

Liberation Theology: Towards the re-configuration of society and re-creation of the Church in Latin America

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Introduction

Rendezvous with God in history

Poverty and injustice are two main social realities of our time. Millions of people around the world live in a status of poverty struggling for survival and without access to clean water, food, education and medication in order to sustain them in life. Moreover, the whole economic structure of society is driven by beneficial and political powers which use the system of justice according to their plans, ignoring the weak and the poor. The problem of global poverty is nothing new; however, it has been brought a new insight due to the movement of *Liberation Theology*, which is characterised by the intense pursuit of the total liberation and freedom of peoples. The representatives of that movement say that liberating means offering life to those poor people who daily suffer. Moreover, Liberation Theology gives an important opportunity to voiceless people to stand up and defend themselves and their right to meditate about their faith through their experiences. The Catholic Church in Latin America tried to interpret the historical moments under the light of the Gospel and using the spirit of the local culture¹.

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1. G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Artos Zois, Athens 2012, p. 23 (Θεολογία τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης, translated into Greek by K. Palaiologos). Original text: *A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York 1973.

It is a fact that in the modern world we communicate faster and easier; consequently, it is impossible to produce a theology without being influenced. Besides, the age-old issue of the rich and the poor has been given global dimensions, because of the consequences of what is called globalisation. Additionally, it is a generally accepted truth that the globalised economic structures have simplified worldwide trade, but at the same time a responsible examination of their social justice, economic and ecological sustainability is needed. “17,000 children die of under-nourishment every day. Three billion people worldwide have less than two dollars a day on which to live. Nationally and internationally, the gap between poor and rich is widening”².

Liberation Theology, which I will try to analyse in the next pages, represents a theology of salvation offered as a gift from God in history. History is very important, since humans’ actions are registered in the historical context as answers to God’s initiatives and calling and also in history, we can trace the fundamental unity proceeded by God, founded by Jesus’ salvific love, without abolishing human’s free will (*αὐτεξούσιον*). In other words, history offers the field where the liberating act of the oppressed can take place. According to liberation theologians within that historical framework the community has to accept that gift freely in order to build a fellowship of brotherhood. Therefore, people are liberated through their participation in the new life given by Jesus and through the communion they share with Him in the mystery of His death and resurrection.

1. Introducing the movement of Liberation Theology

Until the 60’s theology in the countries of Latin America was just a reflection of European styled theology, without any reference to the cultural and historical context of that region. Because of that situation theology became just a pure theoretical process describing the relation

2. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/a-poor-rich-country-wealth-and-poverty-as-a-challenge-to-the-churches>.

between humans and God lacking any realistic link with real life. Liberation Theology was actually the result of the *adulthood* of Latin America's society and it (Liberation Theology) came as a result of the critical Christian meditation under the light of Logos criticising the social conditions of life of the local communities. At the end of the day the people of Latin America decided to be the masters of their own destiny using in that process the arguments of Liberation Theology. Thus, they organised their collegial consciousness and religious and ethnic identity based on three points: 1) defending their right to live, 2) fighting for dignity and social justice, 3) fighting for their political, social, economic and religious liberation from all forms of exploitation and oppression.

Liberation Theology is a synthesis of theological, social, political, economic and ecclesiastical phenomena, which can be divided into three major time periods: first, the *preparation phase* (1962-1968), second, the *formulation phase* (1968-1975) and third the *systematization phase* (1976-until now).

The first phase started simultaneously with the commencement of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, while during the second phase Liberation theologians encountered representatives coming from different theological movements such as *black theology* and *feminist theology*³. The Conference of the Latin America Diocese in Medellin (1968) developed the concept of so-called political captivity and the notion of exile and slavery. While the first impressions of enthusiasm had been lost, the conference in Medellin managed to inspire some new theological proposals addressed to the whole oikoumene. That is to say that the notion of *justice* and *peace* were actually the pillars upon which Liberation Theology was developed.

Within that framework in 1968 the famous theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez was the first to present to the public an analytical sketch of Liberation Theology. In May of the same year Hugo Assmann further developed the same theme and in 1972 the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff published a new book entitled *Jesus Christo Libertador*. Those three theological figures expressed that new theological trend.

