

traditional analysis of class struggle to a new sort of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Liberation theology has reached a certain maturity. MCGOVERN affirms that liberation theology "has matured sufficiently to include greater internal self-criticism."

One of the most interesting changes is the shift in the usage of Marxism. Liberation theologians used elements of Marxist analysis, as it offered the best method of criticizing the capitalist system that was producing the dependency of South America — hence its poverty and economic problems.

In liberation theology "praxis" means the actual living of Christian faith; "class struggle" implies the social realities of Latin America, not a programme of a revolutionary elimination of the ruling class; and when talking about the "poor", theologians of liberation are thinking of landless peasants and those obstructed from real political and economical participation. But there is a repeated identification of capitalism as the source of Latin America's problems.

One positive factor is that liberation theology can still exert a radical "prophetic" role in reminding complacent elites of the religious obligation of social solidarity and in combating oppression and promoting the empowerment of the poor.

SIGMUND notices that "it took the official Roman Catholic Church a century and a half to recognize that democracy and freedom were central elements in the Christian message. It has taken only two decades for it to relate that message to human liberation."

In order to better envision the future ideological perspec-

tives and choices of liberation theology, in the conclusion of his book SIGMUND asks several poignant questions worth reproducing here:

"Does theological reflection on the experience of the poor and oppressed always lead to the conclusion that capitalism must be replaced by a socialist system? What is the relation of the private property and liberation? How can human rights be best promoted in the modern state? What is the liberation theology's attitude toward the redemocratization of Latin America? What is the 'prophetic' role of the theologian?"

If the cure for the weaknesses and failures of democracy is more democracy, should not the liberation theologians devote their primary energies to developing the spirituality of socially concerned democracy, whether capitalist or socialist in its economic form, rather than denouncing dependency, imperialism and capitalist exploitation?"

#### Suggested Reading

BONINO José Miguez, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*. Philadelphia, 1975.

BOFF Leonardo and Clodovis, *Introducing Liberation Theology*. NY, 1987.

GUTIERREZ Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*. NY, 1975.

MCGOVERN Arthur F. F., *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*. NY, 1989.

SEGUNDO Juan Luis, *Liberación de la teología*. Buenos Aires, 1975.

SIGMUND Paul E., *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*. NY, 1990.

Cristian BUCHIU is an assistant professor at Hyperion Univ. - Bucharest, in history and religion. He holds a Master of Theology at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York & a Master in Political Sciences at the Univ. of Bucharest. He also has a B.A. in Orthodox Theology in Bucharest. His email address is [cbuchiu@rdslink.ro](mailto:cbuchiu@rdslink.ro).

Pablo ROMO CEDANO

## *Liberation Theologies and Current Challenges*

*We frequently have the idea that liberation theology is an ideology that rules thought within a generalised sector of the Christian Church in Latin America, and that is false. Liberation theology defines itself as one faith reflection starting from the liberation experience of the believers (Christian militants). That is, doing theology is a second act, the first being the Christian life that works for building God's Reign. It fights for freedom, justice and truth.*

### NOSTALGIC? A LITTLE HISTORY

It might seem that today it is not relevant to speak of a liberation theology, especially after the official sentences in the eighties, the changes in the world's ideological signs, the rise of new actors, the manifest expansion of neoliberalism and the new global trends.

It might eventually seem that this is not a fashionable subject — as if freedom is something fashionable. Apparently, speaking about liberation theologies today is like speaking of the glorious sixties, a nostalgic experience for some who have become conservative and wistful. Is this true?

What happened with the liberation theologies? Where is the theological reflection today? Is this theological model still valid in a world transformed by the expansion of capitalism? Are the poor still a theological subject?

Liberation theology was born as a *concrete expression* in the sixties and was systematised in its first moments both by Latin American and European theologians. Gustavo GUTIERREZ OP was the first to coin this expression as a theological model in the early seventies.

Liberation theology initialised its first stages by recovering the experience of the Christians in Latin America involved in the various battles of social, political and economic change.

Liberation theology is the consequence, or better said, the fruit in Latin America of the Second Vatican Council for the Roman Catholics and of a theological update for Protestants who lived and suffered in the sixties.

If the reflective ecclesiastic experience of this council affected the whole Roman Catholic Church, the manifestations would be very different in the various concrete realities of the world as a whole.

In Europe, there have been reflections for many years upon the dissociation between "Christian life" and "life in the world"; hence there appeared theologies called in their times "theologies of the world's realities" by Yves CONGAR OP.

These theologies, the majority elaborated in France, were fundamentally optimistic, modern, liberal, and bound together with experiences of concrete Christian life in this world. We must remember both the experiences of worker priests and nuns and of priests and nuns in the universities.

