

# Liberation Theology

## Sin and Liberation

Liberation theology is a systematic attempt to pour the newest wine into the old skins of traditional theological language. Well known concepts are reinterpreted.

### Salvation

What is salvation in liberation theology? Liberation theology undercuts the teaching of the Reformation - justification by faith alone. Liberationists virtually equate salvation with socio-economic-political liberation. Liberation has the marks of a "do-it-yourself" gospel. Little is said about personal prayer and a dynamic relationship with the personal God, Whom we know through Jesus Christ His Son. Mysticism and the discipline of piety appear to be incidental.

Professor C.G. Arevalo of the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines, says about salvation: "What then is it that finally gets you into the Kingdom of God? If it is necessarily special revelation or interior faith or membership in the church, what is it that the saved Buddhist, that the saved Muslim and even the saved unbeliever brings with him when he meets St. Peter at the door of Paradise? And the answer is 'the operative practice of charity, deeds of charity, deeds of love!' And then we rediscover (with some amazement!) that this is what the Gospel has been saying all along. In Matthew 25, Jesus puts only one test in the Last Judgment. 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you visited me.'"

### Liberation

Liberation theology is committed to the liberation of men from all sorts of oppression. Frequent reference is made to the Israelites' exodus. The exodus constitutes a political act in which Israel is liberated from the bondage of oppression. "Let my people go" is the constant refrain. So liberation today must be seen in the context of political liberation.

Professor Arevalo writes that the Church must take the side of the poor. The only ministry of the Church is with the oppressed and the destitute. The Church's mission is on the horizontal level. Arevalo suggests: "Liberation is the effort of an underdeveloped people to break out of a condition of underdevelopment, dependency, marginality in which the present relations with developed nations and the dominance of ruling oligarchies make it impossible for the majority of the people to arrive at the economic growth, social development, political participation ... The church is the privileged instrument; institute, raised up by Christ to work within the world, to work within history to help prepare mankind to become the Kingdom of God."

## **Sin**

The doctrine of original sin plays no part in the thinking of the liberation theologian. Sin is seen in social rather than in personal dimensions. It becomes concrete in the social structures of our society.

Liberation theologians have much to say about unjust social structures, but very little about individual sinners. However, sin is still man's revolt against the holy God in order to enthrone himself. Man is still a rebel by nature and prone to hate God and his neighbours. Sin leads to dehumanization and despair. God alone can transform lives.

The cross is more than a sign of liberation. Freedom without Christ's finished work on the cross and its relation to sin is a delusive dream. Donald G. Miller, a spokesman for orthodoxy, writes: "The truth that men are bound by an enslavement that they can never conquer; that however desirable freedom from the oppression of external circumstances is, such freedom can never take the place of that freedom from sin, which is God's act in Christ."

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