3. For the first time Liberation Theology was connected with Black Theology and Feminist Theology in 1975 in Detroit U.S.A. See, S. Torres & J. Eagleson, *Theology in the Americas*, Orbis, New York 1976.

The Medellín's final decisions were received by the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America in a creative way seen through the perspective of the poor people. It is not a coincidence that the notion of growth and development was included into a number of official ecclesial texts of the Roman Catholic Church in '60s, such as *Pacem in terris* (1963), *Glaadium et Spes* (1965), *Populorum progressio* (1967). Thus, in 1968 the connection between the social class of the poor with Liberation Theology was made. In the phase of systematisation in 1976 Liberation Theology examined the procedure, the methodology, the new basis and the fundamental theological issues (Christology and Ecclesiology), which should be re-considered and re-orientated. Following this, liberation theologians became more pragmatists.

Clodovis Boff is the founder of Liberation's methodology since he developed a system based on the notion of liberating the poor people. To do this he used epistemological tools borrowed from the social sciences analysing the current and concrete social situation of Latin America. Then, he proceeded to a modernized hermeneutic mediation of the Bible using the sources of Christian tradition in order to advocate for the poor people. Finally, he proposed certain pastoral activities in the name of the Church so to tackle poverty's scandal. Thus, his methodology is based on the following three pillars: 1) analysis of the current social situation, 2) theological reflection and 3) pastoral activity⁴.

The third Conference of the Latin America Diocese in Puebla (1979) confirmed and re-affirmed the conclusions of Medellín's conference. In Puebla there is, for the first time, a notion of a need for "*a conversion of the Church in favour of the poor and for a total liberation*". This total liberation has a twofold analysis: a) liberation from the *individual sin* in a personal level and b) liberation from the *social sin* in an economic, social and political level⁵.

In other terms Liberation Theology came from the moral indignation of the local community due to the poverty and to the marginalisation of people. Hugo Assmann pointed out that: "the starting point of every

4. Cl. Boff, *Teologia e Prática. Teologia do Político e suas mediações*, Petrópolis 1978, p. 53.

5. L. A. Gallo, *Evangelizzare I poveri. La proposta del Documento di Puebla*, Rome 1983, p. 101.

modern Christian theology should be the current dramatic situation with the 30 million deaths of people annually, because of hunger and malnutrition ... it is necessary to save theology from its cynicism”⁶. Moreover, Liberation Theology is a new way of *doing theology* (πρᾶξις), and not a new way of *thinking theologically*. It has a practical and an empirical dimension more than a rhetorical and theoretical one; it is a theology of an active faith. According to Gutiérrez Liberation Theology is defined as a criticising function over the Church’s pastoral action, where criticising means to be prophetic⁷.

It is noteworthy that the key-word of liberation, which is linked with the notion of dependence, firstly appeared in ’60s in the academic research area of social studies and especially in pedagogical science⁸. It was then when Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul Sartre wrote about the collapse of political colonialism, as a system of exploitation of humans, natural resources and cultures by the powerful and developed countries. On the other hand, the countries of Latin America (and generally of the South) are trapped in an underdeveloped environment due to structural imbalance. According to the theory of dependence the under-development of the Southern countries is the by-product of the developed countries of the North. People who live in such a stressful economic situation and under such political pressure are subjected to the policy of dependence and are not engaged in a social and political relation of solidarity and freedom. Consequently, the term liberation comes in conflict with the term development and growth⁹.

The introduction into theological language of liberation terminology is an event of major importance, since it allows reconsideration of the word

6. H. Assmann, “Opresion – Liberacion. Desafio a los cristianos”, in *Teologia dalla prassi di liberazione. Saggio teologico nell’ America dipendente*, Assisi 1974, pp. 37-38.

7. G. Gutiérrez, *Teologia della liberazione. Prospettive*, Brescia 1972, p. 24.

8. It was in 1967 when the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire wrote his book *The Education as a practice of freedom*, Bell Hooks, 1994. It was actually an attempt to provide local society with a way out from its difficult situation using educational process as a tool. In other terms, he tried to tackle the issue of illiteracy though the development of the educational system. Only educated people are able to stand against the powerful, fighting for their own rights.

