

Liberation theology

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Liberation theology is a school of theology within Christianity, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. It emphasises the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, particularly through political activism. Its theologians consider sin the root source of poverty, recognizing sin as capitalism, and capitalism as class war by the rich against the poor.

Liberation Theologians use political theory, primarily Marxism, to help understand how to combat poverty. Some elements of certain liberation theories have been rejected by the Catholic Church.^[1] At its inception, liberation theology was predominantly found in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. It is often cited as a form of Christian socialism, and it has enjoyed widespread influence in Latin America and among the Jesuits, although its influence diminished within Catholicism liberation theologians were harshly admonished by Pope John Paul II (leading to the curtailment of its growth).

The current Pope, Benedict XVI, has long been known as an opponent of certain strands of liberation theology, and issued several condemnations of tendencies within it whilst head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).^[2]

In sociological terms, openly available data from the University of Michigan-based World Values Survey, initiated by Professor Ronald Inglehart suggest the following strength of the political left (value of 3 on a 0 to 10 point scale) among the regular Roman Catholic Church goes around the globe and over time. The data suggest that Christian socialism and the Christian left continue to constitute significant phenomena in many countries.

[edit] Overview

Liberation Theology posits fighting poverty by suppressing its source: sin. In so doing, it explores the relationship between Christian theology — especially Roman Catholic theology — and political activism, especially about social justice, poverty, and human rights. The Theology's principal methodological innovation is seeing theology from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed (socially, politically, etc.); per Jon Sobrino, S.J., the poor are a privileged channel of God's grace. According to Phillip Berryman, liberation theology is "an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor's suffering,

their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and the Catholic faith and Christianity through the eyes of the poor".

Liberation theologians base their social action upon the Bible scriptures describing the mission of Jesus, the Christ, as but bringing a sword (social unrest), e.g. Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 10:34, Luke 22:35-38 Matthew 26:51-52 — and *not* as bringing peace (social order). This Biblical interpretation is a call to *action* against poverty, and the sin engendering it, and as a call to arms, to effect Jesus Christ's mission of justice in this world. In practice, the Theology includes the Marxist concept of perpetual class struggle, thus emphasizing the person's individual self-actualization as part of God's divine purpose for mankind.

Besides teaching at (some) Roman Catholic universities and seminaries, liberation theologians often may be found working in Protestant Christian schools, often working directly with the poor. In this context, sacred text interpretation is Christian theological praxis.

[edit] History

Created in 1955 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the CELAM (*Conselho Episcopal Latino Americano* - Latin American Episcopal Conference) pushed the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) toward a more socially oriented stance. During the next four years, CELAM prepared for the 1968 Medellín Conference in Colombia. Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, who was a central figure in Medellín and who was later at the Vatican, said that the gathering of Roman Catholic bishops officially supported a version of liberation theology similar to that of the Vatican's CDF in 1984. This began in the X Meeting of CELAM in Mar del Plata and the message Pope Paul VI issued to the Latin American Bishops, Church and Problems. Cardinal López Trujillo, in his account of those historical events, also said that the origin of liberation theology was simultaneously created by the CELAM's Reflection Task Force, of which he was president, and a Brazilian theologian from Princeton, Rubem Alves, who in 1968 wrote Towards a Theology of Liberation.

Among the several essays published on liberation theology in the 1970s, one of the most famous is by the Peruvian Catholic priest, Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P. In his 1972 book, A Theology of Liberation, he theorized a combination of Marxism and the social-Catholic teachings contributing to a socialist current in the Church that was influenced by the Catholic Worker Movement and the French Christian youth worker organization, "Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne." It was also influenced by Paul Gauthier's "The Poor, Jesus and the Church" (1965).

CELAM as such never supported liberation theology, which was frowned on by the Vatican, with Pope Paul VI trying to slow the movement after the 1962-1965 Council. Cardinal Samore, in charge of relations between the Roman Curia and the CELAM as the

leader of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, was ordered to put a stop to this orientation, which was judged antithetical to the Catholic Church's global teachings.

With Cardinal López Trujillo's election in 1972 as general secretary of the CELAM, another liberationist current began to take force in Latin America. This one was an orthodox point of view which became predominant in CELAM as well as in the Roman Curia after the General Meeting of Latin American Bishops in Puebla in 1979.

At the 1979 CELAM's Conference of Puebla, the more ecclesiastical reorientation was met by strong opposition from the liberal part of the clergy, which assumed the concept of a "preferential option for the poor," that had been stamped by Bishop Ricard Durand, who acted as president of the Commission about Poverty in Medellin.

Sebastian Kappen, an Indian theologian, published *Jesus and Freedom* in 1977, with an introduction by the French activist François Houtart. In 1980, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asked the General of the Society of Jesus (of which Kappen was a member) to disavow this book. Kappen responded with a pamphlet entitled "Censorship and the Future of Asian Theology". No further action was taken by the Vatican on this matter.

A new trend blossomed from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI)'s and Pope John Paul II's condemnations of the Marxist current of liberation theology, which is called Reconciliation Theology and has had a great influence among clergy and laity in Latin America. Nonetheless, *The New York Times* reported on the eve of Pope Benedict's 2007 visit to Brazil that liberation theology remains popular in Latin America, with Brazil alone the home to over one million Biblical study circles reading and interpreting the Bible from this perspective. ^[3]