

Liberation Theology

A restructured society

"If the theology of the future pursues the logic of secularization to the very end, it will arrive at the atheistic nadir where Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre are awaiting radical Christians with open arms." – Dr. Vernon C . Grounds.

A common trend in modern theology is the de-emphasis on the concern of traditional theology and a preoccupation with social structures as key to build a better world. The world and this side of eternity hold the interest of the modern theologian. He has no interest in questions related to life after death, heaven or hell, or the new heaven and earth to come. The kingdom of God has to come through a restructured society. So revolution must be included as a trend in current theology. This is partially the background of the theology of Liberation. The two theologians who have made a major contribution to the development of the theology of liberation are Jurgen Moltmann and Johannes B. Oetz.

Jurgen Moltmann(1926-)

In the midst of the 1960's the voice of Jurgen Moltmann, professor of systematic theology at the University of Tubigen, began to be heard in America. At first some American evangelicals were encouraged to think that at last Biblically oriented theology had come from Germany. But this proved not to be the case. It was an illusion.

Moltmann's thinking has been bound up with his experiences of the last world war, the reconstruction of Germany and the radical protest movement of the 1960's. Moltmann's passion for human liberation from oppression led to his development of the theology of hope. In the background of this theology is the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch.

According to Bloch, Karl Marx failed to see the role which theology has played in bringing about the universal kingdom of God.

Moltmann, influenced by Bloch, argues that the Christian principle that relates best to the Marxist critique of religion is the concept of hope and all that is implied therein. And this hope is firmly rooted in the present. Perhaps we may say that the theology of hope is a revision of Marxism dressed up in Biblical terminology. This theology addresses itself to the problem of bringing hope to the oppressed and poor of the world.

Moltmann's theology of hope is a political theology. He writes: "Political hermeneutics sets out to recognize the social and economic influences on theological institutions and languages, in order to bring their liberating content in to the political dimension and to make them relevant towards really freeing men from their misery in certain vicious circles."

Moltmann's Christ is the God of the poor, the humiliated. He says: "The rule of Christ who was crucified for political reasons can only be extended through liberation from forms of rule which make men servile and apathetic and the political religions which give them stability."

Moltmann does neither totally condemn violence nor fully endorse it in the revolutionary struggle for the new world. He says that if a person can achieve the aims of revolution only through the use of violence, the act can be accepted even if it cannot be endorsed. The Christian concept of love will warn revolutionaries that the humane goals of the revolution may easily be brought into disrepute through excessive violence.

As Moltmann suggests: "If the revolutionary goal is a more fully realized humanity, then revolutionaries cannot afford to be inhuman during the so-called transitional period."

Johannes B. Metz (1928-)

Not only Moltmann, but also the political theology of Metz represents an important source of the theology of liberation. Metz was born in Welluck, Germany and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1954. He is a doctor, of philosophy and theology and is a professor of fundamental theology at the University Munster.

Metz understands his theology to be a critical correction of present day "privatized" faith. In his essay, *The Privatization of Religion*, he writes: "The deprivatizing of theology is the primary critical task of political theology." He says that the object of Christian hope is not private salvation. Salvation must be understood in the socio-political sense. The Christian religion has been charged with a public responsibility to criticize and to liberate. Metz contends that the real sins of man are social evils, the corrupt structures of society and alienation.

The liberation theologians have welcomed the new European theologies and their underscoring of the political dimensions of the Christian faith, the criticism of social structures, the correction of theological individualism, its man-centeredness and its stimulus to political awareness and action.

Johan D. Tangelder
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