9. F. Fanon, *I dannati della terra*, Einaudi, Torino 1962, pp. 53-56.

freedom through the biblical spectrum. This linguistic renewal regarding the notion of liberation reflects in three levels:

1. Sociopolitical level, which means to set free oppressed people, marginalised tribes and under-estimated cultures.

2. Anthropological level, which means to look for the establishment of a humanised society.

3. Theological level, which means to liberate people from sin's sovereignty that is the very root of every kind of injustice and oppression¹⁰.

The strategy of the theological movement of Liberation was to bring together the oppressed in order to understand their situation through the process of *conscientization*, discovering the causes of their oppression and organizing themselves into movements and groups. Then they could claim what the current system could provide to them, such as better wages, working conditions, housing, education etc. Thereafter they could transform the current social situation in the direction of a new model, which includes wider participation, better balance between the social classes and better ways of living¹¹.

The peacemakers' work in '60s was a liberating practice full of solidarity for the neighbour and inspired by the gospel's salvific message. One of the greatest slogans of that time was the following: "Unless there is a sharing of life together with the poor people, there is a real liberating practice, since there is no true love, but only among equals". That concrete process of liberating people was at the same time a process of transfiguring history into God's Kingdom. We are witnessing an authentic Christian spirituality lived in a new historical context. However, Liberation Theology is not a recipe for all conditions and for any case; it is a rather proposed evangelical word having local characteristics and an ecumenical message. The combination of these two options (praying-acting) creates what they call "*practical application of contemplation*". It is not possible or easy to separate the former from the latter, since they are always combined (orthodoxy-orthopraxy). This is the very source of Liberation Theology, which in other terms provides the local Latin Christian community with a proposed life-style

10. G. Gutiérrez, *La forza storica dei poveri*, Queriniana, Brescia 1981, pp. 272.

11. J. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, Orbis Books, New York 1993, p. 11.

in accordance with the living word of the Gospel. The methodology of Liberation Theology relies on Faith in Jesus and Life in Community, where it is viewed together with the notion of Revelation and that of History. Faith is not some kind of stock truths, but it must be experienced within the Church's sacramental life. Faith in Christ and shared life in community are the main points of reference of liberation theologians. "Jesus revealed himself in history as one of us, so to become our eternal future in eschaton", says Gustavo Gutiérrez¹².

It is clear that Liberation Theology gives an extra emphasis to the biblical meaning of poverty, which constitutes the pillar of their theological mindset. There is a *rightful and preferential priority* of the poor *vis à vis* the rich regarding the calling of Jesus. The poor are the first to be called, but not the only ones, as this term of rightful priority does not have a dimension of exclusiveness or of uniqueness. For example, the Gentiles had equal access to the kingdom of heaven, although they did not serve God under the Law of the Old Testament.

Another message of Liberation Theology is the ecumenicity of God's love and His preference to the low and marginalised people. The poor are the chosen ones, not because they are better ethically speaking than the others, but because for God "*many who are first will be last, and many who are last, will be first*" in His Kingdom¹³. The ultimate criterion, of being in solidarity with poor people, is based primarily on our faith in God. That encountering with God's grace has a theocentric and not an anthropocentric dimension. Additionally, this realisation provides the Church with a prophetic charisma and duty to criticise the social, political and economic institutional forms, which distort real life.

It was some kind of an internal missionary activity of the Church, which was approved officially by the Conferences in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). Without any fear or hesitation, the Catholic Church in Latin America set herself in the service of the whole humanity, and not only of her Catholic members. Through that perspective was born the idea of "*the Church of the poor*", an expression used by the popes of

12. G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Artos Zois, Athens 2012, p. 55 (*Θεολογία τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης*, translated into Greek by K. Palaiologos).

13. *Matt.* 19, 30.

