

Creation Motifs in the Search for a Vital Space

A Latin American Perspective

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CONTEXT AND COMMITMENT

Theology in Latin America is immersed in a context of continuing economic exploitation. Daily anonymous millions go to search for work, only to find there is no work; to search for land, only to be left nowhere. Daily millions cry out, only to discover that no one is listening; they sing their song in defiance of the ordered rhythm of boots and the procession of suits and ties, only to be ignored. Here indeed the whole creation has been groaning in travail. The words of the Peruvian writer Manuel Scorza are generally held to be true for all Latin America: "There are five seasons in Peru: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall and Massacre."

After 500 years of colonization, the forces of domination have produced and reproduced structures of economic oppression. Except for Mexico at the beginning of this century, only Cuba and Nicaragua have been able to break the chain of submission that in Latin America is anchored in the possession and distribution of land. The appropriation of most of the land into the hands of a few people is one of the root causes of the seasonal massacre faced by the vast majority of our peoples. The following is just one example of this process.

Since pre-Columbian times the Kaiapo people have inhabited an area now called the State of Para of Brazil. Early in 1988 two Native chiefs of the Kaiapo, Paikan and Kube-I, took action on behalf of their people and the land. They asked the World Bank not to finance the construction of a dam

that would disturb the ecological balance of the Amazon. They were charged by the Federal Police and the Ministry of Justice with interfering with the national interest. The charge was based on a law that prohibits *foreigners* to comment on public affairs of the country. If condemned, they will be expelled from the country, from the land their people inhabited before it was known as Brazil, on the grounds that they are not Brazilian.

People's movements and organizations constantly struggle to defend the right to land as the right to life, a right they claim belongs to all those who live on and work the land. Landowners and governments have responded to these movements for land reform by murdering leaders and participants. For the last few years I have participated in these peasant movements by working with the Pastoral Commission on Land Problems (CPT), an ecumenical organization that lends support and that provides socioeconomic, political, and theological training to peasants and their organizations. The presence of the church in situations where life hangs by a thread, where the people have loving hearts and fighting hands, has transformed the community of faith. In this work with peasants the church has learned concretely the challenge of recognizing the face of a God who, to use the words of César Vallejo, has known how to be God by being radically human. Living in a situation in which many have already fallen or been silenced, and experiencing the power of their names and deeds germinating on the third day, the church has discovered a scandal of the cross—that it is erected every day and that it is not empty. The church has also found in this life of commitment new ground for hope. Standing with the masses struggling for life and land, the church in Brazil and internationally has been growing into greater awareness that "*we are the ones we have been waiting for.*"¹

CONSTRUCTION

Theology in Latin America has been ambivalent about creation as a theological theme. Indeed, very little has been said about it. In light of this, some consider our theology to be overpoliticized, having selected its own canon within the canon. But it is with good reasons that we remember that "the story that the Scriptures narrate converges in two basic points: the exodus of the Hebrew people and the cross of Jesus."² Both in biblical and theological studies our agendas are conditioned by the lives and dreams, words and deeds of a displaced people—women and men who hit the road of survival somewhere between annihilation and belonging. And there we are—still puzzled and yet determined to discern the direction in which the people are moving.

Common to the multiple contexts in our continent is the problem of place. From the struggle of the native inhabitants' right to their nation's land to the reality of the *favelas* (urban slums), from agrarian reform to the conflicts in Central America, from the demands of Black people for a social

space to the women's movement, signs of change and consciousness of displacement are commonly found. Time, history, is a function of geopolitics. Hegel, I suggest, was wrong *precisely* in saying that "the truth of space is time." In our experience, if time does not convert itself into space, there is no time at all. The relativity of time *and space* is a common sociological experience. The Roman Catholic Bishop d. Pedro Casaldaliga expressed it well, saying: "Together with the signs of the times we need to discern the signs of places." This is our task: to discern the signs of places in which we do not yet belong but in which we will belong—"no places" that will become concrete *utopias*.

It is necessary to start by saying this, because being displaced is literally our condition. Gustavo Gutiérrez has spoken about being on the underside of history,⁸ where the main question is to know where we are in order to establish where we must go and where we have come from. Displacement is not only a metaphor; it is also a precise description of our condition. Migration is the most striking feature of our reality. Carlos Drummond de Andrade has captured well this puzzlement with spacelessness in his poem, *José*:

And now, José?
Alone in the dark
Like a frightened animal
Without theogony
Without a naked wall
To lay against
Without a black horse
To run out at a gallop
José, you march
To where, José?⁴

Theology in Latin America is a reflection on the life and faith of a people finding a way, a way that is being opened up step by step. We have no place to stand still and contemplate the world, nowhere to lay our heads. It is for this reason we don't find in Latin American theology treatises on creation. But in the midst of this silence some suspicions are at work.

