

Paper 3: June 17th 2019 Afternoon: Liberation Theology

LT is a contextual theology of hope and action. Grew out of Latin America from poor people under oppressive capitalist governments in 1960s and 1970s. Industrialisation filtered through churches, schools and state. Poverty in Favelas with no sanitation, crime, drugs and trafficking. **The heart of LT is to bring spiritual and material justice and freedom to the oppressed. Aim to raise awareness (“conscientisation Freire”) of problems. Kingdom of God is utopia now. Church involved in material conditions of society – matter (politics) and spirit (religion) one. Christians cannot stand back. Praxis is needed. Critical of privatisation of Theology. Theology is more than transfer of facts. About lives.**

Bible Passages: *Exodus: God liberates Israelites from Egypt (OT). God seeks justice in OT. *Mary in Luke 1 states how God will bring down the mighty and raise the poor when she is pregnant. *Jesus “Blessed are the poor” (Matthew 5). the *Parables Of Sheep And Goats* (God will separate us out as farmer does sheep from goats as to whether we have helped the poor) and *Good Samaritan*. Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to get to Heaven (Matthew 19). Resurrection expresses freedom. **The first apostles looked after the poor.**

Key ideas, Puebla Conference, Mexico (1979).

1. Preferential option for the poor: *Those in power, put the poor first and act in solidarity, following Jesus in working for the poor and creating the Kingdom of God on earth now in a struggle for peace and justice in history and not just about salvation after death. People learn how to be poor. No arrogance. God is a living God who seeks justice. Based on the Sheep and Goats parable. Recognise Jesus in the needy. All are made by God. Bread comes before theology, food before rules.*

2. Integral Liberation: *integral to Christianity.*

3. Structural /social/ institutional inequality and sin: *Sin not just about personal disobedience but economic /social structures of society that cause alienation, injustice, exploitation, oppression, dehumanisation of all in a capitalist society. Organisations cause alienation /injustice/ cause others to sin as people dehumanised/ alienated. Deeper alienation as affects many. The Christian must challenge this as much as personal sin. The Church is a community not an institution and must not be hierarchical like the rulers.*

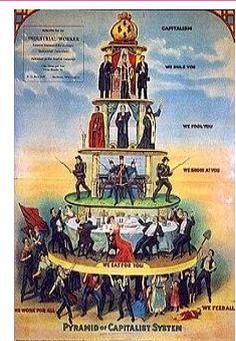
4. Hermeneutic of suspicion: *Questioning interpretations. Eg asking why the rich Man refused to sell wealth and why rich? (Luke 18). Marxist reading of the Bible. Applies Bible to alienated society. Challenge traditional interpretations.*

5. Iglesia popular: *Ordinary people part of church’s decision-making.*

6. Reversal: *Theology starts with earth / people not God. Poor drive action. Kingdom of God here. Idea in Luke’s Gospel. Reverse opportunities. “The first will be last.” (Jesus).*

7. Orthopraxis (right action) over orthodoxy (right belief). *Live with the poor. Feed hungry first. Action before theology.*

A base community brings together the poor/oppressed. . Gives food, solidarity, pastoral care, faith teaching, empowerment even if nearest priest miles away. LT works from the base/ bottom up, from the underside of history.



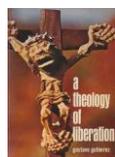
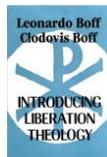
Pope Francis, from Argentina, challenged Catholics to help the poor and rejected wealth of the Vatican. But criticised Marxism.



Gustavo Gutierrez (Catholic priest) lives with poor in Lima. He puts action first, doing "Theology after sundown." He believes we can change the poverty we have caused. Fix human-made problems of structural/social/ institutional sin through human methods. **Political liberation is salvation and the Church must speak out. Orthopraxis comes first.** We then liberate people from personal sin after liberation from social/ economic oppression through reconciliation. Christianity must not legitimise Governments. GG sees through Marxist lens. Invited to Vatican 2015.

Jean Segundo makes "preferential option for the poor" key. Jesus/God associates/liberates with the powerless. There is no neutrality. Peace, love and justice are vital. **Liberation from the slavery of personal sin (spiritual sin) comes first though as we cannot always change society/ politics. Still believed in taking action.**

LT distinguishes right teaching/ belief (orthodoxy) and orthopraxis (right action) needed for oppressed. "Bread before theology". 2 steps to orthopraxis: **Step 1. Pre-theological:** Do not begin with Church teaching but with injustice/exploitation. Solidarity. Visit base communities. Like God visited earth through Jesus. Parable of Sheep and Goats = be alongside those who suffer. **Step 2. Act.**



This is broken down by Boff brothers into the 3 Mediations:

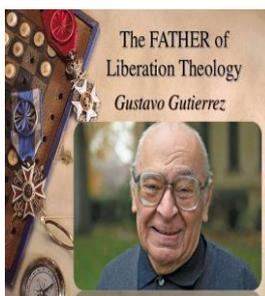
Mediation 1: SEE the oppression: Social, political, economic analysis using Marx. Racism, ageism, sexism too. Poverty is not caused by ignorance, laziness but oppression. Solved through social change. Not empirically/functionally solved but only solved through social change.

Mediation 2: JUDGE with the book of life or the Bible called Liberative hermeneutics. "Application not explanation" (Boff brothers). Poor read Bible. Use key Bible texts on factsheet one.

Mediation 3. ACT: Empower people to bring about change. Transform society. Act for love and justice.



Five motivations state C and L Boff for Liberation Theology: 1. The God of The Bible involved in world hears cry of justice. 2. Jesus acts in solidarity with marginalised. 3. God will judge us for our actions - the Sheep and Goats. 4. Jesus' disciples gave to the poor. 5. The Church transforms society.