Rome John XIII and John-Paul II. What does this phrase exactly mean? It means that the Church should be poor, missionary, socially active and open to anyone, but giving special priority to the humble people of the world. It should also be considered a sign of the Kingdom of God on earth and in history. A result of this internal metamorphosis of the Catholic Church in Latin America was the establishment of the “*Christian base communities*, or *Bibles societies*, or *groups* for popular evangelisation”, where the Gospel became more accessible to poor people and also where the poor were able to share their life experiences taking part in the missionary service of the Church.

2. The message of Jesus to the poor

“*The blind receives their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them*”¹⁴. The poor people were always in the center of Jesus’ preaching and ministry. Even He became poor, so we can become rich. It is to them (the poor) that the Kingdom of God is announced, while their special place is confirmed by the beatitudes¹⁵. Because poor people have nothing either to lose, or to be attached to, they are ready to set themselves constantly open to the saving action of Christ¹⁶. Thus, Christ is presented as the protector of the poor, as the defender of the defendless, of the widow and of the orphans¹⁷. The elimination of poverty that prevents poor people from their rights has already begun by the proclamation of Jesus’ gospel. God’s Kingdom will put an end to the existing unrighteous world by creating a new brotherhood, a new community, based on sharing, solidarity, mutual respect, cooperation and love. That means that existing poverty is a challenge for ecumenical Christianity and for the justice that they claim and teach to the modern society.

14. *Matt.* 11, 5.

15. *Matt.* 5, 3-11.

16. *Luke* 6, 20.

17. J. Dupont, “Les Pauvres et la Pauvreté dans les Evangiles et les Actes”, in *La Pauvreté Evangélique*, Cerf, Paris 1971, pp. 50-51.

According to history powerful humans will always be able to abuse their power to exploit the weak, but according to the eschatological insight and understanding of the Gospel power based on materials (materialism) is a sign of weakness accompanied by greed, egoism and pride. The accumulation of wealth was never justified by Church and it was regarded worse than idolatry. Pagans adore God's creation, while greedy people adore themselves¹⁸. Poverty is a sign of a sinful situation created by humans' unjust behaviour; it is a scandal and an obvious manifestation of evil, while the poor are blessed, since they are the victims of hunger and oppression, but they are also the humble for whom Logos was incarnated. "Poverty is an evil and incompatible with the notion of the Kingdom of God, who has come in His fullness into history embracing the totality of human existence", as Gutiérrez describes it¹⁹. However, it must be clear that it is not poverty itself, which leads people to the Kingdom of Heaven, but the hope and mainly the faith-trust of the poor people addressed to Christ' ministry. The Gospel does not give an extra advantage to the poor people because of their social class, or because of their wretched economic situation. The entrance to Heaven will be a result of a voluntary free decision gifted by divine grace, and not a result imposed by the characteristics of some social group²⁰; otherwise, it would mean that God's judgment is put under certain circumstances.

Thus, in other words, we must clarify the difference between material poverty and spiritual poverty, which are inter-connected and inter-related. "*Material poverty*" is something really bad, something which is not desired by God and is synonymous with evil. People living in such situation are actually struggling to survive. However, being poor in the material sense does not always lead to God's acceptance and

18. St. Tsompanidis, "Ecumenical course for an "Alternative Globalization in the Service of Human and Earth" (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth = AGAPE) from the Orthodox Perspective", in *Biblical Theology of Liberation, Patristic Theology and Ambiguities of the Post-Modernity*, Indiktos, Athens 2012, p. 210 (Original text in Greek: Βιβλική Θεολογία της Απελευθέρωσης, Πατερική Θεολογία και Άμφισημίες της Νεωτερικότητας).

19. G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York 1973, p. 298.

20. A. Gelin, *Les Pauvres de Yahvé*, Cerf, Paris 1953, p. 145.

justification. Material poverty helps only, if it leads humans to God. On the other hand “*spiritual poverty*” means that someone is humble under the discipline of the cross, following the paradigm of Jesus on the Cross. Finally, there is a third option of understanding the poor which is identical to being in solidarity with the poor and, at the same time, protesting for the existence of this social phenomenon of poverty. That kind of “*poverty in solidarity*” is associated with the prisoner, the oppressed, the blind, the deaf and the leper of the eschatological gospel and of the historical context.

