

Liberating Political Theology Today: Elements of a New Paradigm

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My basic thesis is that a liberating political theology today requires first of all the liberation of existing political theologies from theological fragmentation, political complacency, and historical irrelevance, and that the new paradigm must contain five elements: it must (1) embody genuine sensitivity to the dialectic of recent history, (2) rediscover the theological dimension, (3) produce a historically more appropriate political paradigm, (4) renew the primacy of the political, and (5) practice an ecumenical sensitivity to other religions.

The Present Situation of Political Theology

In order to have a political theology that liberates, I think we need to first liberate existing political theologies from the fragmentation, complacency, and irrelevance in which they find themselves today.

Most theologies today, not only the so-called “political” theology of Jürgen Moltmann, Johannes Metz, and Dorothee Sölle of the late nineteen sixties, are political theologies insofar as they are aimed at the praxis of social transformation of one sort or another, and for quite understandable historical reasons these theologies have been preoccupied for some decades now with the liberation of a particular group understood along ethnic and gender lines. Essentially they have been regional, not comprehensive, theologies. So we have had Asian feminist theology concerned with the liberation of Asian women, African American theology concerned with the liberation of African Americans, American feminist theology concerned with the liberation of white American women, Hispanic American theology concerned with the liberation of Hispanic Americans, etc. The rationale for these different theologies has been based on the particularity of the context, the specific origin, mode, and consequences of various ethnic and gender-based social oppressions. Different contexts demand different theologies. It is imperative to have a theology from the perspective of the specific history, needs, and vision of a particular group insofar as such a voice has been suppressed and absent and insofar as it makes an essential contribution to the universality of Christian theology which can become truly universal only through the concrete incorporation of the various particularities, not through the external imposition of a particular theology, e.g.,

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white European theology, on the rest of Christianity, as traditional Christian theology had often been accused of doing.

The result of this theological particularism, however, has also been theological fragmentation, political complacency, and historical irrelevance. The increasing tendency has been to retreat into the sheer particularity of each group, its own history, needs, and experiences, and the projection of such particularity into theology. What is lacking is an attempt to reconstruct the universals of theology such as God, the trinity, Christ, and salvation, albeit from the perspective of a particular group. Instead, we have only seen a sheer particularization of theology on the basis of ethnicity and gender, with no attempt to show how a theology, constructed as it is from a particular, suppressed, absent perspective, is still theology with its universal themes and concerns, and how it still speaks to those Others not included in its own perspective. The data and perspective of a theology are indeed particular, but if it speaks only to the group whose experience and perspective it reflects, such a theology would be not only a projection of the sociology of the originating group but also at best a tribal theology, which is to say, not theology at all, insofar as theology has to speak about God, the trinity, salvation, and Christ, and the soteriological significance of these for *all* humanity and all creation, not only for a particular group. A God that exists only for a group, even if it is an oppressed group, would be a tribal God. My sense is that contemporary political theologies have been losing this theologically essential sense of universality and retreating into sheer particularity, leaving Christian theology in a state of extreme fragmentation. What has been lacking is a sense of the theological solidarity and community which connects all humanity to one another for all their particularities.

This theological fragmentation has also entailed political complacency. Each theology has been concerned with the liberation of its own group and thus also with the analysis of its own particular situation and the equally particular agency of its own group in liberating itself. Apart from the discernible exhaustion of political elan, each group seems satisfied with the status quo and has been showing no pressing sensitivity to the changing contours of its own context. Today the context of each group is constituted not only by the inherited legacies of its own oppressive past but also by the dialectic of the global market economy that has been breaking down all traditional barriers and bringing different groups together into a common political space either to struggle against one another for sheer survival or to struggle together to create social conditions of decent life for all. The globalizing dialectic of the market economy has been making obsolete all hard and fast boundaries among ethnic and gender groups and necessitating political solidarity of those who are different in ethnicity, gender, region, and religion for the sake of their common liberation. A political theology sensitive to the changing dialectic of

history would have sensed the obsolescence, not of the cause of liberation of each oppressed group, which still remains a task and a challenge, but of the independent pursuit of such a task by each ethnic and gender group without cultivating political solidarity with others. The context of each theology is no longer particular but global. To plead indifference to the global issues facing all of us in the name of particularity would be to abdicate the responsibility for the most decisive issues of human well-being of our time. A political theology complacent about itself and unwilling to confront the challenges of a new era would soon dismiss itself as historically irrelevant.