"WHEN I GIVE FOOD TO THE POOR, THEY CALL ME A SAINT. WHEN I ASK WHY THE POOR HAVE NO FOOD, THEY CALL ME A COMMUNIST." Archbishop Helder Camara

“Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it” (Karl Marx, economic theorist and philosopher). His key ideas are:

1. Historical Materialism: World governed by physical processes. Material forces not God (which is *illusory and creates false hope*) drives history. Material conditions affect us and we them. We feel useful as social beings when in harmony. *Unlike animals, we are work conscious.*

2. Humans/workers (proletariat) are exploited, degraded, alienated and de-humanised by the ruling classes (bourgeoisie) . Caused by **private land ownership** by feudal lords over serfs and when a surplus was created, fragmentation followed. **Capitalism (free competitive market where means of production are privately owned, motivated by profit)** “owns” people and changes the relationship further. **Labour bought/sold. Through alienation, workers objectified, degraded, estranged not individuals - an “appendage of the machine”.** Machinery alienates. No power to create/control production/input. Do not see who makes goods other side of world (globalisation). Leads to a living death, a hatred of work as workers have no ownership and workers are just a means to an end. People need the job/money to survive but are alienated (detached/isolated) from the product as they only work on part of it and have no say in it. **They do not control means of production. The ruling class (bourgeoisie) even own the shops where worker spends money.** Relationships are defined by the part of capitalism people are in. **Wealth, for many not the few, before well-being. A Master/Slave Relationship. Class divide.**

3. Religion brainwashes people, causes alienation and needs abolished. God does not control history. Religion is false consciousness. **Rulers use religion as a tool to; justify their rule, exploitation, keep people in their place, under God’s natural order promising equality in Heaven/After Life. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world. The opiate (opium =drug to ease pain) of the people.”**

4. Praxis in needed: This is moving from theory to action through reflection. **History constantly changing between conflict and harmony. Humans can understand and change circumstances.** Change comes through analysis. In history, the exploited rise up and attempt to free themselves. **Praxis analyses, diagnoses and changes the situation. In Communism, people share means of production, material/intellectual goods, equally in classless and social harmony. Philosophers organise revolution.**

For Marx and LT: Christianity has always engaged with other ideas. God is found everywhere (natural theology, reason) Marxism makes Theology concrete, direct, relevant focus on changing society, questioning interpretations. Jesus wanted change- “Blessed be the meek” “the first will be last and the last first” which is like a Marxist idea called reversal. Church leaders reflect on injustice. Jose Porfirio: Capitalism due to original sin, people disobeying 10 Commandments by idol worship. Some see Marx like an OT prophet. The Boffs see Marx as a companion but Jesus is the 1 guide. Others see Marx as an instrumental tool for economic analysis (“method not dogma” said Bonino). Gutierrez: “fruitful confrontation” with Marx. GG influenced by Marx.

Evaluation: 1. Too much engagement with Marx. Christian theology should keep away from atheist secular ideologies like Marxism. It is a world view, that begins with a rejection of God and religion as a tool of oppression. Contradicts Christianity/the Church. Communism has been unsuccessful anyway. Jesus' death on the cross is the liberation from sin. God's grace not praxis brings change. Society more complex than LT says. The Church should remain distinctive and not try to assimilate Marxism because it suggests truth can be found outside Jesus and the Bible (though Christians who believe in Natural Theology/Reason and those who think Marxism can be a tool for debate and reflection might disagree).

2. Christianity has been too gentle when it comes to poverty and oppression. Revolutionary Marxism needed for significant change. LT has not engaged with Marxism enough. There needs to be more thought about the causes of alienation and deeper changes. Christians put too much emphasis on spiritual not real material poverty. They are too scared of Marx. Christianity needs to re-evaluate society in history as Marx suggested to have impact. *Alistair Kee criticised LT for being too conservative. LT picks and chooses because Marx was critical of religion and institutions. Although Marx was an atheist maybe the next phase of history, Kee speculates, could be spiritual – spiritual socialism.*

3. Christianity has been more effective than Marxism and is honest about suffering. God's reality touches people in a direct way to build the Kingdom of God now. Christianity is more practical/ effective help than Marxism. It gives spiritual strength, hope, Bible, Community. It is more positive.

4. Jesus' teaching was about personal sin/forgiveness not politics/economics.

5. What if LT fails? What is the back up?

6. There is other oppression. Not just poverty (R. McBrien)

7. Jesus died for everyone. It is not just the poor who are outcasts. Helped the rich.

7. Oscar Romero: Liberation spiritual then practical. He was an Archbishop shot for protesting against Government abuse of the poor in El Salvador, 1980.

8. Cardinal Ratzinger (would become Pope Benedict) in the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (1984) said theologies of liberation good for justice but LT:

- Not sufficiently critical of Marx. Marx rejects God and religion.
- Deviates from faith. Undermines Christianity. Uses secular ideology.
- Uses violence. Father Camilo Torres Restrepo joined a revolutionary army.
- Was exclusive. What about other issues? What about other people? Pope John Paul II agreed with preferential option for the poor but wrote of "spiritual poverty" and in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), Jesus is as much concerned about the rich man's salvation.

Pope Benedict also said: The slavery of liberation from sin comes before economics. Salvation about God's grace not praxis. LT reduces Christianity (reductionist). Marx was intolerant and denied the individual. The Eucharist not a power struggle. Jesus was not political. Christianity about spiritual not political liberation. Jesus was not anti-rich. He talked about spiritual not material poverty. Jesus had universal care for all. Only God can remove suffering.