3. God or Mammon?

Wealth, according to the New Testament, most of the time is an obstacle to discipleship and obedience to Jesus. It is expected from those who wish to follow Him to share their properties, their goods, and their fortune with those who are in need. Christ himself denounced wealth identifying money with the Devil²¹. Because of money human relations are destroyed. Money is also a symbol of domination, enslavement, ruling and exploitation, and it is contrary to the authority of Jesus. No compromise then can be made between those two, and for this reason we have to render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s²². Wealth is dangerous because it ties men with material treasures and earthly worries and when time comes it is extremely difficult for rich people to renounce their worldly goods, in order to accept God’s world by choosing their neighbor²³. The rich man bases his hopes only on the logic of the power of money and not on Divine providence. Jesus instead is asking from his disciples to follow Him in full trust.

However, there is a danger in suggesting that following Christ must be a path only for poor people; but Jesus indicates mostly the path of love your neighbour and not poverty itself. He rather declares that solidarity with the poor and the needy is the highway to salvation. As

21. *Matt.* 6, 24.

22. *Matt.* 22, 21.

23. R. Bultmann, *Le Christianisme Primitif*, Payot, Paris 1969, pp. 104-105.

Christians we must not have an attitude of triumphalism, but a mindset of serving the suffering one, following the prototype who is Jesus on the Cross (*sequela Christi-imitatio Christi*)²⁴. Through that perspective poverty becomes an act of liberation and love; otherwise, poverty is just a condition of life. In other terms, poverty is a challenge for the whole Christian community of faith evoking the announcement of Jesus' justice and the denouncement of Man's injustice.

4. The notion of freedom according to Liberation Theology

From the beginning the notion of liberation was something universal and total, which could be distinguished in three levels:

1) Liberation from any economic, political and social conditions of oppression.

2) Personal metamorphosis-transfiguration, which leads humans to an internal freedom from any kind of oppression.

3) Liberation from the sin, which (sin) is the deepest root for any kind of slavery. Sin is actually the cause of the rupture of the relationship among humans themselves and between humans and God.

Liberation Theology tried to answer the following crucial questions: What is the role of a Christian in an unjust world? How can we say, as a Church, to the poor people that God loves them, when they live in conditions of death? The answer is the following: there is only one way to be a disciple of Jesus and a true Christian, by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation²⁵.

In other words, Liberation Theology results from the confrontation between the life of the resurrected Jesus and the daily death of the poor people living in Latin America. Liberation Theology is about liberation of the oppressed and marginalised people from the systematic economic and political exploitation they suffer from. Also, there are different

24. B. Clogg, *The Christian Character in the Early Church*, Epworth Press, London 1944, pp. 92-93. Synonymous to *sequel Christi* is when the disciples are called to "deny themselves, to take up their cross, to live for others, to grow according to the stature of Christ".

25. L. Boff & Cl. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, New York 1986, p. 7.

levels of oppression such as: racial, sexual, ethnic, economic. It is clear that we have an enlargement of the notion of being poor. According to the liberation theologians the term “poor” includes also black and indigenous people, vulnerable women and the orphans. Consequently, it goes beyond the classic concept of poverty which uses only numbers and statistics. The poor do not call themselves poor: “*Poor, no! Poor is the end. We are the dispossessed but fighting*”. The poor, according to Leonardo Boff, is the disfigured image of God, the suffering and rejected servant of Yahweh and the persecuted Nazarene. Thus, from the standpoint of the faith and mission of the Church poor are not merely human beings with needs, but they are persons looking for the total restoration and justification of their rights to live in dignity within the modern society²⁶. Thus, Liberation Theology aimed at making non-persons full human beings and new men and women according to the “new Adam”. Commitment to the spirit of liberation is even very possible to lead finally to martyrdom.

5. Final Remarks – Conclusions

Concluding this paper, I would like to point out a few final remarks regarding the impact of Liberation Theology firstly within the Roman Catholic Church and secondly the consequences of that movement at a worldwide level.

