

Clearly, there are differences as well as similarities between existentialist and liberation types of theologies (as I have long since recognized and pointed out, at least in some connections). The difficulty is in sorting them out and rightly relating them to one another.

Not only social scientific analysis, but philosophical analysis also, confirms that to be human is always and of necessity to be engaged in some social praxis implying some ideology or project as well as, more fundamentally, to enact some self-understanding implying some understanding of existence. It is one thing, however, to understand oneself existentially, something else again to clarify the concept of human existence as necessarily implying that to be human is somehow to understand one's own existence. The second thing may be reasonably called an "*existentialist*," as distinct from an "existential," understanding, although it may with equal reasonableness be called a "*metaphysical*" understanding. This it may be called provided that "metaphysics" is construed in the broad sense as including not only general metaphysics, or ontology, but also special metaphysics, and therefore (metaphysical) anthropology as well as (metaphysical) cosmology and (metaphysical) theology. But whatever it is called, such an understanding entitles one to say that, just as a human being must in some way or other understand her or his existence, so she or he must also in some way or other lead her or his own life, and in that sense engage in life-praxis as well as enact a self-understanding.

From the standpoint of Christian theology, however, this fact is significant, not in its "*what*," but only in its "*that*," so far, at least, as the appropriateness of one's self-understanding and life-praxis are concerned. Whatever my self-understanding and life-praxis may be, the sheer fact that I somehow understand myself and lead my life provides the only necessary preunderstanding of Christian faith and witness. Moreover, my existence and action otherwise can be appropriate to Jesus Christ if, and only if, I understand myself and lead my life in the way in which the Christian witness to him calls me to do. Consequently, whatever I understand myself to be and however I lead my

life, I can become a Christian, although I can be and remain a Christian only insofar as I understand myself Christianly and lead my life accordingly.

Therefore, the "*what*" of my self-understanding and life-praxis, far from being in some way necessary to my becoming a Christian, is the very thing I must be prepared to give up insofar as it is incompatible with Jesus Christ.

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