Furthermore, this fragmentation also leads to political despair. The preoccupation of each group with its own plight and its own past also means a cultivated absence of common political agency to address the common issues. There is no sense of common problems, and no group reflecting on the common destiny in which we are all involved regardless of our ethnic and gender differences. Thus, there is no sense of common agency or need for a common, collective effort to create liberating conditions through a praxis of solidarity; each is preoccupied with its own agency, with what each, taken in isolation, can do for itself, and for its own liberation. It is no wonder that thus fragmented, each also feels politically powerless to address the real, political challenges of the new global, multicultural situation facing us all. The sense of urgency and hope is no longer there. Existing political theologies are either too complacent and unaware of the real challenges, or despairing of doing anything to transform the situation.²

Elements of a New Paradigm

A liberating political theology today, then, has to first liberate itself from theological tribalism, insensitivity to the changing dialectic of recent history that breaks down rigid contextual barriers and renders all contexts increasingly interdependent, absence of a sense of common destiny, and political complacency and despair. It must also contain the following five elements:

1. Sensitivity to the Dialectic of Recent History

Let us take a look at the new historical situation that is increasingly the common context of all regional theologies. The dialectic of global

²For further details of my critique of contemporary theological fragmentation, see my works: "Solidarity of Others in the Body of Christ," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 14:2 (1998), 239-242; "From Autobiography to Fellowship of Others: Reflections on Doing Ethnic Theology Today," in Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (eds.), *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 151-155; different chapters of *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); and the last chapter of *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

interdependence has been going on for some time, but it has been so accelerating in recent decades that global interdependence at all levels, economic, political, and cultural, has become a palpable fact of daily life today. It is the capitalist market economy with all its materialist priorities and homogenizing tendencies that is now setting the conditions of life for all, especially those who suffer oppression and discrimination, increasingly with less assistance from the state whose sovereignty has been one of the casualties of the neoliberal economic order.³ This has three consequences on the struggle for liberation.

First, liberation of a particular group is possible only with the cooperation of other groups. In the past, oppression was a matter of relatively regional institutional practices, laws, and decisions, and their regional legacies. Today, it is subject to the dynamics of the globalizing economy and all the institutional changes it entails. Liberation of a group was never a matter of a single group's self-liberation but always a matter of collaboration with other groups; only a collaboration of many groups could dismantle the public institutions of oppression and discrimination. However, the impossibility of the self-liberation of a single group and the need for solidarity with others in the process of liberation have become far greater today than ever before.

Second, a pluralist society requires mutual cooperation among different groups. It is not just a question of needing the collaboration of one another for one's own liberation as a particular group but also a question of cooperating with other groups in the construction of a social order that would be acceptable and beneficial to all in a multicultural, pluralist society. The growing interdependence of the world has been bringing peoples, languages, cultures, and religions into a common social space and forcing them to negotiate a way of living *together* with all their differences and for all their differences. It is simply politically impossible to remain preoccupied with one's own liberation. The conditions of one's own liberation must be acceptable to a consensus among different groups regarding their practicability and justice and can only be negotiated in cooperation and solidarity with them. At the same time, there are issues that go beyond the responsibility and/or interest of a particular group yet should be a matter of common concern and common responsibility for all, i.e., all the issues of the common good such as physical security, economic justice, political equality, education, trivialization of life, destruction of the environment, etc. These are not issues of exclusive interest to a particular group—not merely “our” issues—and it will be the height of political irresponsibility to ignore them. It is time to transcend narrow, self-

³ The literature on globalization is vast. Let me just mention some recent works noted for their readability, comprehensiveness, and critical approach: Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); David Held and others, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Martin Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

destructive, and self-complacent particularism.

