

THE HISTORY OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

I. HISTORICAL ANTECEDANTS

A. 1930-1955

- Urbanization (secularization) and industrialization
- Pluralism: Liberalism, secularism, Communism
- Protestantism
- Catholicism with Shallow Roots: The (colonial and post-colonial) Church of “Christendom” enters into crisis.
- Catholic Responses
 - a. Social Christianity (30's): Christian Democratic Parties, Catholic Action
 - b. CNBB ('52), CELAM ('55), CLAR ('58)

B. 1955-1965

- The Cuban Revolution, 1959
- Crisis of the development model of industry plus import-substitution. Alliance for Progress
- Vatican II, 1962-1965. Called the most important event in Christianity in the 20th century: 16 documents (4 Constitutions, 9 Decrees, 3 Declarations). John XXIII's dream of a “church of the poor”
- Charismatic Leadership in Lat. Amer. (Manuel Larraín, Hélder Câmara, bishops McGrath, Arns, Pironio, Proano, Silva Henríquez, Méndez Arceo, etc.)
- ISAL (Iglesia y Sociedad en Am. Lat., '60), progressive protestants

II. THE HISTORY OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN FOUR STAGES

In tracing this history, we distinguish four levels of the reality we are analyzing, four threads in the tapestry:

- (1) Social reality,
- (2) The Church, with its pastoral activity,
- (3) Work of Theologians,
- (4) The magisterium (official Catholic teaching).

First Stage: The Birth of TL, 1968-71. Medellín Conference and Aftermath

1. Social Reality: Economic crisis, political polarization
 - Military coups, repression. Rule by technocrats
 - Rockefeller Report, 1969
 - Allende (Chile '70) and Velasco (Peru '68)
2. Pastoral practice: renewal
 - Social commitment, conscientization/radicalization of pastoral agents. Model of Camilo Torres (d. 1966), etc.

- Diffusion and implementation of Medellin documents. CELAM training and formation centers. Medellin, Quito, Santiago. G. Gutiérrez, E. Dussel, J.L. Segundo, J. Comblín, S. Galilea, J. Marins y E. Beltrán (CEBs), I. Illich, L. Gera. La CLAR. The struggle over the interpretation de Medellín. CLAR, the Latin American Conference of Religious, is very influential.
 - Groups of committed priests (mostly): ONIS (Peru), Golconda (Colombia), Priests for the Third World (Argentina), The 80 (Chile). Christians for Socialism (founded, Nov.1971).
3. First writings of TL
- G. Gutiérrez, “Hacia una TL” (1968). Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation* (‘71).
 - Books by H. Assmann, S. Galilea, J. L. Segundo, R. Alves.
 - Major themes: LIBERATION, REIGN OF GOD, METHOD. DEPENDENCY THEORY
4. Magisterium
- Medellin documents (Sept.-Oct. 1968). “Vatican II in light of the reality of Latin America.” Ambiguity, seeds of TL.
 - Wider impact: “Justice in the World” (1971), Synod on evangelization (1974)

**Second Stage: Maturation and Repression.
From Sucre (1972) to Puebla (1979)**

1. Social reality
- More coups: Bolivia (‘71), Chile, (‘73), Argentina (‘76). Turn to the right in Peru (‘75) and Ecuador. Congress disbanded in Uruguay (‘73). Meanwhile Somoza (Nicaragua), Stroessner (Paraguay), Duvalier (Haiti). (Democracy “lite” in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Costa Rica.)
 - Repression (death, torture)
 - Doctrine of National Security State
 - Jimmy Carter’s human rights policy
2. Pastoral practice
- Persecution, martyrdom. The Banzer Plan (‘75)
 - Polarization. Christians for Socialism meeting of Apr. ‘72 and aftermath.
 - “Coup” in CELAM at Sucre, Bolivia (Nov. ‘72). Alfonso López Trujillo elected Gen. Sec. of CELAM. CELAM formation program dismantled, TL proponents purged. Anti-TL campaign. R. Vekemans, CEDIAL, Bogota (‘71).
 - Preparations for Puebla: Which is the biggest challenge, secularization or poverty/injustice? Manipulation and secretiveness; planning in the hands of López Trujillo, Card. Baggio and Vekemans.
3. Theologians
- Themes: GOD OF LIFE VS. IDOLS OF DEATH, CHRISTOLOGY (L. Boff and J. Sobrino), POPULAR RELIGION
 - EATWOT (begins 1976). Class, race, gender and imperialism.
4. Magisterium