Suspicions Regarding European Creation Theology

Is Creation Theology Irrelevant?

The first suspicion regarding creation theology is of a tactical nature. Creation discourse seems to be so detached from the dramatic demands of immediate life that to dwell on it would mean to be oblivious to more demanding and life-threatening questions. The words of Brecht, pronounced in a different context, resound sharply in our midst:

Indeed I live in dark ages!

What an age it is

When to speak of trees is almost a crime

For it is a kind of silence about injustice!⁵

There is a sense of emergency in all that is done and said among a people for whom the universe is experienced as an abyss over which they hang by their nails alone. As César Vallejo asked, "A man searches for bones and scraps in the dump site. How can I write about the infinite?"⁶

It may not be irrelevant to ask why there is something rather than nothing. But it is an inopportune question when I am not able to answer why there is nothing instead of bread on my table. Gutiérrez set the tone for the discussion (or lack thereof) about creation in Latin American theological literature by describing the discourse of "theologians of the developed world" concerned with the question of creation as reflective of a political naiveté that has "sapped most of their energy."⁷

Does Creation Theology Justify Domination?

This brings me to the second suspicion. Creation language has been permeated by language that stresses order. The term *creation* is used interchangeably with "the Created Order." This is an ambiguous concept, for in Latin America nature is not seen as ordered and "order" is not a positive concept. "Order" is most often an ideological disguise for domination, repression, and persecution. Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban writer, has defined the cultural dilemma of Latin America as the conflict between the sense of order we have inherited from Europe and the effervescent spontaneity and marvelous anomaly of life as we experience it.⁸ To speak of the world as a given, as something posited by God and thus good, sounds like a justification for the existence of a Gothic cathedral in the countryside of El Salvador. Ideologically, the ultimate appeal to justify order goes back to God's creation. Order becomes the moral parameter to speak about God's will in the midst of the cosmos, justifying the organization of the state. Where order is granted by the head of the state, where order is the result of the demiurgic work of the "invisible hand" of capitalism, where order is the patriarchal hierarchy, the stability and control of the whole society is guaranteed.

Such sacralization of order supposes an epistemological detachment from reality itself, a separation between the thing-out-there (where order is supposed to be found) and the observing subject. Whether this is a tenable epistemology will concern us later. For now it will suffice to note that positivism was the most influential ideology that came to our shores at the time of the struggles for political independence and remained so until the middle of this century. In Brazil, Comte's motto "Order and Progress" is the banner of the national flag.⁹

When order is so conceived as an *a priori* category, what is perceived as anomalous is what lacks order. What lacks order, lacks goodness. Lack of order is evil. Whatever is anomalous and conflictive must be integrated into a well-ordered center or be annihilated. By such criteria people have been exiled and are homeless. In a modern bourgeois world, any appeal to order is not an ordering appeal, but a freezing of a general set of relations of inequity that guarantees oppression, submission, and exploitation of those who are displaced. We continue to learn this lesson in Latin America. Order is the name of the Brazilian worker's monthly wage of U.S. \$44.00. Strike is disorder.

Finding the Way: The Dialectics of Displacement and Belonging

Should we conclude that a theology of creation in our context is seriously limited? Can we only speak properly of a creation at the end of history, as the result of liberation that brings about novelty? Ernst Bloch suggested that God is the *homo venelatus* historically before us fulfilling liberation in creation.¹⁰ Bloch was able to distinguish the central ambiguity in the discourse on creation that I noted in the second suspicion above: The appeal to a creator above us serves to justify the way things are as an order of creation, as an "abstract order," i.e., an ideology that justifies bourgeois domination.¹¹ Such an abstract order is solely the preservation of privilege through the annihilation of any organization that threatens the free market and capital accumulation. Bloch's alternative gives room for a close association between creation and novelty, so that the criterion for discerning the process of creation is dissonance with the old order. Thus, rather than justification of the old order, creation would be the theological expression of the belief in the *noumenon*: "Behold, I make all things new!" (Rev. 21:5; Is. 43:19).