Third, the special responsibility of superpowers such as the United States of America, the European Union, Japan, and now China and India require that their citizens—including their theologians—pay special attention to the human impact on other nations, especially the developing ones, of the policies of their respective governments and the many global corporations and agencies—such as the IMF, the World Bank, etc.—based in their countries. Public disclosures of the last three decades have made us familiar with the human suffering in other parts of the world caused by the policies of the U.S. Empire, from the toppling of governments in Iran and Chile to Vietnam and Cambodia to the recent disclosures of the massacre of several hundred Korean civilians by U.S. troops during the Korean War, the complicity of President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger in the Indonesian takeover of East Timor in 1975, the source of so much suffering and oppression since then, the imposition of IMF policies in many third world nations whose first priority is fiscal austerity, meaning the reduction of programs for the poor, the 1.5 billion dollars in membership dues the U.S. had refused to pay to the United Nations over many years, and the recent invasion and ongoing destruction of Iraq on fabricated excuses.⁴

Citizens of superpowers cannot proclaim indifference to such suffering in the name of difference. It is imperative to recover a sense of common citizenship across the boundaries of ethnicity and gender so as to feel a common political responsibility for the sufferings of others caused by one's own governments and corporations. These sufferings are not just issues of gender or ethnicity that could be left to the concern of a particular group and forgotten by the rest; they are issues of common humanity for which we are collectively responsible. It will be an appalling theological shame to be so preoccupied with our own particularity as to disavow the responsibility for such global suffering.

2. Rediscovery of the Theological Dimension

With significant exceptions, most political theologies in North America are stronger in their sociological analyses of oppression particular to each group than in their theological reflections on that oppression. They are more sociologies than theologies. I do not mean to denigrate them for being sociologies. Any political theology sensitive to the dialectic of history should consider sociological analysis the first moment of its theological reflection. Without an appropriate analysis of the situation of oppression, there is simply no *political* theology. By the same token, if we should stop at the level

⁴ For a history of US military interventions in other nations, see Zoltan Grossman, "From Wounded Knee to Iraq: A Century of U. S. Military Interventions" at <http://www.uwec.edu/grossmzc/interventions.html>. For a history of US attempts to "change regimes," see Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006; Times Books).

of sociological analysis, we should be doing something very important and essential, but we are *not* doing *theology*. In order to do political theology we must also inscribe our necessary social analyses in the theological context and reflect on them from the theological perspective or *sub ratione Dei* as Aquinas would say, the perspective of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. I think it is imperative to rediscover the theological dimension as the most fundamental and most comprehensive perspective of all because it is the eschatological dimension, the perspective of the ultimate finality of all things. Political theology is possible only as a dialectic of the political and the theological, the political preventing the theological from becoming an irrelevant abstraction, and the theological preventing the political from absolutizing itself but disciplining it with the judgment and inspiration of the eschatological proviso and hope. Theology must be made sensitive to the concrete cries of the oppressed and purified of its unconscious ideological functions through the discipline of the political, but the political must also be inscribed in the most fundamental and comprehensive context which is theology in order to reflect on the deeper significance of political praxis with both critical judgment and empowering hope.⁵

3. Need of Political Theory as the Concretizing Mediation of Theology

The dialectic of the political and the theological in political theology also requires the concretizing mediation of theology by an adequate political theory. Theology must be mediated by the social analysis of the dynamics of the actual production and distribution of power in a particular situation and by political theory that presents a vision of a non-oppressive social order and the practical way to such an order on the basis of the liberating possibilities disclosed by the social analysis within the oppressive actuality. An unmediated, direct political application of a theological vision runs many dangers. It can end up condemning all social revolutions or reforms in the name of an abstract order or love and becoming an unconscious ideology of an oppressive status quo. It can remain a mere rhetoric without action and fall into an impotent idealism whose ideals remain mere ideals without effective actualization and which can easily turn into its opposite, cynical realism. Worst of all, it can absolutize a theocracy that would be oppressive to everyone except the ones whose interpretation of the divine will is imposed on the rest of society.⁶

If the Christian theological vision consists in some version of the

⁵ On the properly *theological* dimension of political theology, see my *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 47, 100-101, and *Paths to the Triune God*, 307-337; Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 67-158 ("Hermeneutic Mediation").