After the theological proposal offered by the Liberation movement a new theological trend took place which was at the same time a challenge for ecumenical theology. It is a theological meditation that was developed gradually and not always without problems and confrontations. Almost simultaneously with the birth of Liberation Theology in Latin America Europe saw the development of the so-called *political theology*. Many scholars believe that these two theological mainstreams are identical; but in reality, this is not accurate, since both of them tried to face different challenges in different backgrounds. The representatives of political

26. Op. cit., L. Boff & Cl. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, New York 1986, p. 32.

theology dealt with the issue of post-modernity such as individual freedom, human rights and rationalism, within European culture, while the theologians from the Latin American region had as partners in the dialogue the pioneers of public revolution²⁷.

Liberation Theology has two major dimensions: a) salvific (freedom as a divine gift) and b) social-moral (liberty as a social duty). The liberation's representatives gave "flesh" to the spiritual notion of freedom²⁸. Until the '60s, liberty and freedom were only seen through a theoretical perspective. Thus, they analysed the historical causes, meanings and reasons of life in order to avoid discussing freedom in an abstract content. They refused St. Augustine's anthropology, according to which the material world is just a temporary habitat. On the contrary they proceed to the historicisation of liberty imprinted in concrete social, political and economic conditions of life. For instance, the Kingdom of Heaven does not derive from this world; however, it is revealed within the historical context of the present time.

Another controversial issue is the extent of Marxist influence upon the systematisation of Liberation's basic principles. If that was the case, then the whole suggestion of Liberation Theology was at stake either because it would be part of a political encounter, or because of losing its pure theological and intellectual character.

Another divisive question was the use of term *Iglesia popular* (popular Church) by Latin America's theologians. That particular terminology gave the impression of separating the Church into two different parts: the Church of the bishops versus the Church of the people.

For these reasons the Roman Catholic Church had initially been hesitant about the movement of Liberation Theology. Specifically, in 1977, after a long period of time, an official Declaration was published by the International Theological Commission, where they presented (Karl

27. C. Katerelos, "Paull Knitter: With Liberation Theology within Religious Pluralism", in *Theologia*, vol. 13 (2013), pp. 21-56. See here, pp. 22-23 (Original text in Greek: Paull Knitter: «Μὲ τὴ Θεολογία τῆς ἀπελευθέρωσης στὸ θρησκευτικὸ πλουραλισμό»).

28. Th. Papatheanasiou, "Perspectives of the Patristic Thought for a Theology of Liberation", in *Biblical Theology of Liberation, Patristic Theology and Ambiguities of the Post-Modernity*, Indiktos, Athens 2012, p. 168 (Original text in Greek: Βιβλικὴ Θεολογία τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης, Πατερικὴ Θεολογία καὶ Ἀμφισημίες τῆς Νεωτερικότητας).

Lehmann, Heins Schurmann, Olegario Gonzalez de Cardedal, Hans Urs von Balthasar) the *pros and cons* of that new theological movement.

But are these accusations against the Liberation Theology justified?

The theologians of the Liberation movement supported the opinion that they borrowed some important key-points in order to analyse social reality, but at the same time they kept a selective and critical approach towards Marxist ideology, and not a integral acceptance of it. Moreover, the theologians of Liberation clarified that the term *popular Church* does not have the meaning of being an alternative Church, which would contradict the official Church. It means that they desire to get the Church closer to the lower social classes²⁹.

Finally, Liberation Theology managed, while facing the challenges of modernity, to demonstrate the meaning of preaching anew the Gospel within the context of the Latin American region. “*It is not the Gospel which has been spoiled, but it is “we” who have started understanding it better according to the new context*”, declared Gustavo Gutiérrez.³⁰ Therefore, the notion of *contextuality* and *multiculturation* played a major role in the development of the theological meditation under the light of faith.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ἡ Θεολογία τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης: γιὰ τὴν ἀναδιαμόρφωση
τῆς κοινωνίας καὶ τὴν ἀναδημιουργία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας
στὴ Λατινικὴ Ἀμερικὴ

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Στὴν παροῦσα μελέτη ἐξετάζεται τὸ κίνημα τῆς Θεολογίας τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης, τὸ ὁποῖο ναὶ μὲν ἀναπτύχθηκε στὶς χῶρες τῆς Λατινικῆς

29. R. Gibellini, *Theology of the 20th century*, Artos Zois, Athens 2002, pp. 430-479 (Ἡ Θεολογία τοῦ 20οῦ αἰῶνα, translated into Greek by P. Ifantis).