- Local episcopal documents
- Puebla: 1300 paragraphs. On one hand, on the other. Medellin re-affirmed. “False interpretations” criticized or condemned. “Liberacion integral” affirmed. TL not mentioned. Persecution and martyrs ignored (!). Option for poor, option for youth. “Faces” of the poor (nos. 32ff.). CEBs.

**Third Stage: Controversy and Systematization.
From Puebla (1979) to Santo Domingo (1992)**

1. Social Reality

- Deepening economic crisis: the “lost decade” (GDP of L.A. fell 9% in ‘80s). External debt crisis (1981ff.), structural adjustment programs.
- War and counter-revolution in Central America. Sandinista triumph (1979), with broad Christian participation.
- Reagan and the two Santa Fe documents (1980 and 1988): TL threatens US interests.
- A wave of democratization. Peru (‘80), Honduras (‘82), Argentina (‘83), Brazil and Guatemala (‘85), Chile (‘88), Paraguay and Panama (‘89).
- Fall of Soviet communism (‘89-’91). Defeat of Sandinistas (‘90). Crisis of socialism (and of capitalism).

2. Pastoral practice

- Participation of Christians in the Sandinista revolution. Priests in gov’t. Pope visits Central America, 1983.
- Martyrdom of Archbp. Oscar Romero (1980).
- Appointment of conservative anti-TL bishops. (Option for church-institution and for “orthodox” teaching.)
- The challenge of Pentecostal Protestantism (“sectas”)

3. Theologians

- SYSTEMATIZATION (The “Teología y Liberación” project, with 55 volumes planned. Mysterium liberationis).
- The “fall of utopias.” Less questioning of the economic system as a whole. Exception: Hinkelammert, etc.
- Themes: SPIRITUALITY. BRIDGE-BUILDING BETWEEN TL AND THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION AND THE MAGISTERIUM. FEMINIST THEOLOGY WITHIN TL. C. Boff on method.

4. Magisterium

- New Evangelization” (John Paul II, Haiti, 1983)
- Two Instructions of Ratzinger’s CDF, 1984 (two key concerns: Marxism and church unity) and 1986
- Leonardo Boff’s “obsequious silence,” 1986 (10 mos.). (*Charism and Power*).
- Letter of John Paul II to Brazilian bishops, 1986
- Santo Domingo, 1992. From see, judge, act to judge, act. CEBs and apostolic movements.

**Fourth Stage: The Conservative Moment.
Santo Domingo, Aparecida y Benedict XVI**

1. Social Reality

- Globalization
- Stagnation and mounting debt. Financial crisis. Mexico 1996, Argentina 2001-02.
- Socio-economic *exclusion*. Social disintegration, spreading crime.
- Crisis de democracies. Militarism and terrorism.
- The growing influence of the mass media on culture and political life

2. Pastoral Practice

- Facing the urban challenge
- Apostolic Movements. Conservative groups like Opus Dei, Liberation y Communion, the Legionaires of Christ, the Neo-Catecumenate.

3. Theologians: Re-thinking

- The theological critique of economic theory. F. Hinkelammert, E. Dussel, Jung Mo Sung.
- Themes: FEMINISM, ECOLOGY, CULTURE, AFRO-AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY, SOLIDARITY VS. EXCLUSION, CRITIQUE OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY, CRÍTICAL RE-READING OF THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION
- The challenge of postmodern thought

4. Magisterium

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992
- Jubilee and debt (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, 1994). Critique of neo-liberal capitalism. Humanize globalization; globalize solidarity (John Paul II).
- *Ecclesia in America* (1999) and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004)
- The Aparecida Conference, 2007
- The magisterium of Benedict XVI. *Deus caritas est* (2004) and *Veritas in caritate* (2009)