⁶ On the concretizing mediation of political theology by a political theory, see my *Dialectic of Salvation*, 91-102; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 116-122, and his *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984).

reconciliation of all humanity and creation in God and with God in Christ the “Son” through the power of the Holy Spirit, then social analysis must disclose how this reconciliation is being resisted by oppressive forces and what possibilities of liberating reconciliation are embodied in the situation, and political theory must present a vision of a reconciled social order appropriate today. The central issue is not how to produce a most noble theological vision of reconciliation in itself but how to actualize reconciliation or love in historically most effective ways under present conditions. Political theology neither merely sanctifies the status quo in its ambiguity and oppressiveness nor merely proclaims the eschatological ideal, but tries to transcend both the pure facticity of the first and the pure ideality of the second by presenting a concrete vision of a social order that is both rooted in the real possibilities of the present and transcendent of the present in its facticity. Such a vision is neither sheer utopianism because it is rooted in the actual although as yet untapped possibilities of the present, nor sheer realism because it is committed to the ideal possibilities critical of the status quo.

I suggest “the solidarity of Others” as the central concept of a new political-theological paradigm for today. Contemporary political theologies use as their central concept some version of liberation derived from the Marxist tradition of the self-liberation of the proletariat and apply it to their particular situation as a particular group with its own unique history of oppression. The new situation of globalization, however, brings peoples in all their differences into a common political space and compels them to create a new social order in which they can live *together* in their *differences*. The situation tends to abolish the sharp boundaries of particularities and make them increasingly so interdependent as to rule out self-liberation of each by its own unaided power as impossible. The situation demands the institutionalization of the mutual interdependence of those who are other precisely for the creation of the very social conditions that will protect their otherness, of mutual solidarity insofar as they recognize a common destiny despite their differences, of otherness insofar as such solidarity presupposes and nourishes the appreciation of mutual otherness, i.e., of “the solidarity of Others.” “Liberation” today must give way to “solidarity of Others.”

The solidarity of Others is a most concrete, historical translation of the theological idea of communion, fellowship, and reconciliation. Theologically, all humanity—and indeed all creation—is called to communion with the triune God and with one another in God. This “communion,” however, connotes an interior state of union between parties who may or may not belong to each other, and a state already achieved, with no reference to the negativities of history that deny the possibility of such communion or to the process of often bloody struggles to achieve the minimum conditions of communion in history. It connotes an abstract ideal.

In contrast, “solidarity” brings out much more forcefully and clearly the aspects of mutual dependence and mutual participation; it is the sense of mutual dependence and mutual participation of those who primordially belong together. It also refers not only to the *state* of such mutual belonging but also to the *process* of bringing about such belonging. Solidarity of “Others” makes clear that the solidarity at issue is not just any solidarity, like the solidarity of those who belong to the same country club or to the same church or to the same Beverly Hills neighborhood. It means precisely the solidarity of those who are *other* to one another in one sense (sociological), and have *become* other to one another in another sense (political) because they have not been treated as other in a third sense (ethical). Solidarity is to be achieved among those who are sociologically other to one another, in terms of ethnicity, gender, culture, and religion, precisely by overcoming the concrete historical conditions that made sociological others political others as well, i.e., oppressors and oppressed, agents and victims of power, and made them so by reducing their ethical otherness or transcendence to one’s own will or identity. It is a solidarity to be achieved by establishing political conditions that negotiate sociological differences in ways that protect ethical but eliminate political otherness.

