

Liberation Theology

(Conclusion)

The problems of the Third world nations are enormous. Their expectations far out space the available material resources. The spiralling cost of energy hits the underdeveloped nations far harder than the industrialized West. The suffering of the poor masses in the Third World is intensifying. As Christians in the still rich West we should develop a deeper appreciation for the tenacity and complexity of the political, economic, social and racial problems in the Third World.

The theology of liberation is sensitive to the heart cry of the oppressed in the Third World. I hold in high regard its compassion, its commitment and its social insights. Through liberation theology's emphasis on this world's activities, we are forced to realize once again that the Gospel is not just for the world to come, but also for the here and now. God cares about what happens in this world.

The Gospel gives hope in this world, for this world and *beyond* this world. We cannot concentrate exclusively on individual salvation. Liberation theology is right in its debunking of the privatization of the Gospel. The Gospel should not be used to induce people to abide meekly by the status quo by promising justice and relief from hunger in the sweet by and by. Christians cannot be uncritical of whatever authority there might be in power.

I am disturbed by the trend among North American evangelicals and fundamentalists towards the political right. Some have gone as far as to the unquestioning support of right-wing regimes in the Third World. A critical stance towards either right or left should be maintained. Social concern must accompany the spread of the Gospel. There must be a Word and deed ministry. You cannot separate the two. The Gospel is for the total man as he lives and works or subsists in the world.

Liberation theology draws our attention to the great needs in the Third World, but we cannot be its fellow travellers. Since it is beyond the scope of a brief series of articles to give an in-depth study and analysis of the theology of liberation, I want to conclude with just a brief critique.

I. The theology of liberation is not a theology but an ideology. Christianity is reduced to a concern for the here and now, without any dimension for what is yet to come. It is man-centered. Man can change his own destiny. He will make his own new world. He will work out his own salvation.

God will watch on the side lines. Its confessed basis is man's social condition and not God's revelation. Not the Bible, but man's needs formulate the theology of liberation. As an ideology it has surrendered to the revolutionary spirit of our age.

Jacques El Iul comments: "Fifty years ago, it would never have occurred to Christians to favour such movements. But it is fair to say the dominating ideology everywhere is the socializing, anti-colonialist ideology, and 'advanced' Christians fall in line and march along on the road to violence."

2. A Christian has his citizenship in two worlds. We must not forget that the Bible still teaches that the Christian is a pilgrim. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). Our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20; I Pet. 1:4). A Christian's loyalty is to the heavenly kingdom. And his citizenship in the heavenly world should control his judging, feeling and working in this world. The Christian maybe in the world, but his heart and "ties" are elsewhere. He owes no allegiance to this world.

3. Liberation theologians, who advocate revolution, are naive romanticists. Simone Weil observes: "Throughout history, men have suffered and died in order to emancipate the oppressed. Their efforts, when they have not been in vain, have only ended in replacing one regime of oppression by another." And a scholar from the Third World, the Filipino, Pedro Salgoda, remarks: "However poor a people may be, they would rather stick to the little they have, than embark in so risky and violent an endeavor. And this is what really frustrates idealistic revolutionaries, they go to the mountains thinking the masses will follow them only to find out, they are alone. Rather than undertake a revolution where success seems dim, is it not more worthwhile to devote more efforts to the non-violent solution through social organizational power?"

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