Alongside these theologies, there appeared other, more pessimistic ones like "the theology of the death of God." There were in this period more rationalist theologies and the hermeneutical and historical criticism manifested itself.

Those were the times, we must remember, of the great debates and sentences for Biblical interpretation with the tools of the semantics of that period, of linguistics and of the contributions of biblical theology (fundamentally Protestant).

Such contributions, together with the Christian practice of many women and men in the social field, awakened an irrepresible desire to read the Bible "one more time"; to do *proper and contextual readings*.

The concern of many Christians was the result of an intense *search for alternatives*, ways for the authentic life of faith. The great European wars ended and a lot of opportunities opened for the future.

The Soviet Union took a completely different path from that of the United States, and Europe was divided. Many Christians in Europe honestly and freely tried to take the best road for all. These thoughts arrived second-hand in Latin America, while the basic emergency there was to survive and follow the road that could *give life*.

The Second Vatican Council allowed many things that were previously censured. One could read the Bible with criticism suggested by science, and the liturgy pleaded for more participation and openness, becoming more accessible to the people.

The centralized power was reformed and redefined according to "God's People." And one of the most important things was that with the constitution of *Gaudium et Spes*, doors opened for the participation of Christians in the realities of the world.

### THE LONG MARCH

Many Christian women and men, many pastors with their people, many people sometimes without their pastors, initiated a march — a quest. Their march was one of faith. They started by reading the Bible again, to understand what Jesus was saying *today and now*.

And they discovered the power of God's presence with His people. They discovered, as many Christian women and men in history, that God's presence is always liberating. That God is a God for the living and that God joins God's people in the liberation, as God did with Moses and the prophets.

This "discovery" was not made by some great theologians behind their desk; it was made by the people in the middle of their reality, fundamentally characterised by pain, poverty, marginalisation, and the lack of access to goods that make fullness of life possible, as Saint John says.

If the great theologians also "discovered" it, they did it with the people, for the people and within the people. The Gospel of St. Lucas, the "Good Samaritan" was read again and questions were made about the current meaning of the word *compassion*.

Let us remember that these were the times of the Alliance for Progress, those developmental programmes of the Cold War. "Who is my fellow?" Christian women and men of those times asked themselves; and they answered fearlessly, the one who suffers "death before one's time," like Bartolomé DE LAS CASAS more than 450 years before.

This transition is only made through the Christian practice of love from the mystical life: identifying Jesus with the Other woman or man who suffers and is persecuted. This was the transition of Saint Catherine of Siena when she saw Jesus in the prostitute or in the criminal sentenced to death.

Then the following question was: *how to be efficient here and now?* Many Christian women and men took the revolutionary path and went to the mountains of Latin American countries; others decided on working in unions; others in politics, others in the media, others in the middle of base communities, others on the peripheries of the great cities. They fermented and grew in their spaces.

These were the times for the great debates on means and purposes, on the validity of this or that alternative. There were also times of great repressions, the coup d'état in the name of the "values of Christianity."

The disappeared ones were present in Christian communities that searched for the Resurrected. Theologians began their task of gathering the faith experiences of the first to give reason for their hope.

### MARTYRS OF FAITH

During that period it was recognised that a theological work is one done by a militant of faith. Theology is not sociology of religion or a new science of secularised humanities; it is all about an act of faith.

A *second act*, as I said at the beginning, was already defended in the late seventies by Latin American theologians, while the first act was represented by Christian life: the priority of practice over theory. Thoughts multiplied and diversified, faithful to their origins and scientific methods.

Thus plurality developed; theology was defined not as unique and monolithic, but as something which materialises in concrete reality: it is historical and contextual. If we are faithful to their methodology, theologians never pretended that their reflection of faith was one and only one, and even less that it was constant and unchanging.

Liberation theologies approached the subject from the point of view from which they analyzed the surrounding reality. First of all, Latin American theologies took as subjects the poor, "the ones for whom God acts in favour."

Afterwards there was great criticism from the point of view of the woman in search for including the excluded, i.e. the woman and the poor woman. Further came the Negro, the Indian (Native American) and the Chicano (Mexican-American).

### HOW IS IT SEEN TODAY?

The present interest in liberation theologies is an interest in all theology that speaks of God and gives a reason for hope. The question for the present interest is linked to the question for the need the Christian has plainly to explain to her- or himself and to others her or his faith and hope and the love she or he practices.

Today as always, a theology talking about God, the real God, is a theology that liberates, a liberation theology that reclaims human beings, revealing as a reflection their own lives damaged by evil and inviting them to freedom.