It is not clear, though, what this novelty is. It is only clear that it is "not yet," i.e., eschatological. If Bloch's materialist presuppositions are respected, God would be the name of the formal cause of novelty.¹² However, I fail to see why this horizontal meaning of transcendence and human fulfillment should be interpreted in any sense as creation. For one thing, it excludes the notion of God cosmologically above us. Furthermore, the fundamental question that emerges in the dialectics of displacement and belonging is not addressed by horizontal transcendence and its appeal to history. The question of transcendence, for the displaced people on earth, is much more related to fences and walls than to a shiny new day to come.

That a full theology of creation cannot be found in recent Latin American theology has to be understood not as a disregard for the creation, but as a consequence of the phenomenon of displacement. Creation faith presupposes a sense of belonging. When one says that God is the creator of whatever is, I can only relate to this if I can situate myself in this "is." In a cel-

ebation among landless peasants struggling for agrarian reform in Brazil, Psalm 24 was read: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers." A peasant commented: "When I hear this I don't see land anymore, only fences." On the road to belonging, he was able to begin to utter creation faith. In radical displacement not even this is possible, for it is the absence of vital space, i.e., a place where one can situate oneself.

An Emerging Latin American Theology of Creation

Out of the dialectic of displacement and belonging, elements for a theology of creation are emerging that play a definite role on the road toward belonging. They are means to overcoming displacement. They foster vital space, a place in which human life finds its potential fulfillment in the biological, social, and cultural dimensions. I will distinguish three basic types of belonging that define this vital space. First, there is the relation to the ultimate ground of life, i.e., to God through faith; second, the relation to nature through labor; third, the relation to other human beings, i.e., the formation of community through the praxis of love.

If displacement makes us question how we are to lift our voices to sing the Lord's song (Ps. 137), still our restless hearts endure, hearts that have never succumbed to absolute displacement. The invitation remains with us to go through the gates to prepare the way for the people, build up the highway and clear it of stones, and lift up an ensign over the people (Is. 62:10). The old song cannot be sung anymore, but a new song is being composed with motifs that have a long history in the tradition of creation faith.

The Doxological Meditation: Trust and Hope as Creatio Ex Nihilo

Let me call upon a theologian deeply engaged with a people also living in dark ages, in displacement. This theologian, known to us as Second-Isaiah, wrote during the exile of the Hebrews in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E. His or her appeal to the creation tradition cannot be separated from the announcement of liberation. In fact, the creation tradition makes liberation credible. The author of the "Book of Comfort" is above all a pastor to a people living in displacement. Second-Isaiah is a voice raised in the wilderness, sending forth the people with God's promise: "Fear not, I will help you" (Is. 41:14; 43:1; 44:2). Creation images and motifs emerge in the book as vindications of God's redemptive power. Wouldn't the "creator of the ends of the earth" also "give power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength" (Is. 40:29)? The Creator is praised in remembrance of things past, whether as a lament for a paradise lost or as a recital of past redemptive acts. "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Is. 43:18-19). Times had changed and it was not enough to remember the historical past. A new lib-

eration, a new exodus was necessary. A renewal of the patterns of the past exodus could not be enough. It had to be something really new.

In this context creation faith emerges as a doxological affirmation of the trustworthiness of Yahweh in a time full of suffering and pregnant with the *novum* to come. The people are called to "sing to Yahweh a new song" (Is. 42:10). This can only be understood as a parenthesis of celebration in the midst of the experience of oppression and hope of redemption: a doxological interim that comforts, encourages, and animates. A historical break is necessary to make credible the power of Yahweh in a time when historical evidences testify to the contrary.

Here creation motifs are not dogmatic statements or systematic concepts that refer to the origin and order of the universe, but words of praise that celebrate the trustworthiness of God. After the exile, Third-Isaiah evokes with even more strength the doxology of creation, proclaiming a "new heaven and a new earth" (Is. 65:17; 66:22) in which worship will last "from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath" (Is. 66:23). Such a view links creation with the formation of a God-fearing people. This notion of a new creation is radicalized in Paul. The *kaíne ktísis* is descriptive of the features of a communion of those who are *en Christo* (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).¹³

The doxological mediation of creation motifs does more than foster expectations of redemption. Although we don't know the origins of the doxologies in Amos 4:13; 5:8; and 9:5-6 (which are full of creation motifs), they are set in a context of words of judgment. Here also the motifs are used to relativize the memory of the old exodus, which was being used to justify Israel's exclusiveness and failure to affirm God's solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Penitence and the conviction of being under judgment are indeed part of doxological experience.