30. G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Artos Zois, Athens 2012, p. 87 (Θεολογία τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης, translated into Greek by K. Palaiologos).

Ἀμερικῆς, εἶχε δὲ ἰσχυρὸ ἀντίκτυπο σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη κατὰ τὶς δεκαετίες τοῦ '60 καὶ τοῦ '70. Ὅλα ξεκίνησαν ἀπὸ ἓνα βασικὸ ἐρώτημα: «Ποῦ βρίσκεται ὁ Θεὸς κρυμμένος μέσα σὲ ἓναν κόσμον ποὺ πεθαίνει ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα καὶ ὑποφέρει συστηματικὰ ἀπὸ τὴ θεσμικὴ ἀδικία; Πῶς μπορούμε νὰ μιλήσουμε γιὰ ἓνα Θεὸ σὲ ἓναν κόσμον, ποὺ ἔχει πλέον ἐνηλικιωθεῖ μακριὰ του, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν ἀναγνωρίζει, ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη περισσότερο πῶς μπορούμε νὰ τὸν παρουσιάσουμε ὡς Πατέρα σὲ μία κοινωνία ποὺ ἀδιαφορεῖ γι' Αὐτόν;».

Τὸ κίνημα τῆς Θεολογίας τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης ἀναπτύχθηκε διαδοχικὰ σὲ τρεῖς χρονικὲς περιόδους: α) Στὴ φάση τῆς προετοιμασίας, β) στὴ φάση τῆς διατύπωσης καὶ γ) στὴ φάση τῆς συστηματοποίησης. Οἱ πρωταγωνιστὲς αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεολογικοῦ ρεύματος εἶναι οἱ λεγόμενοι *μῆ-ἄνθρωποι*, δηλαδή ὅλοι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἢ ἴδια ἢ κοινωνία τοὺς ἀπαξιώνει, τοὺς περιθωριοποιεῖ καὶ τοὺς ἐκμεταλλεύεται μὲ ποικίλους τρόπους. Ὅμως αὐτοὶ οἱ μῆ-ἄνθρωποι γιὰ ἄλλη μία φορὰ ἀναδεικνύονται ἀπὸ τὸν ἐλευθερωτὴ Χριστὸ ὡς οἱ πρόδρομοι τῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς Βασιλείας καὶ ὡς οἱ ἐκλεγμένοι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῶν φτωχῶν εἶναι πλέον ὄχι ἓνα αὐστηρὰ δομημένο ἱερατικὸ καθίδρυμα, ἀλλὰ μία Χριστιανικὴ κοινότητα ποὺ μοιράζεται ἐμπειρίες, ἀγάπη, ἐκπαίδευση, φαγητὸ καὶ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ. Ἡ *λαϊκὴ ἐκκλησία* λοιπὸν δὲν προχωρεῖ σὲ διακρίσεις, ἀλλὰ ἀποτελεῖ μία συγκεκριμένη, τοπικὴ, ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κοινότητα ἢ ὅποια λειτουργεῖ σὲ ὅλα ὡς λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Γιὰ τοὺς ἐκπροσώπους τῆς Θεολογίας τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης ἢ ἀλληλεγγύη, ἢ δικαιοσύνη, ἢ ἐλευθερία καὶ ἢ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν πλησίον δὲν εἶναι ἔννοιες μὲ περιεχόμενο θεωρητικὸ. Ἀντιθέτως ἀποτελοῦν σχέσεις ἱστορικές, ὑπαρκτικές, μεστὲς ἀπὸ τὸ φῶς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ τὴν πίστη στὸν Χριστό. Ἔτσι προχώρησαν στὴ λεγόμενη *ἱστορικοποίηση* τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου. Ἡ στράτευση αὐτὴ ὑπὲρ τῶν καταπιεσμένων καὶ τῶν φτωχῶν βασίζεται ἀποκλειστικὰ καὶ μόνο στὴν πίστη πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, ἀποτελεῖ μία συνειδητὴ ἐπιλογὴ ποὺ ἀνάγεται τελικῶς στὴν διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἐλευθερία συνεπῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ τὶς κάθε μορφῆς δυνάμεις ἐξουσίας εἶναι δωρεὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, μιλώντας σωτηριολογικά, καὶ ὑποχρέωση καὶ καθῆκον τοῦ ὑπεύθυνου πολίτη, μιλώντας κοινωνιολογικά.

