a church for refugees in Budapest.

James Penney carried out his doctoral research on liberation theology in Latin America, and has travelled widely in Peru and Brazil. He now lectures in contextual theology at Westminster College, Oxford.

Joseph Pungur was born in Hungary. He is a minister of the Hungarian Reformed Church and was formerly secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Hungarian Churches. For a time he was a member of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches. He is now adjunct professor of Religious Studies in the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Philip Walters carried out his doctoral research on Russian Orthodox religious philosophy. From 1979 he worked at Keston College where for many years he was head of research. He has published numerous articles on aspects of religious life in communist countries. He now works at Keston Research in Oxford and is editor of *Religion, State and Society*.

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