Another main biblical source that testifies to creation faith is the Psalms, whose doxological character cannot be overemphasized. Such doxologies ascribe a power to God which affirms God's sovereignty over all that destroys life. The ultimate affirmation of such a power emerges in face of the destruction of life itself, in the face of the deadly power of the goddess.

The first explicit affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* emerged in the tradition of creation faith. When the tale of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother is told in 2 Maccabees 7, we observe that each son, refusing to succumb to the power of the king, affirms that faith with words of praise to God. After the first six brothers have been tortured and killed, the king attempts to persuade the mother to convince her last son to obey him. The mother reminds her son that he should not be afraid, even in the face of this total destruction, for God has made heaven and earth "not out of existing things" and humanity in the same way (v. 28). In the experience of total negation, *creatio ex nihilo* is the affirmation of hope in a God who will not succumb to negation. In the New Testament Paul also links *creatio ex nihilo* with justification and hope of resurrection (see Rom. 4:17).

From a people living in displacement and contemplating new ways of liberation we hear a voice daring to sing an impossible song. The first article in the creed of the Nicaraguan Peasant Mass is sung with these opening words: "Lord, I believe strongly that from your prodigious mind all this world was born, that from your hand of artists (the hand of the primitive painter), beauty has flourished. . . ." This motif was also applied by Víctor Jara in his well-known popular song, *Prayer to a Farm Worker*:

Rise up and look at the mountain
Whence comes the wind, the sun, the water
You who change the course of the rivers
You whose seed sows the flight of your soul.

New images are emerging in the song now being composed. These images, the remains of doxological events, veil such events, but simultaneously make them visible and grant to the experiences of awe and wonder cultural and religious space. A group of indigenous people were recently contacted by whites in South America and were presented with a Bible. They had never seen a book, nor did they have a name for it. They called it "the skin of God." The "skin of God" is being formed in Latin America, giving evidence to the presence of a God who is in solidarity with the displaced in their pursuit of a space where life might flourish.

The creation motifs in the Bible and tradition are not irrelevant, though they are, by themselves, ambiguous. The point is to determine the mediation through which they might contribute to finding a vital space. This is achieved in doxology whenever creation motifs affirm the possibility of liberation granted by the power of a creator God and sustained by a faith assured that the maker of heaven and earth can make all things new and is not bound, even by what already exists. The most radical expression of such doxology can affirm the *creatio ex nihilo* in evocative language. In such a doxology the new protology and eschatology converge, or as H. Gunkel put it: "The end of time is the same as the beginning" (*Endzeit gleich Urzeit*). Such a doxology negates the boundaries of time and evokes images that stir emotions and animate a people defying the fate of displacement.

The question of memory emerges at this point. Doxological experience seems to relativize or criticize the role of memory in liberation. The affirmation of novelty supposes the overcoming of the past and of the boundaries of the memory of past experiences. If the new is to come and if it is to be liberating, it will have to transcend previous liberating events. Here is the basic difference between romanticism and liberationism. Memory is bound to the finitude of historically determining experiences. Doxological experiences "overdetermine" the experience of reality. "Overdetermination" is a concept with some history in Freudian psychology and Althusserian philosophy. I use it theologially to describe the resolution of a conflict which could not be expected or predicted beforehand, consider-

ing the *determining* variables at work. The religious sense of awe and wonder is the practical (doxological) experience of overdetermination. However, overdetermination does not set one in a mystic mood floating above everything that determines day-to-day life. It evokes praise and awe *because* the socio-historical, biological, and cultural determinations are taken with utmost seriousness, and then transcended. Memory and liberation are in a dialectical relationship. Liberation is not possible without the overcoming of memory, but memory informs liberation. Without memory, liberation is at most a spiritualized notion. Memory is a road that brings you to a river. Although necessary and indispensable, it is not enough to enable you to build a bridge or a boat to cross the river.

The images, myths, and rituals that inhabit our memory are part of the doxological mediation. They are what recent studies in neurobiology call "preparedness." Preparedness is our brain's capacity to assemble images so as to preview things which, though dependent upon discrete components of memory, form a whole distinct from its parts.¹⁴ So prophetic images are not simply visions of what is to come, but also archetypes that favor a resolution within day-to-day life. Preparedness allows for an imaginary place within the experience of displacement and offers concrete possibilities for making it real. The no-place becomes a concrete *u-topia*.

