

Liberation Theology

The class struggle

The connection between Latin American and Asian theology of liberation and Marxism is obvious. The claim is made that there can be no systematic theology without an analysis of Karl Marx. Everything is to be interpreted in terms of the class struggle. Theology must situate itself in the context of the revolutionary struggle. However, the liberation theologians do look to communist Russia as just another exploiting power. They prefer to use the word socialism rather than communism.

An anonymous Filipino writes that, within the context of the situation in his nation, Marxism-Leninism-Mao-TseTung Thought (MLMTT) is the theory that will guide and lead the national and social liberation movement to victory. He says that the understanding of the faith and the Roman Catholic Church has to find its context in and be shaped by the oppressive reality in Philippine society as analytically viewed by the revolutionary theory of MLMTT. The Church is to serve the revolution.

Father C.G. Arevalo, S.J., Professor of Ecclesiology and Theology of Atone ment at the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, has lectured extensively on the theology of liberation in the Philippines and in other parts of Asia. And he writes in a similar vein, but without the strong emphasis on Marxist analysis, as his anonymous fellow Filipino liberationist.

He maintains that Filipino Christians must develop a new style of theological vision which is relevant for today. He calls this new theology the "theology of the signs of the times." This theology has as its point of departure neither Scripture nor the "data of tradition" but "what is going on in the world." This theology begins with man and not with God and His revelation.

The basis of theology is not the Bible, but the economic-social-political analysis of the conditions in which millions of poor are living throughout the world. It must discover "the aspiration of man." Furthermore, the Holy Spirit works through the widespread "secular desires" of our times. "Dialogue with the world is not just useful for the Church, it is necessary because the Holy Spirit is also speaking to us through the world." So this theology is not for armchair theologians, and not even for the man in the street. It must lead to direct action. It is inherently revolutionary.

Since revolution plays an important part in the theology of liberation, it tends towards violence. Roman Catholic priests throughout the Philippines recently read a pastoral letter which was signed by all of the country's 98 bishops. The bishops warned that incitement to revolutionary violence is criminally irresponsible. But the bishops also declared that in the face "of manifest, longstanding tyranny," the use of force "is not absolutely ruled out." However, a growing number of Catholics, influenced by the theology of liberation, believe that the only way to overcome institutionalized violence, which crushes the poor and the weak and families, is "through an armed struggle."

F. Sionil Jose wrote in an essay "*The Christian Revolutionary*," I am a socialist in the sense that I believe in the class struggle, that it is up to the poor to wage war – and here I am taking war to mean political and/or physical confrontation – with the rich, the oligarchy. I am also a Marxist, having derived inspiration from the profound observations of Marx although I do not subscribe to his economic theories, which, we all know, have been disproven. I am, however, a firm believer in the dignity of the individual, in the existence of God. And it is precisely because I believe in these two fundamentals that I justify socialism, and the fight for justice by the many who are poor against the few who are rich."

He also believes "that this oligarchy is not worth saving, the only alternative is for the oligarchs to be wiped out, by force if necessary, so that this country will move forward."

But it must also be said that not every liberation theologian is a proponent of change through violent revolution. There are those who adhere to the philosophy of non-violence. For example, Archbishop Helder Camera, of Recife, Brazil, is noted as a leading champion of non-violence. "My personal conviction," he says, "is that of a pilgrim of Peace . . .; personally, I would prefer a thousand times to be killed than to kill." And he writes: "Non-violence means believing more passionately in the force of truth, justice, and love than in the force of wars, murder and hatred."

Johan D. Tangelder
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