Given these rich connotations, “the solidarity of Others” is a concept that captures the central concerns of contemporary Christian theology and does so not in a static but in a dynamic, in fact dialectical way inherent in the very content of the concept. Theologically, it means the solidarity of all humanity in grace, their mutual dependence and participation in Christ, the head of recreated humanity, just as there is human solidarity in sin through Adam. This theological solidarity is ultimately derived from the trinitarian solidarity of Others that constitutes the eternal communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their respective otherness. Ontologically, it means the constitutive interdependence of all reality, both the fundamental sociality of human existence and the cosmic, metaphysical interconnectedness of all things including human beings, as created in the image of the triune God who creates, redeems, and reconciles all things by bringing them together without destroying their otherness and identity, and producing varying degrees and modalities of the solidarity of Others.

It refers, however, not only to the (metaphysical) state and (theological) goal of humanity but also to the process, task, and conditions under which that goal is achieved. It refers to the historical process in which all sociological others are being brought together into a common political space and becoming interdependent, manifesting historically the constitutive sociality of human existence, setting the ethical-political task of creating together the conditions of common existence that will protect their ethical otherness and promote their common good, precisely under those conditions in which sociological others have become political others. The theological goal of communion in

God must be achieved through the concrete historical solidarity of Others. The concept of solidarity of Others thus includes in one concept not only the central dimensions of theology, ontology, history, ethics, and politics but also the dialectical dimension of the pain of alienation and the struggle to achieve solidarity among the alienated, surely a concept most relevant to an increasingly pluralist contemporary world where the greatest crimes have been crimes against the Other.

I prefer the expression “solidarity *of* Others” to “solidarity *with* Others,” which might be colloquially more acceptable. Solidarity “with” Others tends to attribute privilege and activity to the subject of solidarity and inferiority and passivity to the object. When we enter into solidarity *with* Others, it is *we* who decide the agenda and *we* who select the appropriate Others to enter into solidarity with. Likewise, we tend to regard Others as *passive* objects of *our* assistance, as in “solidarity with victims.” Solidarity *of* Others, on the other hand, where the *of* is a subjective, not objective genitive, means the mutual solidarity of Others with one another, where no group is privileged or passive, and the active involvement of all in their concern for one another as subjects of a common destiny.

The ethical-political task, from the perspective of the solidarity of Others, is threefold. The first is to establish the economic, political, and cultural conditions of justice for all. Regardless of their sociological differences, all must be guaranteed these conditions which are demanded by their equal ethical transcendence or dignity. Without this justice no solidarity is possible among sociological others who have become political others. Justice is the minimum condition of ethical and theological solidarity.

The second task is to forge enough solidarity of Others to achieve a sense of common problems, a sense of the common good, and a sense of common responsibility for them, in domestic affairs. There are many issues which are indeed crucial to the welfare of all which, however, may not be perceived as particularly compelling to the interest of any particular group. It will be a real shame to see such issues go untended in the name of difference, each group preoccupied only with its own internal issues, however historically justifiable such a preoccupation might be. All the big issues of today, from the breakdown of the family, quality of education, and the materialist cheapening of life to the problems of war and peace and the ecological integrity of nature, are not specific to any one particular ethnic or gender group, although their consequences may vary from one group to another. They are common problems, matters of their common good requiring a sense of common responsibility and common destiny, i.e., a sense of solidarity of Others.