The Metabolic Mediation: Labor as Creatio Continua

Having dealt with the relation to the ultimate ground of life, let us now turn to the second relation of belonging. In the doxological mediation, creation motifs appear as an expression of ultimate confidence in a God who *overdetermines* reality. Now we turn to finite existence, seeking for creation motifs in the midst of nature, of which we are a part.

All the amazing vitality in the process of nature from which life emerges is a result of living organisms. Biochemical processes produce the variety and the reproduction of life within certain possibilities controlled by DNA. Metabolism is an encompassing term that applies to the processes that result in living organisms. During its evolution nature has produced organisms that were able to cope with, as well as to change, their environments. If creation is nature seen in reference to God, we can say that metabolism is a name for *creatio continua*.

In the first volume of *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx defined labor "as a process in which both the human being and nature participate, and in which the human through its action mediates, regulates and controls its metabolism with nature."¹⁵ Using the term *metabolism* to define labor is helpful in the sense that through labor human life produces and reproduces itself by shaping and reshaping the environment. Labor is not an action like throwing a ball or waving goodbye. It is human social production for the satisfaction of some need through a product envisaged and controlled ideally (*telos*), conditioned by the material reality at hand and by the technological means available.¹⁶ We may call this external metabolism as opposed to the

internal metabolism of living organisms. And we can speak theologically of a continuing creation through labor.

How is this motif linked with traditional creation faith? The J account of creation, with its explicit commission to work (Gen. 2:15), provides a clue. What calls for attention in this account is the parallelism of images between God's action in shaping the human out of *humus* (adam/adamah) and the order to cultivate the land. There is an analogy of action between God and the human. St. Basil in his extemporaneous homilies about the creation account of P inverted this analogy, describing God's creative activity in analogy to human labor (*poiesis*). As an artisan makes and shapes an object, God has made the world.¹⁷ In the New Testament this motif is present in the miracle stories, which are portrayed as acts of divine creation. There the verb *poiesis* is frequently used¹⁸—the same verb that is used to translate the Hebrew *bara'*:

We should be cautious about speaking of labor without warning against its alienation. A clear distinction must be drawn between the process of labor and the accumulation of its result. Marx once remarked that original accumulation "plays in political economy the same role as the original sin in theology."¹⁹ This is a central problem of social ethics, particularly ecology, since alienation in labor is the destruction of metabolism; it is diabolic. It is not what brings together (*meta-bole*) but what throws apart (*dia-bole*). The pursuit of authentic labor craves a vital space where human beings can find self-realization within the environment.²⁰ Thus, the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil, for example, goes hand in hand with a militant ecological consciousness.

Because this view risks turning the *creatio continua* motif into an anthropocentric concept, some explanation is necessary. Creation viewed from a metabolic perspective has a demarcated linguistic sphere. It refers exclusively to the interaction of humans and nature (including human nature). This interaction changes not only nature but the human itself. There is something human, all too human, in such a language. But can it be avoided?

Recent studies in cosmology and physics have discovered "large numbers of coincidences" in the expansion rate of the universe. The expansion rate is precisely that which has allowed for the emergence of life and thus led to our emergence as observers. A rate minimally lower or higher would make life impossible. This is not the place to get into a discussion of the so-called anthropic principle, which says "that what we can expect to observe must be restricted by the conditions necessary for our presence as observers."²¹ A minimal version of this principle will suffice to suggest that our observation of and discourse about the vast universe and its unfolding is precisely and only the observation of our total *involvement* with it.²²

This involvement, which is metabolic, tells us that we can only speak about a world with which we interact to become those who can say something about it. And nothing that we say is irrelevant to our own existence. It

may foster either destruction or belonging. Hence we cannot avoid being "anthropic." Being "anthropic" establishes only an epistemological primacy of the human, not an ontological one. Labor as metabolism focuses on the continuing creation of a universe from the standpoint of the human as the only possible observer of *this* world. And the world we metabolically create is only the world that creates us as observers of it. We are participant-observers and we observe because of our participation. There is no ecological neutrality. In all the ways we change nature and nature changes us, the only two options are to be "metabolic" or "diabolic."

Victor Jara's song, *The Plow*, expresses well this relation of belonging:

The sweat makes furrows on me
and I make furrows on the land
Ceaselessly . . .
Like a tightened yoke
I have my fist full of hope
because all will change.

The worker and the land both change in the process of labor. The same hand that holds steady the plow is the fist full of hope. All will change.