Ἐπεδίωξαν ἐπομένως μία νέα ἐρμηνευτικὴ προσέγγιση τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ λόγου μὲ βάση τὶς κοινωνικές, οικονομικές, πολιτικές καὶ

πολιτιστικές συνθήκες τῆς Λατινικῆς Ἀμερικῆς, χρησιμοποιώντας παράλληλα μεθοδολογικά ἐργαλεῖα εἰλημμένα ἀπὸ τὶς κοινωνικὲς ἐπιστῆμες, προκειμένου νὰ προχωρήσουν στὴν ἀνάλυση τῆς κοινωνικῆς πραγματικότητας. Στὴν κίνηση αὐτὴ χρησιμοποίησαν ἐπιλεκτικὰ στοιχεῖα ἀπὸ τὸ μαρξιστικὸ λεξιλόγιο καὶ τὴ μαρξιστικὴ ὑφολογία, χωρὶς ὥστόσο νὰ ἀποζητοῦν μία μορφή ἀπολυτότητας ἢ ὀλοκληρωτισμοῦ. Ὡστόσο, ἐπεδίωξαν τὴν ὀλοκληρωτικὴ ἀπελευθέρωση ἀπὸ τὴν ἀτομικὴ καὶ τὴν κοινωνικὴ ἀμαρτία. Παράλληλα ἀρνῆθηκαν τὴ σχέση τους –ἢ τὴν ὅποια ὁμοιότητά τους– μὲ τοὺς ἐκφραστὲς τῆς λεγόμενης πολιτικῆς θεολογίας. Ἐπιπλέον, δὲν ἀποδέχθηκαν τὴ χρῆση βίας, διότι ἡ νομιμοποίηση τῆς ἔνοπλης ἐπανάστασης ἀποτελεῖ μὲ τὴ σειρά της πηγὴ νέων ἀδικιῶν καὶ νέων καταστροφῶν. Γενικὰ θὰ λέγαμε ὅτι ἡ μεθοδολογία τῆς Θεολογίας τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης οἰκοδομήθηκε πάνω στὸ τρίπτυχο: κοινωνιολογικὴ ἀνάλυση, θεολογικὸς στοχασμὸς καὶ ποιμαντικὴ δράση πρακτικοῦ χαρακτήρα.

Ἡ Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, στοὺς κόλπους τῆς ὁποίας ἀναπτύχθηκε τὸ σύνθετο αὐτὸ θεολογικὸ κίνημα, ἀρχικὰ ἦταν διστακτικὴ. Ἐπειτα ὅμως ἀπὸ μακρὰ καὶ ἐνδελεχῆ μελέτη τῶν σχετικῶν κειμένων, πού παρήχθησαν στὶς Ἐπισκοπικὲς Συνελεύσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Λατινικῆς Ἀμερικῆς στὶς πόλεις Medellin (1968) καὶ Pueblos (1979), ἀπὸ μία εἰδικὴ ἐπιτροπὴ ἀκαδημαϊκῶν θεολόγων δημοσιοποιήθηκε μία Ὁδηγία τὸ 1986, ἡ ὁποία εἶχε θετικὴ ἀνάδειξη καὶ ἀποτίμηση τῶν θεωρητικῶν καὶ πρακτικῶν ἀπόψεων τῆς Θεολογίας τῆς Ἀπελευθέρωσης.