The third task is to forge enough solidarity of Others as to have a sense of common responsibility for what their governments and corporations do overseas and a sense of common destiny with the international victims of

suffering across the many boundaries of identity. This sort of global solidarity of Others is especially incumbent on the citizens of superpowers, who often play politics with the lives of citizens of weaker nations. Even when the suffering is not caused by one's own nation or one's own multinational corporation, a sense of the solidarity of Others should enable one to stretch his or her theological imagination so as to see in the victims members of the same body of Christ, in whom Jesus is still shouting his cry for anyone to hear, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"⁷

4. The Primacy of the Political

It is also imperative to retrieve the primacy of the political in three senses. (1) The political is, first of all, the realm of the polis, the community, the realm where we, as citizens of the community, not as separatist individuals or partisans of a particular group, come together to deliberate on issues of common concern for which we bear a collective responsibility. By assuming a common responsibility for the fate of the city we affirm our common destiny. Insofar as injustice is the single most destructive crime against the community, the first political priority must be the elimination of injustice, whether racist, classist, sexist, or otherwise, as a prior condition of genuine community. At the same time, politics must also aim at the promotion of the common good, i.e., the common economic, political, and cultural conditions of life that bear on all regardless of their differences. It is imperative to promote a genuine politics of the common good against the contemporary dominance of the exclusive politics of difference.

(2) It is also imperative to promote the primacy of the political in the sense of praxis or activities for justice and the common good in the production, distribution, and consumption of the power of the state, the organ of the common good. This primacy of the political does not deny the primacy of other things in a different sense. The economic in the sense of the production, distribution, and consumption of material goods and services has a certain primacy, in my view, insofar as it provides the basic material conditions not only for survival but also for political power and cultural fulfillment. The cultural in the sense of the production, distribution, and consumption of mediations of the ultimate meaning of life also enjoys a certain primacy precisely as the end of both economics and politics. The ecological in the sense of the harmony of nature and humanity also enjoys a certain primacy insofar as it has to do with the most fundamental condition of the totality of human existence including economics, politics, and culture. None of these are denied. There is a peculiar

⁷ I provide a fuller analysis of the concept of "the solidarity of Others" in my *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* and "Dialectic of Salvation in Solidarity: Philosophy of Religion after Kant and Kierkegaard," in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds.), *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 278-294.

primacy to the political, however, because it is through the use of the official power of the state that the community as such can influence the course of economics, culture, and ecology in accordance with justice and the common good. The problems of economics, culture, and ecology can only be solved *politically*, i.e., through the intervention of the state in terms of policies, regulations, laws, budgets, etc. The content may be economic, cultural, or ecological, but the form must be political.

The political in this sense means the praxis of constructing a totality that liberates and unifies into a solidarity of Others. Politics is the realm of official acts, policies, regulations, and laws engaging the powers of the state. Just as the state exists for all, so all its actions are essentially universal, aimed at all citizens, and thus totalizing. Laws are made for all, not just for determinate individuals, just as they are binding on all. We cannot have one law for one group, another for another group. That is, politics is the process of producing and reproducing totalities. Contrary to Levinas and Derrida, we are not reduced to a choice between totality and difference. We cannot live without some laws, some regulations, some policies, i.e., without some government. Our only choice is between oppressive totalities that reduce Others to the identity of a dominant group, and liberating totalities that liberate all groups from injustice and promote solidarity of Others by providing the basic economic, political, and cultural conditions for liberation in solidarity, such as basic material needs, adequate medical care, truly equal access to political power, education sufficient for effective and enlightened citizenship, etc. Without such liberating totalities human dignity remains totally vulnerable, just as solidarity remains merely ideal. Human dignity, liberation, and solidarity require political protection and institutional nurture, i.e., liberating totalities.⁸

(3) It is also imperative to renew the primacy of the political in the sense that the greatest crimes against justice and humanity today are committed by governments, the holders of official power, that far more human suffering is caused by governments than by private individuals, and that social sins in the sense of the abuse of authority and resources of the state are far more destructive than are private, individual sins.⁹ The greatest crimes in the twentieth century were “political” crimes, crimes committed by and/or through the official power of the state. The two World Wars, the Holocaust, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the many genocides and massacres in Cambodia, Somalia, China, Rwanda, Armenia, Ethiopia, Palestine, South Africa, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq, the legally institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, and intolerance for the

⁸ On the notion of the political, see my *Dialectic of Salvation*, 108-111. For my critique of Levinas, Derrida, and postmodernism, see my *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 7-88.