The Praxiological Mediation: Praxis as "Imago Dei"

Because of our metabolic participation in the world we observe, we cannot be indifferent participants and observers. The question is, What difference do we make? This brings me to my last point, to our relation to other human beings, to the question of praxis, and full circle to the question of whether creation themes are appropriate to address our situation, living as we do in the dialectic of displacement and belonging.

Who are those who sing a new song and trust in a God capable of making all things new? Who are the participants in the continuing creation of a world divided between the rich and the poor, capital and labor, corporations and communities, patriarchy and womanhood, pharaohs and slaves? The differences are also differences in celebration, differences concerning the role of labor in life, differences concerning the way God is imaged and where we find the image of God.

It is not my purpose to exegete Genesis 1:27.²³ I don't regard the formulation of the text to be as important as the sheer affirmation of the *imago* in the conditions of domination and exile under which the people were living when the P writer formulated it. The apparent *hubris* in the self-definition of the human is in fact manifested in its opposite: the profound humility of the minimal human condition. Erich Auerbach insisted that this is unique in literature: "Humiliation and exaltation [in the Old Testament] are very profound . . . and always go together."²⁴

In P the social and political conditions under which the text emerged

confront the daring affirmation of the *imago*. This same contrast comes together explicitly in Psalm 8. The tensive unity of humiliation and exaltation is the heart of the psalm, whose point is that likeness is there where it is unlikely to be found. Guido Rocha, a Brazilian artist known for his sculptures of the crucifix, was once asked why his images of the Christ were those of a tortured, hungry, and poor man screaming on the cross. He said, "[S]ince I was a child . . . I learned that nothing is as similar to Christ as the people."²⁵ Here is the reversal of historical subject that marks the experience of a people empowered by God, a people of slaves, exiles, the poor, servants. Those who are displaced, dispossessed, little, weak, and crushed make the difference. "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Insurrection (*insurgere*) is the way of God, as is testified in biblical literature from the formation of *adam*, the human made of *humus*, through Jesus, the child without a place to be born, the man risen from death.

The *imago* motif establishes the pattern of the human in its minimal condition. In this minimal condition the human finds its greatness. The displaced and dispossessed have only their capacity to act and interact. Having lost the objective result of their labor, they have gained the consciousness of their capabilities, of participating in the *actus purus*.²⁶ What they can conquer and retain is sociability. They gain dignity in human-to-human relation. In being faced with each other and in having interaction as their only reference they *re-cognize* the profile of the human.

The new profile of the human is being drawn in the concrete experiences of community participation. Those who cannot be defined by what they have or by the place they occupy are being defined by the way they interact. The *imago* motif appears then as an attribute of a collectivity; it refers to "earth creatures" (Gen. 1:27) united by their differences. Paul's references to "new creation" in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15 link the new condition to being "in Christ" or to being the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This being "in Christ" is defined not by status but by relatedness: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).²⁷

The formation of community through intersubjective relations is what technically may be called *praxis*. Such praxis is a loving act. Community praxis is possible only where people share in love the urge to belong. In community a new social texture is being woven, a vital space is being formed. We may even say that communion is the strategy of creation and recreation of the loving image of God. Community is not a forum for discussion of interests that brings together people of good will. Community is possible when it begins with the fundamental equity of those who are displaced. It does not restore relations. It creates them.

In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, an early Christian book, an interesting view of

the Christian church is presented. An old woman appears to the main character and gives him a small book. He tries to guess who she is. Unable to find out, another character appears to him and says: "She is the Church." Surprised, the main character asks, "Why is she so old?" It was a good question, since the church had just emerged. The reply from the other character is revealing: "Because she was created first, before all else; that is why she is aged. It is for her that the world was made."²⁸ When we experience a church emerging out of grassroots communities shaping a new ethos, gathering the displaced and making hope and faith practical in love, it is not an innovation. It is the oldest of all realities in which the definite and primordial profile of the human is raised.

CONCLUSION

In these three relations of belonging I have shown how scriptural and traditional creation motifs are used in the midst of the struggle of the displaced people in search of a vital space. The motifs that appeared witness to a theology of creation in process in Latin America. First, in the relation to the ultimate ground of life, the power of God to make all things new is claimed doxologically. Second, at the ecological level of the relation between human beings and nature, the metabolism of labor is claimed as continuing creation. Third, *imago Dei* is claimed as community interrelatedness that affirms the fundamental solidarity of God with the displaced and dispossessed whom God empowers.

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