It invites them as persons and as a group: as people; and today more than ever, as people of peoples. Hence it is not the subject of one continent, of one certain period. Talking of God today means talking of the hope for freedom.

The characteristics of these new liberation theologies are like the old ones: the discovery of the Bible's novelty that invites to end slavery and seduces to realise efficient actions, in the historic context of the moment, by denouncing lies and presenting the ways to a full life.



Thus, today liberation theologies are not exclusively of one geographic area, I insist; they are merely elaborated from the perspective of the forgotten of the Earth, are inclusive in gender (feminist); are macro-ecumenical; dignify; they are multiethnic and multicultural and fundamentally full of courage facing injustice and full of tenderness facing the creation of the human being.

### THE CHALLENGES OF INSURGENT THEOLOGIES IN THE XXI<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The first challenge of insurgent theologies will be that of permanently identifying the true God from the other gods appearing on the market, or from the market itself — that is, taking into account the complex reality generated by globalisation, the enormous inequality and inequity.

This means recovering what contextual theologies bring to us, understanding theology as a “second act,” the first one being “action,” “orthopractice.” The theologies of this emerging century will have to grant a privilege to charity — love — as the source of all faith reflection.

Free, compassionate, charitable, unconditional love. Concrete and real love, also called charity. Not any kind of charity, but one which is qualified by efficiency in its doings, in its transforming the structures of lovelessness and sin, and not only to alleviate an occasional or exclusively personal necessity.

This practice of “efficient love” will be the whole of subsequent reflections. This means selectivity, to be small, to be marginal, and frequently this practice implies not being “socially correct”. This involves a pre-understanding of partiality.

The second is closely tied to the first: that is, assuming a clear and public option for those excluded from this global market designed by current financial institutions and the entire chorus surrounding them.

That is, for the great impoverished majorities, for the immigrants who abandon everything while trying to survive, the Indians enduring poverty, the marginalised and excluded homosexuals, the individuals with different abilities driven away and the poor children and youth.

I think that the challenges of theologies reside in understanding how to give life and how to accompany life from the point of view of the poor and the excluded, from the point of view of those who do not have their future in their own hands.

This is not about the fact that theology designs a new economic alternative and valid pattern. This is not the problem of theology. But its concern is animating this possibility. This is not about creating a new ideology, but about jointly reflecting in a community of faith, with whom they do not believe but fight for freedom; and about making protagonists of the irrelevant ones and empowering them.

When Fray BETTO mocks the market and places it as the current god in its tremendous immanence, he is repeating the joke made by psalmists and prophets against the Golden Ram and the gods of the neighbouring empires in the Old Testament. He is merely distinguishing between idolatry and adoration of the God of Life. Humour is a powerful weapon. Dignity is an indestructible weapon.

This theological work repeats time and again along the history of Christianity: denouncing idolatry is now the charge of the Christian and therefore of the theologian. Exposing the god who requires human sacrifices — blood, pain, passion, death — in order to be able to live and rule.

Bartolomé DE LAS CASAS, before the invasion of Our America, did the same thing; it is what Martin LUTHER did in front of the traffic of Grace; it is what ROMERO did in relation to the unjust war developed in El Salvador.

Arundhati ROY, from the Hindu tradition, with the finest intuition says that in order to end with the Empire one must surround it, one must mock it and expose it. That is, one must keep a distance and laughter is the answer: we must tell stories, says she, “depriving it of oxygen. Making it ashamed, mocking at it. With pure art, music, literature, stupidity, joy, brightness, our pure persistence — and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from those they want us to create.”

### LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER

Learning to live pluralistically is learning to live together: as Felicísimo MARTINEZ said, no theology owns the entire face of Jesus Christ. The whole of the Christian mystery is yet to be discovered.

For Christians to live together, we have to own a deep spiritual serenity more necessary today than ever. Spirituality grounded in affective and effective congruity. This kind of living together will be seen more frequently in other religions and not only within Christianity.

The ecumenical movement within Christianity initiated in the past century will continue as something natural and obvious. Today’s challenge for all us resides in joining the orthopraxis with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Taoists. It also means weaving possible channels with the most ample doctrinal reflection (Paul KNITTER). Thus theologies will carry out the humble function of articulating the human desire of meeting the God of life and fulfilling God’s will.

Pablo ROMO CEDANO participated, with Bishop Don Samuel RUIZ, in the mediation team in the war between the Zapatistas movement and the federal government of Mexico (1994–1998). He was the director of the diocesan human rights centre in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas (1995–1997); and later director of the Dominicans for Justice and Peace organization, based in Genève, Switzerland (1999–2002). Now he is part of the SERAPAZ, a peace organization in México. His email address is pabloloromo@hotmail.com.