⁹ On the concept of social sin, see my *Dialectic of Salvation*, 104-116. On the horrendous statistics of murders committed by the state, see R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994).

sociological Others in practically all countries, not to mention the countless smaller ethnic and religious conflicts going on throughout the world: these are political crimes directly committed by governments or at least abetted by them. Furthermore, these are basically crimes committed by governments as agents of collective identity against Others of all kinds, of race, class, gender, religion, ideology, and sexual orientation. These crimes far, far outweigh crimes committed by individuals in their purely private capacity.

An effective contemporary political theology, then, must renew the primacy of the political today by recovering the political subjectivity of the community as such precisely in order to engage in the politics of liberating totality against the many political crimes that violate the Other.

5. Ecumenical Sensitivity to Other Religions

Political theology today is a theology for living together with those who are different. Its primary task is to reflect on and contribute to the solidarity of Others from the theological perspective. In promoting this solidarity of Others it is imperative for political theology not only to go back to its own Christian tradition and retrieve the best that will promote that solidarity but also to enter into dialogue with other religions, to learn from their religious insights, share its own perspectives with them, and to challenge them, if necessary but with all due respect, to think and act solidarity. Not all Christians, not all Christian theologians think or act solidarity, nor do members of other religions and their thinkers. Other religions too must be challenged and goaded to think and act solidarity. All religions have a contaminated heritage of sins against the Other that must be shed; all religions also have a tradition of solidarity of Others that must be retrieved. It is an essential aspect of liberating political theology today to enter into a dialogue of suspicion and retrieval with other religions on the all important topic of the solidarity of Others.

In this interreligious dialogue, however, it is vital not only to share ancient insights that will promote the solidarity of Others, insights that will deepen our understanding of the dignity of human beings regardless of their sociological differences, the importance of community as one of eternal destiny, and the relative importance of history and politics in that destiny. It is also crucial to mediate and concretize those ancient insights through appropriate contemporary political theory. Ancient ideals, taken as ideals, are faultless and desirable. The problem arises when we try to make them relevant to our contemporary historical contexts with all their complicating and destabilizing differences. How can we make ancient ideals *concretely effective* in our different contexts? This would require a concretizing mediation of ancient insights through a contemporary political theory. Ancient ideals of human transcendence and human solidarity e.g., the supreme identity of Brahman and Atman, the universal presence of the Dharmakaya, the non-dualistic

approach to difference, compassion for all sentient beings must be elaborated and concretized in terms of the contemporary economic, political, and cultural context, the dominant needs and sensibilities of that context, and its dialectic of contradiction and resolution. The question to ask is not only what is the profound insight into the nature of human dignity and solidarity but also what is the way to concretize that dignity and solidarity today in the most effective manner. Without this historical mediation ancient insights suffer the fate of impotent idealism. Many studies of ancient wisdom, both eastern and western, omit this crucial step of concretizing mediation and indeed suffer such a fate as a result.¹⁰

To summarize, I have argued that a liberating political theology today requires first of all the liberation of existing political theologies from theological fragmentation, political complacency, and historical irrelevance, and that the new paradigm must contain five elements: it must (1) embody genuine sensitivity to the dialectic of recent history, (2) rediscover the theological dimension, (3) produce a historically more appropriate political paradigm, (4) renew the primacy of the political, and (5) practice an ecumenical sensitivity to other religions. These are only preconditions and elements of a liberating political theology today, not that theology itself yet.¹¹

¹⁰ On the implication of the solidarity of Others for interreligious relations, see my article, "Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65:3 (Fall 1997), 587-604. For an Asian political theology of solidarity and relevant insights from Asian religions for that theology, see my "Towards a Theology of Citizenship as the Central Challenge in Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41: 2 (2004), 136-159.

¹¹ I have tried to provide a first attempt at a political theology based on the paradigm of the solidarity of Others in my *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*.